

Considerations for Administering and Delivering Services in the USDA, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) Programs: Lessons From the SNAP E&T Pilots (Summary)

Background

The Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) authorized \$200 million for the development, implementation, and evaluation of up to 10 pilot projects to test innovative strategies to increase employment and reduce the need for SNAP among program participants. The 10 States that received grants were California, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Grantees began implementing their pilots between January and April 2016 and all pilot services concluded by April 2019.

The three issue briefs present cross-pilot findings on SNAP E&T program administration, recruitment strategies, and community college partnerships.

Key Findings

- SNAP agencies must take ownership of their E&T programs and provide oversight to ensure proper implementation of policies and procedures by partners and providers.
- Recruiting SNAP participants into E&T programs requires a multifaceted approach.
- Community colleges are an important SNAP E&T provider and lessons from the pilots can help SNAP agencies form successful ongoing partnerships with them.

Methods

The briefs are based on qualitative data collected during interviews with pilot staff from State SNAP agencies, partners, and E&T providers and through focus groups with individuals participating in the pilots.

Findings from the Briefs

Considerations for Administering SNAP E&T Programs

This brief draws lessons from the planning, implementation, and the operation phases of the pilots for use by SNAP agencies, their partners, and providers. The brief includes tips on planning, working with partners, and developing new services along with examples from the pilots.

SNAP agencies must take ownership of their E&T programs. Although SNAP agency staff generally do not have a workforce background, they know program policies best and are responsible for all aspects of their SNAP E&T program. SNAP agencies must provide oversight to all, new, or long-term partners and E&T providers. Grantee (SNAP agency) oversight varied across the pilots and grantees who were less involved initially learned they needed to be more hands on and involved in pilot operations. They found that it was important to delineate responsibilities of each participating organization while

being responsible for communicating policies and procedures and providing oversight and program monitoring.

SNAP agencies must be intentional when implementing changes or creating new programs. They must invest in planning and developing strategic partnerships, as well as make informed decisions about changing or expanding services. Planning should not be rushed and should include all stakeholders. It is also important to understand the needs of the target population and select providers best suited to meet participants' needs. Grantees found that not everyone needed or wanted the same set of pilot services and that having a menu of options was beneficial for addressing individual needs. Implementing changes incrementally, such as piloting in a small area, should be considered before broader rollout.

A single program model is unlikely to work across an entire state. Most E&T programs operate in urban areas. SNAP E&T participants in rural areas may have limited access to training opportunities. SNAP agencies are likely to face a myriad of challenges when expanding their SNAP E&T programs to rural areas: limited availability of providers, participant access, technology, public transportation, and even employment opportunities.

Effective Recruitment Strategies for SNAP E&T Programs

Over a 2-year period, the pilots enrolled nearly 45,000 individuals into SNAP E&T, an effort that required extensive outreach and recruitment. The brief shares examples of how the pilots reached their target populations, faced challenges, and found successful strategies.

Engaging participants in SNAP E&T requires planning and active recruitment processes. Despite the robust services offered through the pilots, active recruitment efforts were required to get the word out, generate interest, and enroll participants. Grantees developed outreach plans, materials, and messaging for providers to use for reaching SNAP participants.

An array of strategies is needed to recruit SNAP participants for E&T programs. Strategies included developing videos, posting flyers, meeting people in the community, stationing staff at local events or sites where other public assistance was provided, and implementing targeted marketing campaigns. It is important to develop messages that speak to and motivate individuals from diverse backgrounds and employment goals, which may include getting input from potential participants. Recognizing that different strategies work with different people, grantees and E&T providers who used multiple strategies were more successful in enrolling participants. In addition, hiring staff with a customer service or sales background can help sell the program to potential participants, since case managers or eligibility workers may lack such skills.

Considerations for Providing SNAP E&T Through Community Colleges

There are many advantages to partnering with community colleges to provide SNAP E&T services, such as the range of training courses that could be available to SNAP E&T participants and access to E&T services in rural areas. Additionally, community colleges have the infrastructure to serve as a “one-stop” location for providing SNAP E&T services, a feature that can reduce drop offs when SNAP E&T participants must go to multiple locations for services. Nevertheless, there can be challenges, too. This brief provides practical considerations for working with community colleges, which provided SNAP E&T services to thousands of participants across the 10 pilots.

Ongoing SNAP E&T enrollment does not always align with community colleges course schedules, creating waiting periods for participants. In the pilots, individuals referred to community colleges after a course had begun had to wait to for the next scheduled course. This waiting period could be a few weeks to months depending on when the individual was referred. SNAP agencies need to work with community colleges on strategies to utilize such periods effectively by providing useful skill building activities or adding training classes when possible. SNAP agencies also need to ensure that participants are able to meet work requirements through qualifying activities so they do not lose their SNAP benefits.

Not all SNAP E&T participants will be a good fit for community college services. Some SNAP E&T participants may not have the prerequisites required for enrolling in various training courses, including reading and math skills. Other participants may be reluctant to return to school or to take the required aptitude tests for entering training. And, in some cases, an outstanding community college debt must be paid before a participant can start a new class. The SNAP E&T program cannot pay for tuition, fees, or any debt that existed prior to enrollment.

For many community colleges, providing case management and job placement services may not be a strength. SNAP agencies must be prepared to provide case management services or have another partner in the community provide these services while a participant is enrolled in a community college that does not provide the level of support needed for SNAP E&T participants. As for job placement services, community colleges generally referred pilot participants to another provider in the area to receive help with job placement after completion of training. Thus, identifying community partners who can provide job placement services to participants who have completed their training is a good option for community colleges that do not have robust job placement services.

For More Information:

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