

2021 Board Candidate Questionnaire

1 What is your name?

Leigh Blancato

2 What agency are you with? ♦

Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee

3 Position are you running for?

Answer

President

Vice President

Treasurer

State Agency Director

Local Agency Director

4 How long have you worked with the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and in what capacity? ♦

For 2.5 years. Our organization began managing the program in October 2018 after a 3-month transition from another local agency. I manage a team of 3, which includes 2 delivery drivers and an administrative coordinator. I oversee the daily operations of CSFP, handle inquiries and complaints, and manage initiatives to grow our caseload.

5 What types of advocacy work (local, state, or national) have you done for CSFP or other programs? ♦

I have advocated for CSFP locally by educating potentially eligible seniors about the program and encouraging them to apply. I have also advocated to our state agency for more accessible CSFP certification guidelines, including lengthening the certification period from 6 months to one year and moving from requiring proof of income to self-declaration. Learning from other states at the NCSFPA Conference in 2019 gave my team and me the confidence to continue advocating for these changes. The state agency amended the state plan with these changes during the last fiscal year. Presently, I'm advocating for a waiver to allow us to distribute partial CSFP boxes as we experience food shortages in multiple categories.

In a previous role at a food bank in NC, I advocated on the national level for SNAP. I visited members of Congress and their staff during two Anti-Hunger Policy Conferences to share SNAP recipient stories and the positive impact SNAP has on participants and the economy.

6 What do you see as the number one external challenge facing the National CSFP Association and how should we, as an Association, be addressing it? ♦

The biggest external challenge we face currently is the COVID-19 pandemic. We must determine how to continue to serve seniors, our most vulnerable population, and meet caseload, while maintaining health and safety measures and dealing with supply chain issues and food shortages. While the pandemic has exacerbated these issues, unforeseen circumstances could cause them at any time. To combat these challenges, it's important to have a robust association with aligned messaging to advocate on behalf of CSFP participants and local agencies so the USDA has the information they need to act swiftly so we can continue to serve participants. Developing emergency and disaster contingency plans and best practice resources and making them available to the USDA and state/local agencies could result in faster responses to waive restrictive regulations and help agencies better navigate unprecedented circumstances.

7 What do you see as the number one internal challenge facing the National CSFP Association, and how should we, as an Association, be addressing it? ♦

The number one internal challenge I see is communication. Since NCSFPA members are spread across the country and we typically only have one in-person conference a year, it can be difficult to keep members engaged and informed. This can be remedied through enhanced communication and access to information. We should continue the webinar series as it gives members the opportunity to connect and share successes and challenges. Having a more informal space, such

as the social networking site Yammer, to ask questions and share ideas, could help cultivate discussions as well. I also think a mentorship program for new members would be a beneficial way to share information about the association and to help educate members on CSFP if they are new to the program.

8 **At which of the following NCSFPA Conferences were you in attendance? ♦**

Answer

2013 Salt Lake City

2014 Philadelphia

2015 Charleston

2017 New Orleans

2018 Fort Myers

2019 Alexandria

None

Other

9 **On what other Boards of Directors or Committees (on any level, Local, State, or National), have you served? ♦**

N/A