

The Use of Supervised Job Search, Job Search Training, and Integrated Job Search in USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T): Three Case Studies (Summary)

Background

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), provides nutrition benefits to eligible low-income households. State agencies are responsible for processing household applications, including verifying applicant eligibility and certifying eligible households to receive SNAP benefits. States must also ensure benefit issuance and SNAP case management occurs. In addition to performing these core functions, States must also operate an employment and training (E&T) program for SNAP participants. FNS provides funding for E&T to States; however, States have considerable flexibility in designing their programs, including the selection of E&T program components offered to SNAP participants.¹

While there are many E&T components, States most commonly offer the supervised job search or job search training components. Supervised job search assists participants in the job application process. Job search training provides skills, such as building resumes, cover letter writing, and mock interviews, to prepare participants for applying for jobs. Some States that offer the vocational training component integrate job search activities into their programs to help participants find jobs in their chosen field after they complete their programs. Despite their widespread use, little is known about how States implement these components and their effects on participant outcomes. Case studies were conducted in three States to examine processes and outcomes of the following components: supervised job search (Oregon), job search training (Oregon and Tennessee), and integrated job search within a vocational training component (Connecticut).

Key Findings

- Within the job search training and integrated job search components of SNAP E&T programs, the most common activities included resume or cover letter assistance, mock interviews, and individualized job search plan development.
- Most participants interviewed across the three States had short-term goals and felt satisfied with the job search services they received.
- Most participants in Oregon and Tennessee found employment after engaging in supervised job search or job search training.²
- Jobs obtained after participating in supervised job search or job search training alone were unlikely to enable long-term self-sufficiency.
- The study identified practices that may foster success, such as placing SNAP E&T staff in local SNAP offices to facilitate the initiation of E&T services.

Methods

The case studies used a mixed-methods research approach of both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The qualitative data collection included (1) a document review of extant E&T data, policies, and State-level documents, (2)

virtual site visits with State E&T, local SNAP office, and E&T provider staff, and (3) telephone interviews with 86 E&T participants across the three study States. Site visits and participant interviews were conducted between December 2020 and June 2021. Quantitative data included fiscal year (FY) 2018 SNAP administrative, FY 2018 E&T participation,

¹ Components are services approved by USDA and provided by SNAP E&T providers. Allowable components include supervised job search, job search training, workfare or community service, work experience, education programs, self-employment programs, vocational education, and job retention.

² Connecticut did not provide data on job search activities.

and FY 2018 and FY 2019 unemployment insurance wage data.³

Findings

Program Delivery and Participant Perspectives

The most common activities within job search training and integrated job search included resume or cover letter assistance, mock interviews, and individualized job search plan development. The three study States varied in how they recruited participants and delivered activities. In Oregon and Connecticut, participants learned of job search training and supervised job search through word of mouth, flyers, or from E&T providers. In Tennessee, the majority of job search training participants were referred by local SNAP offices. Intake processes were similar across study States and included an intake meeting during which E&T providers assessed participants' needs, goals, work history, and potential barriers to determine appropriate job search activities. The duration of job search training and supervised job search varied based on the participants' needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the way that SNAP E&T providers delivered the components shifted to include remote services and other ways to ensure social distance. For example, Tennessee held drive-thru job fairs.

Most participants interviewed across the three States had short-term goals and felt satisfied with the job search services they received. Many participants had the short-term goal of finding a job to pay bills, whereas fewer participants focused on longer term goals such as earning a degree. A smaller subset of participants expressed dissatisfaction due to their unmet needs or difficulty reaching E&T provider staff. Some participants faced barriers limiting their engagement. Barriers that made it difficult for participants included accessing virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation, and childcare.

Participants attributed their ability to find employment to the assistance they received from their E&T providers. In all three States, regardless of component type (supervised job search, job search training, integrated job search), participants worked closely with caseworkers or E&T providers, suggesting external accountability may be

important for the success of participants. Participants viewed job search training activities (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews) as the most useful aspects of their program participation.

Labor Market Outcomes in Two States

After engaging in programs with a supervised job search or job search training component, most participants in Oregon and Tennessee found employment and had slightly higher earnings compared with E&T participants who did not participate in either of the components during the study period. In both States, most supervised job search and job search training participants found jobs in the administrative support, waste management, and remediation services job sector, and had a shorter mean time to employment. Jobs in this sector included administrative assistant, clerical worker, janitor, and security guard. In Tennessee, individuals who participated in job search training had higher mean quarterly earnings of about \$700 compared to those who did not participate in job search training.

Jobs obtained after participating in supervised job search or job search training alone were unlikely to enable long-term self-sufficiency. The average earnings among supervised job search and job search training participants in Oregon and Tennessee were lower than the SNAP income limit for a household of one and the individuals continued to be eligible for and need the support of SNAP. Many participants were also working in more than one job or more than one sector.

The study identified practices that may foster success, such as placing SNAP E&T staff in local SNAP offices to facilitate the initiation of E&T services, using 100 percent of funds to cover start-up costs for new E&T providers, and continuing remote services to help participants with transportation or childcare issues. Other recommended practices include offering activities to support participants with criminal records, combining supervised job search and job search training, and encouraging collaboration across E&T providers.

³ Administrative data (fiscal years 2018 and 2019) reflect the period before the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, which replaced job search with supervised job search.

For More Information:

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