

★ 2021 ★

ADVOCACY

HONOR ROLL

FOOD
BANK
NEWS

ADVOCACY HONOR ROLL

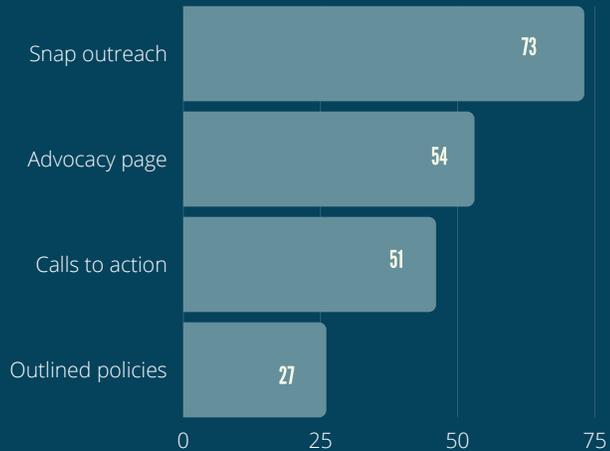
Food Bank News analyzed the advocacy activities of the top 100 food banks to develop a framework for identifying best practices in advocacy. The analysis found four activities common among food banks that prioritize advocacy. All four needed to be discoverable on food bank websites.

They include:

- SNAP outreach
- Advocacy page on the website
- Specific legislative priorities on the website
- Calls to action

Number of Food Banks* Participating in Various Advocacy Activities

**Among the 100 largest food banks by revenue*



Source: Food Bank News

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Acknowledgements: A generous grant from Winter-Lehman Family Foundation, Inc. made this Advocacy Honor Roll possible. Thanks to Odeya Rosenband for research assistance and Dani Geraci for graphic design.



★ **HIGH HONOR ROLL** ★

The following food banks met all four criteria for excelling in advocacy:

SNAP outreach ★ an advocacy page on the website ★ legislative priorities on the website ★ and calls to action

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

Central Pennsylvania Food Bank

Central Texas Food Bank

Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma

East Texas Food Bank

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin

Food Bank Contra Costa and Solano

Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina

Greater Boston Food Bank

Greater Chicago Food Depository

Greater Cleveland Food Bank

Houston Food Bank

North Texas Food Bank

Northern Illinois Food Bank

Operation Food Search (MO)

Oregon Food Bank

Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma

San Francisco Food Bank

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina

Second Harvest Heartland (MN)

St. Louis Area Food Bank

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These food banks excelled in three of the four best practices for advocacy:	SNAP Outreach	Advocacy Page	Calls to Action	Outlined Policies
Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, OH	✓	✓	✓	
Alameda County Community Food Bank, CA	✓	✓	✓	
Atlanta Community Food Bank		✓	✓	✓
Capital Area Food Bank, D.C.		✓	✓	✓
Care and Share, CO	✓	✓	✓	
Central California Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
City Harvest, NY	✓	✓	✓	
Community Food Bank (Southern Arizona)	✓	✓	✓	
Connecticut Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
Feeding San Diego	✓	✓	✓	
Feeding South Florida	✓	✓	✓	
Feeding Tampa Bay	✓	✓	✓	
Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia	✓	✓	✓	
Foodlink		✓	✓	✓
Food Bank for New York City	✓	✓	✓	
Food Lifeline, WA		✓	✓	✓
Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana	✓	✓	✓	
God's Pantry Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
Harvesters - The Community Food Network	✓	✓	✓	
Mid-Ohio Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
Northwest Harvest		✓	✓	✓
Philabundance	✓	✓	✓	
Roadrunner Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
San Antonio Food Bank	✓	✓	✓	
Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida	✓	✓	✓	
Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina	✓	✓	✓	
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County	✓	✓	✓	
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley	✓	✓		✓
Three Square Food Bank	✓	✓		✓

ADVOCACY AT GREATER CLEVELAND FOOD BANK REACHES FAR AND WIDE

Since it began focusing on advocacy about ten years ago, Greater Cleveland Food Bank has built up an advocacy program that stands out for its breadth and depth.

A top priority for the food bank is its SNAP Outreach program, which was initially formed within the advocacy group but now has grown into its own department, staffed by 25 employees. Much of their work involves going out into the community to bring awareness to SNAP benefits. Part of the team is stationed at the food bank's help center, answering calls from people applying for SNAP over the phone.



Kimmy LoVano is seeking legislation that would make pandemic-related waivers permanent.

“Our job is to put ourselves out of business.”

**-Kimmy LoVano
Greater Cleveland Food Bank's Director of
Advocacy and Public Education.**

In addition to signing people up for SNAP, employees try to understand the underlying issues contributing to food insecurity and connect callers with partners that can provide help beyond food.

“Our job is to put ourselves out of business,” said Kimmy LoVano, Greater Cleveland Food Bank's Director of Advocacy and Public Education.

When Ohio started cutting senior meals programs a few years ago, senior hunger also became an area of focus. To advocate for its growing elderly population, Greater Cleveland Food Bank started a Senior Hunger Advocacy Day where people with lived experience could meet with elected officials to lobby for improved senior meals programs. Partnering with local agencies and think tanks, as well as the Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging, this upcoming spring will mark the food bank's third Senior Hunger Advocacy Day, a program that runs every other year.

A big area of focus will be to make permanent the many waivers and policy changes that went into effect in response to the pandemic.

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“With more waivers we can be more creative in getting food out the door more efficiently and more effectively,” LoVano said. “Ultimately, we want those waivers to turn into long-term policy changes.”

An additional arm of the food bank’s advocacy work is a team of seven volunteers known as the Speakers Bureau, who give public presentations about current advocacy issues and how people can get involved with the food bank. These volunteers are almost entirely retired professionals, which LoVano said helps to create “a really cool variety of people who have different interests and different areas of expertise.” Last year, the Speakers Bureau gave over 50 presentations.

Public education is also a major part of Greater Cleveland Food Bank’s advocacy work. Prior to the pandemic, the food bank ran a poverty simulation every other month with anywhere between 60 to 100 participants. Inspired by the Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation, participants would take on the roles of family members struggling to make ends meet. The goal was to help raise awareness on why people need public benefits.

Additionally, the food bank runs a hunger education program specifically designed for students in fifth grade and above. Often part of a field trip, this allows the students to engage in activities —such as sorting through food items — tailored for their age level.

A neat feature of the food bank’s website is a Hunger Poll question, which challenges a visitor’s knowledge of the food bank’s impact with questions like, “How many seniors were served by the food bank last year?” The answers can be eye-opening to people seeking to understand the food bank’s activities and impact.

Greater Cleveland has also explicitly listed its policy priorities on its website as a way to make the information as accessible as possible. “Where the government plays a role in all of this is important,” LoVano said. “Without a public-private partnership, it’s just not possible for us to do the work that we do.”

A newer feature of the food bank’s advocacy program is an opt-out advocacy newsletter. Now, anytime someone donates or contacts the food bank, they are automatically subscribed to an advocacy mailing list. “With opt-out enrollment, we are able to send email updates on legislation to over 20,000 people at the touch of a button,” LoVano said.

Greater Cleveland Food Bank’s approach to advocacy has support at every level of the food bank, including a dedicated board-level advocacy committee. “We all understand that we cannot truly end hunger unless we’re all pushing for long-lasting policy change,” LoVano said. “If your whole organization and your leadership team don’t believe that policy change can end food insecurity, then that would be a major barrier.”

-- Odeya Rosenband

Odeya Rosenband is a freelance writer and essayist at Cornell University studying government and creative writing. She is a columnist and staff writer at The Cornell Daily Sun.

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**- Kimmy LoVano
Greater Cleveland Food Bank’s Director of
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ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN ADVOCACY

When Foodlink of Rochester, NY, sought to create its first-ever advocacy agenda last year, it veered from the typical playbook.

The Rochester-based food bank, the third-largest in New York State with \$39 million of revenues in FY 2019, made sure to reach out to clients, conducting six focus groups at food pantries and community meal programs, and interviewing 54 people. This input was added to feedback from employees and pantry agencies.

The end result was a two-page advocacy document articulating Foodlink's guiding principles, three main areas of focus, and 17 specific priorities. The food bank's agenda around eliminating the root causes of hunger came directly out of the focus groups and client conversations, said Thomas Silva, Community Advocacy Specialist. "It organized our framework for what to focus on," he said.

The client input gave Foodlink a higher comfort level with advocating for policies typically outside the boundaries of food banks, such as affordable health care and higher wages, Silva said. "It gave



High school student, Geoffrey Brown, center, started a giving garden with help from Feeding Tampa Bay's Andrea Kitchen, left, and other students.

us something to stand on. We represent our clients, so it led us to being able to take stances," he said.

While Foodlink tapped the community to inform its advocacy, many other food banks are using community voices to promote it. North Texas Food Bank and Feeding Tampa Bay are noteworthy for involving kids and young adults as evangelists of their advocacy programs.

North Texas Food Bank's Young Advocates Council, formed in 2018, is gaining momentum. These high school students get involved in volunteer activities like preparing food boxes, writing letters to legislators, and holding fundraisers, while learning about food insecurity.

The Council now has 75 students from 18 high schools all around North Texas, up from about 20



Students in the Youth Advocacy Council at North Texas Food Bank get training on how to pack food boxes.

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in its first two years. John Jenkins, Foundation Giving Specialist, would like to see the Council become a school club program available to all the high schools in the region.

Students fill out a fairly in-depth application to become part of the program, signaling that a level of commitment is required. “We need them to be active and we want them to be engaged,” Jenkins said. North Texas Food Bank, which is the ninth-largest food bank in the country with \$145 million of FY 2019 revenues, also has a Young Professionals Committee, started in 2017, which has about 100 members and has raised about \$200,000 since its inception.

Feeding Tampa Bay has been engaging children as young as six in its Changemakers program. These children and their families engage in volunteer activities and learn about hunger awareness and financial literacy, including sharing their money through change-collecting. There are 56 families in the program so far.

As kids began to age out of the Changemakers program, the food bank realized it wanted to keep the momentum going, so in 2020 it added its Catalyst program for 14 to 18 year olds, and Cultivate for those 18 to 24. The 17 teens currently in Catalyst get involved in hunger-relief projects, often creating their own, and use social

media and their voices to advocate against hunger. An additional 47 student ambassadors are feeding into the Cultivate program.

Engaging youth at all levels has been a lesson in empowerment, noted Andrea Kitchen, Community Engagement Manager at Feeding Tampa Bay, which is one of the largest food banks in Florida, with FY 2019 revenues of \$119 million. “Our ability to step back and let people lead and use their own voices is incredibly powerful,” she said.

Proving that statement true is Geoffrey Brown, a high school senior and Catalyst teen, who has grown a successful giving-garden with about 20 other students, despite none of them having much experience in gardening. Brown’s original two ideas -- having a school pantry and a share table at the cafeteria -- were both derailed by Covid.

Brown acknowledged that a lot of the students involved in the project were not even very interested in gardening, but were motivated by a desire to help people. Being young and unafraid of failure, and having a group mindset helped propel the project along, Brown said. “The group was like, ‘Why not?’ so we did it.” he said. “We figured if it fails, it fails ... but if not, it’s going to be great.”



Foodlink convened six focus groups of clients, which helped it identify its advocacy priorities around eliminating the root causes of hunger.