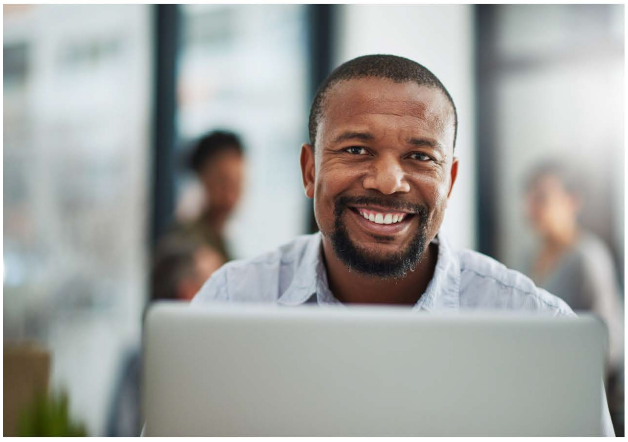
United States Department of Agriculture

The Use of Supervised Job Search, Job Search Training, and Integrated Job Search in SNAP E&T: Three Case Studies

Final Report



August 2022

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August 2022

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Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, serves as a critical safety net for households with low incomes and provides food benefits to eligible households. In addition to nutritional benefits, State agencies must operate an employment and training (E&T) program to provide SNAP recipients with the training and skills needed to move toward self-sufficiency. FNS provides funding to States to operate E&T programs, and States have considerable flexibility in designing their programs, including what E&T components to select, whether to serve specific SNAP populations, whether participation is mandatory or voluntary, and where to provide E&T services.

While States may choose from a variety of E&T components, including basic education, work experience, and vocational training, States most commonly offer supervised job search or job search training components ("job search activities") to participants (Rowe et al., 2017). Job search activities aim to help participants understand the job application process, gain skills to develop clear resumes and cover letters, prepare for interviews, stay motivated and proactive, enlist social support, and set job search goals. States most often provide job search activities through the supervised job search and job search training components but may also integrate these activities into other components, such as vocational training ("integrated job search"). Despite their ubiquity, little is known about State agency implementation of supervised job search, job search training, and integrated job search; specific activities offered by SNAP E&T providers; and the long- and short-term economic effects of participation.

This study seeks to help fill this knowledge gap through case studies of three States with different approaches to E&T implementation. Specifically, the study was designed to meet three study objectives shown below.

Study Objectives

- Describe each State's job search activities, requirements, and policies.
- Conduct a process evaluation to describe how each State implements job search activities and how those activities operate within the broader E&T program.
- Conduct an outcome evaluation to assess the short- and long-term effects of job search activities on participant outcomes.

A. Study Approach

The study used a mixed-methods design to produce indepth case studies in three States (Connecticut, Oregon, and Tennessee) to assess the roles of supervised job search, job search training, and integrated job search in SNAP E&T. For the qualitative component, the study team conducted (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 E&T participants. Site visits and participant interviews were conducted between December 2020 and June 2021. The quantitative component included analysis of fiscal year (FY) 2018 SNAP administrative, FY 2018 E&T participation, and FY 2018 and FY 2019 unemployment insurance wage data. Table ES.1 presents the study objectives and data sources used to address them.

Table ES.1. Study Objectives by Data Source

Study Objective	Document Review	Virtual Site Visits	Interviews With E&T Participants	SNAP, E&T, and UI Wage Data
Describe each State's job search activities, requirements, and policies	✓	✓		
Conduct a process evaluation to describe how each State implements job search activities and how those activities operate within the broader E&T program	✓	✓	✓	
Conduct an outcome evaluation to assess short- and long-term effects of job search activities on participant outcomes			✓	✓

Note: UI = unemployment insurance

B. Study Limitations

The study has several noteworthy limitations that warrant consideration.

- Administrative data (collected for FY 2018 and FY 2019) reflect the E&T landscape prior to passage and implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, which replaced job search with supervised job search and required State agencies to provide case management services to all E&T participants. As a result, the quantitative findings may not accurately represent participant outcomes, given changes to the program.
- The COVID-19 pandemic severely limited the job search services many E&T providers were able to offer in 2020 and 2021 when the study team conducted site visits and participant interviews; therefore, study participant perceptions and their descriptions of activities and challenges may not reflect the experience of SNAP E&T participants before or after the pandemic.

The following issues also limited the scope of the analysis and the generalizability of presented findings: (1) lack of data on intensity and duration of job search services; (2) limited data on E&T outcomes; (3) unemployment insurance wage data limitations (e.g., no reported earnings for gig workers[1] or the self-employed); (4) a short (1-year) followup period; and (5) a nonexperimental study design.

C. Job Search Overview

States can offer a variety of E&T components to participants, including supervised job search, job search training, basic adult education, self-employment training, job retention, workfare, and vocational training. Job search activities—the focus of this study—are offered through the supervised job search, job search training, and, in some States, vocational training components of SNAP E&T.

[1] Gig workers are individuals who take on work through online gig platforms, such as rideshare, grocery shopping, or food delivery apps.

- The **job search training component** aims to enhance participants' job search skills and qualifications. Participants engaged in this component can receive individualized services (e.g., resume and cover letter writing, mock interviews, skills assessments, job placement) and engage in group workshops on topics ranging from interviewing skills to maintaining motivation during a lengthy job search process.

- The **vocational training component** provides participants with in-demand knowledge or skills and often leads to a certificate or credentialing. Some States integrate job search activities, such as resume assistance, mock interviews, and job coaching, into the vocational training component to assist participants in finding a job in their new field once they complete their training program.

D. Study States

The three States selected for this study—Connecticut, Oregon, and Tennessee—were chosen to reflect a variety of approaches to job search implementation. Each State operates a voluntary E&T program and offers E&T services statewide. Highlights of these programs follow:

- Connecticut offers a job search training component and also integrates job search activities within a vocational training component through partnerships with the State's 12 community colleges.
- Oregon offers both supervised job search and job search training components through partnerships with a variety of providers, including the Oregon Employment Department, community-based organizations (CBOs), and community colleges.
- Tennessee offers a job search training component through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD) that administers job search training through DLWD's network of American Job Centers (AJCs).

Although all three States offered job search training, only Oregon had a supervised job search component. Connecticut was the sole State to offer job search activities primarily through its vocational training component. Table ES.2 presents an overview of each State's E&T program.

Table ES.2. Overview of State E&T Programs

Characteristic	Connecticut	Oregon	Tennessee
FNS Region	Northeast	Western	Southeast
Number of E&T participants (FY 2020)	1,579	19,984	2,478
Percent of SNAP participants in E&T (FY 2020)[a]	0.4	3.1	0.3
Percent of work registrants in E&T (FY 2020)	5.2	15.5	1.9
Offered supervised job search (FY 2021)	No	Yes	No
Offered job search training (FY 2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes

Characteristic	Connecticut	Oregon	Tennessee
Other E&T components offered (FY 2021)	• Work experience • Vocational training • Job retention	• English as a second language • Basic education • Work readiness training • Work experience • On-the-job training • Vocational training • Self-employment training • Job retention • Bridge programs, internships, and other short-term training	• Basic education • Work readiness training • Work experience • Vocational training • Job retention

Note: FY = fiscal year
[a] Denominator is all SNAP participants.
Sources: FY 2021 State SNAP E&T plans, FY 2020 FNS-583 data

E. Job Search Program Design and Delivery

This section summarizes the job search activities provided in the supervised job search, job search training, and vocational training components across the three study States and highlights differences in program design and delivery.

Types of activities. Across States and E&T providers, the most common job search activities within the job search training and the vocational training components were resume or cover letter assistance, mock interviews, and individualized job search plan development. E&T providers also commonly directed participants to job search websites and connected them with local employers. Oregon participants, who commonly engaged in both supervised job search and job search training, frequently indicated the most helpful services they received were job search training activities, such as assistance creating or updating a resume.

Awareness of SNAP E&T. In Oregon and Connecticut, participants most frequently learned about supervised job search and job search training through word of mouth, flyers, or directly from E&T providers. Participants were commonly enrolled by the E&T provider when seeking services in a provider office; most of these individuals were already receiving SNAP benefits, and E&T providers verified SNAP participation prior to E&T enrollment. In Tennessee, most job search training participants were referred directly by local SNAP offices.

Intake process. Intake processes were similar across study States. During the intake meeting, E&T providers assessed participants' needs, goals, work history, and potential barriers to participation and determined which job search activities would best suit them. Provider staff also assessed participants' background to inform career path decisions because a criminal record, for example, would disqualify participants for certain jobs (e.g., security guard).

Duration and intensity of job search services. The duration and intensity of participant engagement in supervised job search and job search training varied based on participants' needs, goals, and plans. Some participants only required assistance updating their resumes and therefore engaged with the program for a short time (e.g., a few days). Typically, participants remained engaged with providers until they were able to find a job. However, those who disengaged often did so because of personal barriers, such as substance use disorders, unstable housing, or lack of childcare.

Job search services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, supervised job search and job search training services were typically offered in person, and participants could drop by a provider office when they required assistance. In response to the pandemic, E&T providers moved to an online service model. Participants and providers described this shift to virtual appointments and limited in-person appointments as challenging. Some participants did not have access to the internet or computers to engage in services remotely. Staff were also not accustomed to providing services remotely and had to adapt their internal processes and workflow. Still, E&T provider staff demonstrated resilience and employed creative solutions to ensure services were available to all participants. For example, in Connecticut, E&T provider staff experimented with online class formats and kept remote classes smaller than in-person classes to support student engagement. In Oregon, E&T providers set up mirrored computer stations to help caseworkers better assist participants while remaining socially distanced. In Tennessee, staff held drive-by job fairs.

F. Participant Perspectives

The study team interviewed 86 participants across the 3 study States. Most interviewed participants were focused on short-term goals and generally satisfied with the job search services they received; some participants faced barriers that limited their engagement in program activities. A summary of participants' motivations, satisfaction with the program, and barriers to participation follows.

Motivation. Most interviewed participants were focused on short-term goals, such as finding any job that would help them pay their bills. Only a few participants described long-term goals as their motivation for participation (e.g., returning to school to obtain a degree). Some participants were seeking a job that would put them on a career path or a higher paying career path in a new sector. For example, one participant wanted to find a job in a dentist's office and then continue their education to become a dental hygienist.

Satisfaction. Overall, most interviewed participants were satisfied with their job search experience. Many appreciated the guidance E&T provider staff offered and felt it moved them closer to achieving their goals for employment. Participants who engaged in job search activities in conjunction with a vocational training component often did so because they were required to; many reported being surprised by how useful the classes were in helping them tailor their resumes to a new sector or brush up on interviewing skills.

Only a few participants expressed dissatisfaction with their job search experience noting that E&T provider staff were difficult to reach or provided guidance that was not aligned with participants' job search needs.

Barriers to participation. Interviewed participants reported barriers that limited their engagement with job search services, including access to virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation, and childcare. Transportation and childcare were common barriers to participation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, these barriers persisted during the pandemic, despite changes to service provision.

- **Access to virtual services.** Many participants lacked the equipment (e.g., computer, telephone, internet) necessary to engage remotely with E&T provider staff. Some vocational training participants also struggled to adapt to virtual services and reported problems accessing school materials online and reaching E&T provider staff.

- **Transportation.** Though many job search services were offered virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, some E&T providers continued to offer in-person services, and some job search activities required an in-person model (e.g., healthcare-related vocational training programs in phlebotomy). Participants who found a job were also typically employed in a field that required them to work in person. Adequate transportation to E&T providers and employers was cited as a barrier to participation and job retention. Some participants noted it was difficult to get around without a car where they lived. Even though participants could obtain bus passes from E&T providers, the transportation assistance provided often did not completely alleviate the barrier because public transit in their area was limited (e.g., bus lines did not run to their workplace or stopped before their shift ended).
- **Childcare.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, childcare facilities were closed in some areas, and in rural areas especially, participants lacked access to reliable childcare providers. Several participants without access to childcare said virtual job search services made it easier to participate because they could do so while at home with their children. Other participants, however, struggled to care for their children while engaging with E&T; this issue was particularly salient for vocational training participants.

G. Labor Market Outcomes

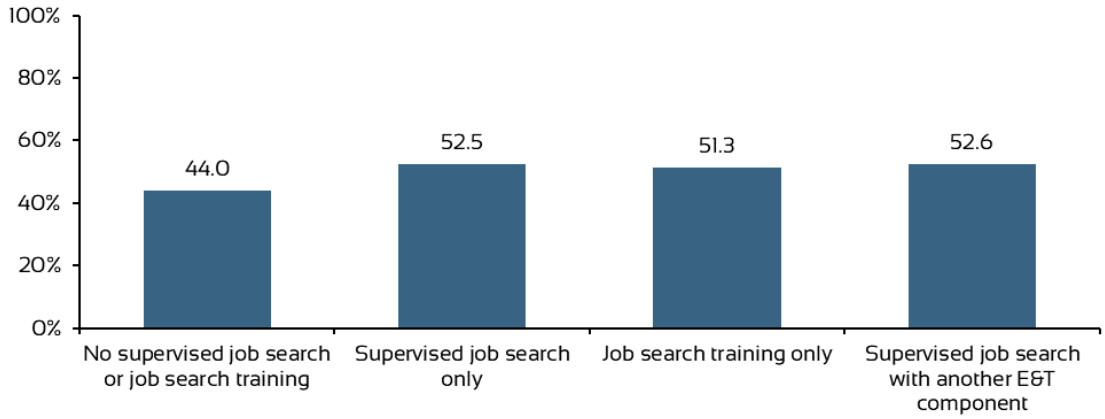
This report presents limited findings on labor market outcomes for Oregon and Tennessee.[2] In both States, most participants found employment after engaging in either supervised job search or job search training, were employed in similar employment sectors, and had slightly higher earnings compared with E&T participants who did not participate in either supervised job search or job search training during the study period.

Types of jobs. 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. Jobs in this sector include administrative assistant, clerical worker, janitor, and security guard. The second most common employment sector in Oregon was healthcare and social services; in Tennessee, it was retail trade.

Percentage employed. In Oregon, a higher percentage of E&T participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training were employed 3 months following their program start date compared with E&T participants who did not engage in either supervised job search or job search training (see figure ES.1).

[2] Connecticut did not provide data on job search activities.

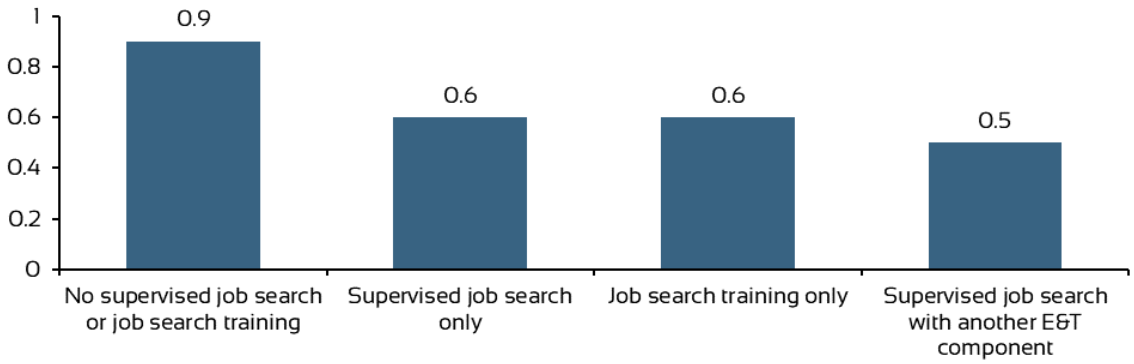
Figure ES.1. Percentage of Participants Employed 3 Months After Starting E&T, Oregon, FY 2018–2019



N E&T only = 1,002; *N* supervised job search only = 3,581; *N* job search training only = 2,700; *N* supervised job search and other E&T component = 7,217
Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Time to employment. Similarly, individuals who participated in supervised job search and/or job search training had a shorter mean time to employment (see figure ES.2). Those who participated in supervised job search along with another E&T component had the shortest mean time to employment, 0.5 quarters (or approximately 6 weeks) following enrollment in E&T.

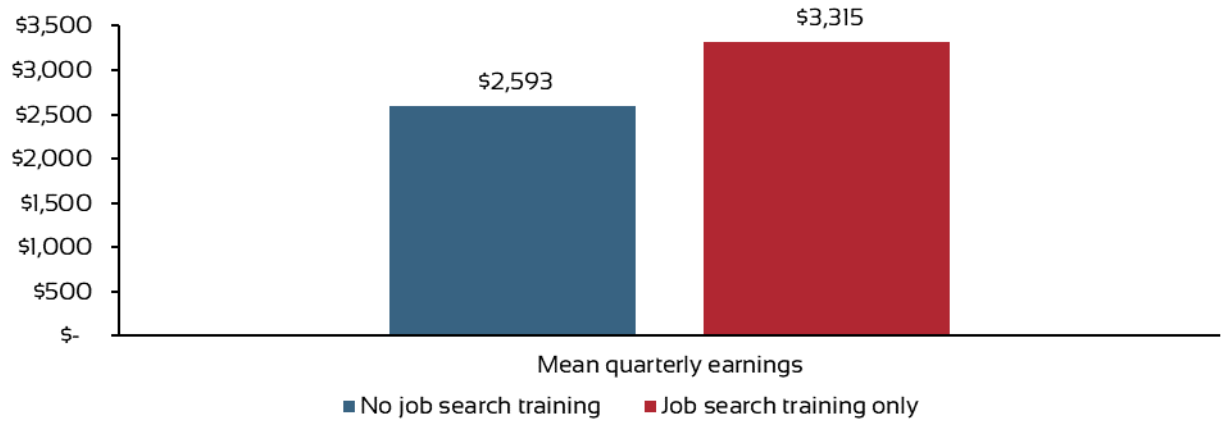
Figure ES.2. Mean Time to Employment After Starting E&T (in Quarters), Oregon, FY 2018–2019



N E&T only = 1,002; *N* supervised job search only = 3,581; *N* job search training only = 2,700; *N* supervised job search and other E&T component = 7,217
Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter. Mean time to employment refers to the number of quarters, on average, it took for a participant to find employment after participation in an E&T component. Individuals who were employed in the same quarter as their E&T participation had a value of zero quarters to employment.
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Earnings. In Tennessee, individuals who participated in the job search training component and no other E&T component had higher mean quarterly earnings than those who did not participate in job search training ($3,315 versus $2,593; see figure ES.3).

Figure ES.3. Mean Quarterly Earnings Among E&T Participants, Tennessee, FY 2018–2019



N E&T component, no job search training = 684; *N* job search training only = 150
Note: Excludes those who had only an intake encounter or assessment and those with no earnings
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

H. Conclusions

Findings suggest that some activities participants can engage in through supervised job search and job search training may be helpful in finding employment.[3] In Oregon, participants who engaged in supervised job search, job search training, or both had higher rates of employment and found employment more quickly than those who did not participate in any job search components. In Tennessee, job search training participants had slightly higher quarterly earnings (about $700) than those who did not participate in job search training. However, on 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 many were working more than one job or in more than one sector. These findings suggest that although supervised job search and job search training may help participants find employment, the jobs participants obtain after engaging with either of these two components are unlikely to enable long-term self-sufficiency.

Still, interviewed participants noted they were able to find employment because of the assistance they received from their E&T provider and were grateful to be working with a caseworker who helped motivate them during their job search. Participants in the three States, regardless of whether they received job search assistance through supervised job search, job search training, or vocational training, worked closely with a caseworker or other E&T provider staff throughout their job search engagement, suggesting external accountability may be important to participant success. All interviewed participants (*N* = 86) described typical job search training activities (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews) as the most useful aspects of their program engagement.

[3] Some caution must be used when interpreting findings from these quantitative data because the study could not control for other participant characteristics that may influence employment and earnings, and participants may have self-selected into these program components because they were more motivated to find a job quickly. These results are not generalizable to other States or populations nationwide.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, E&T providers pivoted to a fully remote service delivery model or a hybrid of in-person and remote services. As the pandemic subsides, E&T providers could consider continuing to provide hybrid services. Remote job search services can help overcome some barriers to participation, such as unreliable transportation and lack of childcare, and ensure participants stay engaged and committed to meeting their goals. For example, providing asynchronous online classes can enable participants to complete job search activities on their schedule. However, in-person services will also continue to be important because some participants may have unreliable internet access or thrive with face-to-face interactions.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutritional benefits to eligible households. Administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the program provides a set dollar amount to households each month to spend on food at authorized vendors. In addition to nutritional benefits, State agencies must operate an employment and training (E&T) program to provide SNAP recipients with the training and skills needed to move toward self-sufficiency. FNS provides funding to States to operate E&T programs, and States have considerable flexibility in designing their programs, including what E&T components to select, whether to serve specific SNAP populations, whether participation is mandatory or voluntary, and where to provide E&T services.

While States may choose from a variety of E&T components, including basic education, work experience, and vocational training, States most commonly offer supervised job search or job search training components ("job search activities") to participants (Rowe et al., 2017). Job search activities aim to help participants understand the job application process, gain skills to develop clear resumes and cover letters, prepare for interviews, stay motivated and proactive, enlist social support, and set job search goals. States most often provide job search activities through the supervised job search and job search training components but may also integrate these activities into other components, such as vocational training ("integrated job search"). Despite their ubiquity, little is known about State agency implementation of supervised job search, job search training, and integrated job search; specific activities offered by SNAP E&T providers; and the long- and short-term economic effects of participation.

This study seeks to help fill this knowledge gap through case studies of three States with different approaches to E&T implementation. Specifically, the study was designed to meet three study objectives highlighted below.

Study Objectives

- Describe each State's job search activities, requirements, and policies.
- Conduct a process evaluation to describe how each State implements job search activities and how those activities operate within the broader E&T program.
- Conduct an outcome evaluation to assess short- and long-term effects of job search activities on participant outcomes.

A. Background

The Food Stamp Act of 1985 (PL 99-198) mandated that each State SNAP agency implement a SNAP E&T program to provide SNAP recipients with the "skills, training, or experience that will increase their ability to obtain regular employment and meet State or local workforce needs" (PL 110-234). The Act defined E&T components as job search, job search training, workfare, work experience or training, or other components approved by USDA; established the funding mechanism for E&T; and required State agencies to reimburse participants for costs incurred while engaging in E&T components (USDA, 2018). SNAP E&T program requirements are updated regularly through Congressional legislation. The 2008 Farm Bill further expanded the definition of E&T components by authorizing the use of E&T funds for job

retention services, and the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (PL 115–334, the 2018 Farm Bill) introduced several additional changes. The 2018 Farm Bill required States to (1) operate an E&T program that consists of case management and at least one E&T component; (2) design their programs in consultation with local State workforce development boards; and (3) ensure all job search activities are supervised.

FNS funds E&T through three mechanisms (USDA, 2021b):

1. One hundred percent administrative grant funds are fully paid by the Federal Government and calculated using a formula based on the number of work registrants and able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) in the State. States can use the 100 percent funds to plan, implement, and operate E&T.
2. Fifty percent reimbursement funds are available to States for administrative costs that exceed their 100 percent grant funding and participant reimbursement costs. States are required to reimburse participants for expenses incurred while participating in E&T. In either case, States or the E&T provider must pay the costs before receiving the 50 percent reimbursement from FNS (i.e., a community college would receive a 50 percent reimbursement for the cost of a training program once the student completes the program).
3. ABAWD pledge funds are allocated to States that pledge to serve all at-risk ABAWDs[4] through E&T.

Program Implementation and Design

State agencies implement their SNAP E&T programs in a variety of ways. For example, some programs focus on ensuring ABAWDs[5] meet their work requirements (USDA, 2019), while others focus on providing services to all SNAP participants statewide. States engage with a variety of partners to provide E&T services. Some States provide training through a network of community colleges, while others use third-party providers or work directly with the State's department of labor to incorporate SNAP E&T into other workforce development programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

States have considerable latitude in determining which E&T components to offer. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the array of E&T components States may offer to move participants toward self-sufficiency.

Table 1.1. SNAP E&T Components

Component	Description
Noneducation, Nonwork Components	
Supervised job search	Prior to the 2018 Farm Bill, job search could be conducted independently and/or in a group setting, depending on the State. As of fiscal year 2020, all job search activities must be supervised, and independent job search is no longer allowed. As part of this component, participants make a predetermined number of inquiries to prospective employers over a specified period.

[4] At-risk ABAWDs are individuals who are in the last month of the 3-month time limit of SNAP eligibility (Government Accountability Office, 2018).

[5] Under normal SNAP operations, ABAWDs can only receive SNAP benefits for 3 months in a 36-month period unless they work or engage in a work program for at least 80 hours a month.

Component	Description
Job search training	This training provides instruction in job-seeking techniques and increases motivation and self-confidence. It may include job skills assessments, job placement services, resume writing workshops, mock interviews, instruction in job search tools, and other activities.
Job retention services	These services help employed participants succeed at work, retain employment, and/or increase earnings. Services may include case management, life skills classes, and a variety of support services (e.g., transportation assistance, clothing, test fees). Only individuals who have received other employment and/or training services under the E&T program are eligible for job retention services.
Education Components	
Basic education and/or foundational skills instruction (includes high school equivalency programs)	These programs offer instruction below the postsecondary level to increase a participant's reading, writing, and math skills with the goal of obtaining a secondary school diploma or equivalent.
English language acquisition	This component helps English language learners improve reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension.
Career and/or technical education programs or other vocational training	These components are designed to provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary for employment or further education in a skill, trade, or in-demand employment sector. Programs may lead to certificates or credentials.
Integrated education and training or bridge programs	These programs provide adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or group of occupations for the purpose of educational and career advancement.
Work readiness training	These programs include skills assessment and educational remediation services that prepare individuals for the workforce. Work readiness skills may include foundational cognitive skills such as reading for information, applied mathematics, locating information, problem solving, and critical thinking; and noncognitive skills, or soft skills, such as adaptability, integrity, cooperation, and workplace discipline.
Work Components	
Preapprenticeships and/or apprenticeships	Participants learn a skilled occupation through instruction and on-the-job training.
Internships	Participants improve their employability through a planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time.
Work experience	This component is designed to improve the employability of participants through actual work experience and/or training and enable them to move into regular employment. The required number of work hours is determined by dividing the household's SNAP benefit by the Federal or State minimum wage, whichever is higher.
On-the-job training	This work placement is made through a contract with an employer or an apprenticeship program. The contract is limited to the amount of time it requires a participant to become proficient in the position.
Self-employment training	This component provides training in setting up and operating a small business or other self-employment venture.
Workfare	In this component, participants are placed at a supervised worksite to gain work experience and skills. Positions are unpaid; participants receive compensation in the form of their household's monthly SNAP allotment. The primary goal of workfare is to improve employability and encourage individuals to move into regular employment while returning something of value to the community.

Source: USDA, 2021a

1. Job Search Activities

Job search activities are offered through the supervised job search, job search training, and, in some States, vocational training components ("integrated job search"). Supervised job search and job search training are offered by most States and have the highest participation of all the E&T components (Rowe et al., 2017). Supervised job search assists participants who are actively applying for work, while job search training aims to enhance their job search skills. Although participants may engage in either component to aid in their job search process, E&T providers are required to provide hands-on case management to supervised job search participants. Participants must meet with their caseworker at least monthly to discuss available jobs and their submitted job applications, receive coaching, and identify next steps. Some participants may require additional services that are not provided through the supervised job search component, such as resume assistance, which is typically offered in the job search training component. Job search training participants can receive individualized services (e.g., resume and cover letter writing, mock interviews, skills assessments, job placement) and engage in group workshops on topics ranging from interviewing skills to maintaining motivation during a lengthy job search process (see text box for other job search training activities). Some States integrate job search activities into the vocational training component to assist participants in finding a job in their new field once they complete their training program.

Job Search Training Activities

- Employment assessments
- Job placement services
- Occupational exploration
- Resume and cover letter development
- Mock interviews
- Soft skills training
- Job fairs
- Completion of job applications and employment goal setting

Changes as a result of 2018 Farm Bill

Prior to fiscal year (FY) 2020, participants in most States conducted their job search independently using online tools and other resources. The 2018 Farm Bill replaced independent job search with supervised job search as an approved E&T component. FNS defines supervised job search as "programs occurring at State-approved locations, at which the activities of participants shall be directly supervised, and the timing and activities of participants tracked in accordance with guidelines issued by the State" (USDA, 2020, p. 2). Effective FY 2020, all job search activities must be supervised, except for job search activities incorporated with other E&T components. For example, participants engaged in a nursing training program may look for jobs as part of the E&T component unsupervised by E&T provider staff (USDA, 2019).

2. Previous Research

Job search programs have been implemented across many federally supported public assistance programs, in addition to SNAP E&T, including through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), WIOA, and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. While studies on SNAP E&T have been limited, the available evidence suggests stand-alone job search activities do not lead SNAP participants to long-term self-sufficiency, and States that promote independent or stand-alone job search are less likely to see positive employment outcomes for their SNAP E&T participants compared with States with more intensive services (Puma et al., 1994; Hamilton, 2002; Martinson et al., 2003; Gueron et al., 2002; Rangajaran et al., 1998). Some evidence suggests more intensive E&T programs that combine several components and tailor programs to meet local labor market demands are more likely to increase E&T participation rates and employment and earnings outcomes (Kogan et al., 2016; Vollmer et al., 2017).

Studies of job search programs offered by other public assistance programs have yielded mixed results. Evidence suggests employment and reemployment programs that include career counseling, skills assessments, and job retention services result in reduced unemployment insurance (UI) claims, increased participant earnings, and increased employment rates (Heinrich et al., 2013; Michaelides & Mian, 2020). Other studies of TANF job search activities that included case management, employment coaching, and classes saw mixed results: Dyke et al. (2005) observed decreases in earnings immediately following program completion, with earnings increasing 2 years later, while Martinson et al. (2020) observed no impact of job search activities on participants' employment status or wages.

B. Organization of the Report

The remainder of this report presents study findings. Chapter 2 describes study methods, chapter 3 presents a brief overview of the three study States, and chapters 4–6 present State-specific case studies. Chapter 7 triangulates key findings from the three study States and presents recommendations for best practices and opportunities for improvement.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the study design, data collection components, analysis procedures, and considerations and limitations.

A. Study Design

The study used a mixed-methods design to produce indepth case studies in three States (Connecticut, Oregon, and Tennessee) to assess the role of supervised job search, job search training, and integrated job search in SNAP E&T. For the qualitative component, the study team conducted (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 E&T participants. The quantitative component included analysis of SNAP administrative, E&T participation, and UI wage data. Table 2.1 presents the study objectives and data sources used to address them, and appendix A provides a crosswalk showing which data sources address the research questions for each study objective.

Table 2.1. Study Objectives by Data Source

Study Objective	Document Review	Virtual Site Visits	Interviews With E&T Participants	SNAP, E&T, and UI Wage Data
Describe each State's job search activities, requirements, and policies	✓	✓		
Conduct a process evaluation to describe how each State implements job search activities and how those activities operate within the broader E&T program	✓	✓	✓	
Conduct an outcome evaluation to assess short- and long-term effects of job search activities on participant outcomes			✓	✓

Note: UI = unemployment insurance

B. Data Collection

The study team gathered data from State agencies between December 2020 and June 2021. The qualitative data collected were current as of the timing of the site visits and interviews (e.g., the study did not ask individuals to describe processes, practices, or experiences tied to a specific timeframe). The study team requested retrospective quantitative data from October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2019. This section provides more details regarding data collection processes and the data collected. See appendix A for further details on study methods.

1. Qualitative Data

The case studies drew on three sources of qualitative data: (1) a document review; (2) virtual site visits; and (3) telephone interviews.

Document review

The study team collected several types of documents prior to and during data collection (see text box). Documents received prior to the data collection were used to develop a base level of understanding of each State's E&T program. Documents collected from States during the site visits were used to triangulate interview findings and provide further information on outcomes and processes.

Documents Collected and Reviewed From Three Study States

Received from FNS prior to data collection

- FY 2019, FY 2020, and FY 2021 Annual State E&T plans
- FY 2018, FY 2019, and FY 2020 FNS-583 data
- FY 2020 FNS-778 data
- FY 2018 National Outcome Reporting Measures

Collected from States during virtual site visits

- Training materials
- State and local policy manuals and memoranda
- Lists of E&T providers and services offered
- Outcomes reports (internal or submitted to FNS)
- Annual reports
- Assessment tools
- E&T provider handbooks
- E&T outreach materials

Virtual site visits

The study team conducted virtual site visits with study States between January and March 2021 using videoconferencing software.[6] Each site visit included a series of indepth, semi-structured interviews with staff at State SNAP E&T offices, local SNAP offices, E&T providers, and other stakeholders (e.g., State departments of labor); observations; process-mapping exercises; and the completion of a cost worksheet.

Site Visit Interview Topics

- SNAP E&T local and policy background
- Services offered
- Job search administrative process
- Job search delivery process
- Communication with SNAP agency and data tracking
- Assessment, monitoring, and compliance
- Participant outcomes
- Challenges and recommended practices

Semi-structured interviews. The study team created four semi-structured interview guides to better understand the State's job search activities, requirements, and policies and learn how different stakeholders perceived the operation of job search activities within the E&T program. Topics covered in each interview are presented in the text box. The State SNAP office recommended local SNAP offices and E&T providers to participate in the study, ensuring representation from rural and urban areas. The study team interviewed local offices and E&T providers in the same county or region to ensure consistency across the populations discussed. Table 2.2 presents the number and type of interviews conducted in each State.

[6] The original study plan included a 5-day in-person site visit. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study team pivoted to virtual data collection to ensure the safety of the study team and site visit respondents.

Table 2.2. Interviews by Study State

State	Interviews Completed
Connecticut	• One interview with State SNAP E&T staff • One interview with a stakeholder organization • Two interviews with staff at two local SNAP offices • Two interviews with staff at a CBO providing job search training • Six interviews with staff at three community colleges that offer job search activities alongside their E&T vocational training component
Oregon	• One interview with State SNAP E&T staff • Four interviews with staff at two local SNAP offices, one urban and one rural • Four interviews with staff at two E&T providers, one urban and one rural
Tennessee	• One interview with State SNAP E&T staff • One interview with a stakeholder organization • Four interviews with staff at two local SNAP offices, one urban and one rural • Three interviews with staff at two E&T providers, one urban and one rural

Note: Because Connecticut's E&T program focuses on the provision of vocational training to participants and the State only has two job search training providers, the study team conducted semi-structured interviews with one job search training provider and three vocational training providers. These vocational training providers offered job search activities to E&T participants, but participants were not formally enrolled in the job search training component.
CBO = community-based organization

Process-mapping exercises. Each virtual site visit included two process-mapping exercises with E&T providers to develop a detailed description of participants' progression through E&T and job search activities. During the process-mapping exercise, respondents were asked to explain the E&T participant experience—from eligibility and intake through program completion or exit. Specifically, the study posed the following types of questions about each step in the E&T process to respondents:

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How are you doing it?
- What individuals are involved, and what are their roles?
- How long does it take?
- What information is communicated? When? By whom? To whom?
- What are the next steps?

Observations. The study team planned to conduct observations to gather detailed information about the E&T process, such as referral, client intake, and orientation. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many job search activities were disrupted, limiting the types of activities that could be observed. Site visit teams were able to virtually observe client referral to E&T, a prerecorded job search training activity, and a virtual orientation session. The study team used an observation checklist to take detailed notes during each observation session.

Cost worksheet. To gather information on anticipated and actual costs of supervised job search, job search training, other E&T components, and participant reimbursements of support services, the study team developed a cost worksheet, prepopulated the worksheet with cost information available from State E&T plans and FNS-778 data, and sent the worksheets to State SNAP E&T staff to complete prior to the start of the site visit. The study team reviewed the completed cost worksheets before the State SNAP E&T staff interview and asked followup or clarifying questions during the interview.

E&T participant interviews

The study team conducted phone interviews with current and former E&T participants to inform study objectives 2 and 3; the participant telephone interviews enhanced the study team's understanding of participant experiences and outcomes.

Telephone Interview Topics

- Understanding and awareness of job search objectives
- Expectations and experiences of participation in supervised job search and/or job search training
- Satisfaction with E&T activities
- Barriers to participation
- Participation in other E&T activities, such as vocational training
- Outcomes

The procedures used to recruit telephone interview participants adhered to a general process across all three States, including using SNAP administrative data to contact current E&T participants and provide background information about the study, its purpose, and participants' rights regarding participation. The team used an online scheduling tool to enable participants to schedule their interview in advance. Phone interviews lasted 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for accuracy with participants' permission. All participants who completed the phone interview received a $30 gift card by mail. State-level differences in the sampling frame and recruitment process follow.

Connecticut. The study team used State administrative data from January 1 to April 30, 2021, to recruit telephone interview participants. The data included job search training and vocational training participant names and phone numbers. The study team further limited the pool of potential vocational training interviewees to individuals who were likely to have engaged in job search activities (i.e., were attending or had completed a training program at one of the three vocational training providers that participated in the site visit). Interviewers made up to four outreach attempts for each sampled participant. The study team conducted telephone interviews between March and June 2021 with 26 participants: 14 vocational training participants and 12 job search training participants.[7]

Tennessee. The study team used State administrative data from September 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021, to recruit telephone interview participants. The data included SNAP job search training participant names, email and mailing addresses, and phone numbers. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tennessee had low job search training participation rates during the data collection period. As a result, in addition to job training participants, the study team recruited individuals who participated in job search activities through their vocational training program. Insight mailed advance letters to participants to inform them of the study; interviewers then attempted to reach participants via email once and via phone four times during the 2-week recruitment period. The study team conducted telephone interviews from December 2020 to March 2021 with 31 current or former job search training participants in Tennessee. Twenty-one interviewed participants engaged solely in job search training, and 11 participated in job search activities that were integrated into their vocational training program.

Oregon. Oregon was unable to provide State administrative data with contact information to conduct interviews with participants. Instead, the study team worked with State SNAP E&T staff and supervised job search and job search training providers to recruit current and former participants for telephone interviews. The study team developed a flyer, social media posts, and a frequently asked questions document to assist E&T providers with recruitment. The study team conducted telephone interviews between March and June 2021 with 29 current or former supervised job search and job search training

[7] Of the 26 participants, 13 were currently participating in E&T, 12 were former participants, and 1 individual's status was unclear.

participants in Oregon. Twenty-five interviewed participants only engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training; the remaining four completed job search activities during a vocational training program.

2. Quantitative Data

The State agencies provided three types of secondary data the study team used to explore participant outcomes and inform study objective 3:

- **SNAP administrative data.** The SNAP administrative data files consisted of one record per SNAP participant per month for individuals over the age of 16 who received SNAP benefits at any time during the 1-year reference period of October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2018 (i.e., FY 2018). These data included demographic information and identifiers for linking to the other secondary data sources.
- **SNAP E&T data.** The participant-level SNAP E&T data contained information on E&T participation, including component, provider name, start date, and end date.
- **UI wage data.** The participant-job level UI wage data provided quarterly earnings and employer data for all SNAP participants. Tennessee and Oregon provided UI data for eight calendar quarters (between October 1, 2017, and September 30, 2019), and Connecticut provided UI data for six calendar quarters (between April 1, 2018, and September 30, 2019).

C. Data Analysis

1. Qualitative Analysis

To conduct the qualitative analysis, the study team analyzed and synthesized data from the document review, virtual site visits, and participant interviews to provide a comprehensive description of job search activities in each State.

Document review

The study team reviewed the documents received from FNS prior to the start of data collection and abstracted relevant information into an Excel workbook. This workbook was used to build a profile of each State's E&T program and was reviewed by study team members in preparation for the virtual site visits. Further documents received over the course of the site visit were analyzed in conjunction with interview, process-mapping, and observation data.

Virtual site visit data

After each site visit, the study team summarized key site visit takeaways, drafted a process map, and met regularly during the data collection and analysis phases to discuss common and distinct insights gathered from each of their respective site visits. These procedures helped the study team identify themes and gaps in knowledge requiring additional data collection (e.g., a followup email to a respondent requesting clarification).

All interview recordings were transcribed and coded using NVivo 12. The study team developed a coding scheme to align with the study objectives and research questions and capture emerging themes. Prior to the start of coding, all team members coded the same site visit interview transcript and conducted an

interrater reliability check to ensure coders applied the scheme consistently. The analysis focused on synthesizing information across interviews to describe each State's job search program, including services offered, populations served, implementing partners, integration with other programs and services, intake and referral procedures, orientations, assessments, notification process and materials, and circumstances that led to participants dropping out of activities.

E&T participant interview data

The study team coded telephone interview transcripts in NVivo 12. The team worked iteratively to create a coding scheme that reflected the research questions and study objectives. Study team members coded one participant transcript and conducted an interrater reliability check to ensure all coders were consistently applying and understanding the codes. After reaching an agreement, team members coded the transcripts. The analysis focused on describing clients' motivations for engaging in job search activities, expectations of the length of participation in job search, perceived outcomes of participation, and barriers and facilitators to participation in job search activities and achievement of positive outcomes.

2. Quantitative Analysis

The study team linked SNAP administrative data, E&T data, and UI data to examine the characteristics and labor market outcomes of supervised job search and job search training participants enrolled in E&T during FY 2018. Specifically, the study team conducted the following quantitative analyses:

- **Descriptive statistics.** The study team used the SNAP administrative and E&T data to assess participation across E&T components; compare characteristics among supervised job search, job search training, and other E&T participants; and determine duration, reengagement, and completion status across E&T services.
- **Labor market outcomes.** The team used cross-tabulations to compare labor market outcomes among supervised job search, job search training, and other E&T participants overall and by participant characteristics. Labor market outcomes included the time to employment, mean quarterly income post-E&T participation, and number of jobs and sectors of employment. The study team also used ordinary least squares regression to explore labor market outcomes as a function of E&T participation. In the regression analyses, the study team controlled for a limited set of observed participant characteristics.

In FY 2018, no individuals in the Connecticut administrative data participated in job search activities (outside of vocational training), and receipt of job search training could not be identified in the data. As a result, the team did not include Connecticut in this analysis; appendix C provides descriptive statistics and labor market outcomes for Connecticut's FY 2018 vocational training participants.

D. Study Limitations and Considerations

The study has several noteworthy limitations that warrant consideration.

1. Timing of the Quantitative Data

The study team used retrospective administrative data for all individuals participating in E&T in each State in FY 2018 and wage data from FY 2018 and FY 2019. The team conducted virtual site visits and participant phone interviews between December 2020 and June 2021. Administrative and wage data

reflect the E&T landscape prior to the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill in December 2018 (see chapter 1, section A.1 for further details). However, the qualitative data gathered during virtual site visits and participant phone interviews reflect the implementation of changes to SNAP E&T—and job search and job search training, in particular—after the passage of the Farm Bill. For example, in FY 2018, the job search component did not need to be supervised or conducted at a State-approved location. Quantitative findings report outcomes for participants who engaged with a different, older version of the program and may not reflect current program design. That is, it is unclear how the addition of case management and supervision may have affected participant outcomes; the reported quantitative findings may no longer be an accurate representation of participant outcomes given the changes to the program.

2. Other Considerations

Data on intensity and duration of job search were not available. The intensity and duration of supervised job search and job search training can vary substantially. Engagement with E&T providers can range from a small interaction (e.g., a few hours) to a variety of activities over an extended period of time; for example, vocational training programs may encompass weeks or months of education. Because study data on the intensity and duration of the job search participant activities were not available, the findings represent the average time to employment and earnings after E&T participation across all participants, regardless of the intensity of their participation. E&T participants receiving more intense services are likely to have better outcomes than those with less intense services, but the study was not able to investigate this association.

Limited data on E&T outcomes. Study States collected a limited amount of E&T data during the study period and could not provide several requested variables on participant outcomes, such as whether the participant found a job after engaging with E&T. As a result, the study team only explored outcomes that could be measured using the UI wage data.

Limitations related to UI wage data. UI wage data do not include earnings for individuals employed in the Federal sector or those who are self-employed, including gig workers. As a result, the data may not provide a complete picture of earnings among E&T participants. The data also include only quarterly earnings, not wages or hours worked.

Limited scope of longitudinal dataset. The relatively short 1-year duration of SNAP administrative data on post-E&T participation posed challenges in examining whether participation in job search or job search training was associated with participants leaving SNAP and obtaining gainful employment. The study team only collected 2 years of wage data, so some participants may have had only four quarters of wage data depending on the timing of their job search participation. A previous study (Dyke et al., 2005) demonstrated that participation in job search programs among TANF recipients was associated with increased earnings only six quarters after participation, indicating a longer followup period may be needed to sufficiently measure program outcomes. A longitudinal data file spanning several years might have enabled a better assessment of changes in SNAP participation and earning potential following participants' engagement in job search activities.

Nonexperimental study design. This study used a nonexperimental design, in which SNAP participants self-selected into different E&T components based on their personal goals, motivation, and life circumstances and program offerings in their geographic areas. Several unobservable characteristics may have influenced supervised job search and job search training participant outcomes. For example,

individuals who participate in supervised job search may be more motivated than nonparticipants, which could be a key factor in finding a job.

Ashenfelter's dip. The study team observed patterns consistent with Ashenfelter's dip, a phenomenon where earnings of individuals in job training programs decline before they enter the program, likely because their motivation for entering the program was job loss (Heckman & Smith, 1995). As a result, measures of the impact of the intervention—in this case, participation in supervised job search or job search training—can be overstated when program participants' earnings return to their preprogram participation levels. That is, while job search activities may have helped individuals find a job, it is unclear whether earnings from the new job were higher than earnings from a previous job. Therefore, the results about the association between participation and earnings should be interpreted with caution.

COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic severely limited the job search services many E&T providers were able to offer in 2020 and 2021, when the study team conducted site visits and participant interviews. Providers often served participants only via phone, or if in-person services were offered, they were conducted by appointment only. These limited services resulted in lower participation in supervised job search and job search training in 2020 and 2021 and affected the participant phone interview data collection. The study team spoke with only recent or current participants who engaged with E&T during the pandemic; therefore, participant perceptions and their descriptions of activities and challenges may not reflect the full experiences of participants before or after the pandemic.

Chapter 3. Overview of Study States

The three study States—Connecticut, Oregon, and Tennessee—reflect differing approaches to job search implementation, though each State operated a voluntary E&T program and offered services statewide.

- The Connecticut E&T program offered job search support through two mechanisms: (1) job search training at two community-based organizations (CBOs) and (2) job search activities integrated within the vocational training programs at 12 community colleges across the State.
- Oregon offered both supervised job search and job search training activities through partnerships with a large variety of third-party providers, including the Oregon Employment Department, CBOs, and community colleges.
- Tennessee offered job search training through a solo partnership with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD); activities were offered through DLWD's network of American Job Centers (AJCs).

Table 3.1 presents an overview of each State's E&T program.

Table 3.1. Overview of State E&T Programs

Characteristic	Connecticut	Oregon	Tennessee
ABAWD time limit[a]	Statewide waiver	Statewide waiver	Statewide waiver
FNS Region	Northeast	Western	Southeast
Number of E&T participants (FY 2020)	1,579	19,984	2,478
Percent of SNAP participants in E&T (FY 2020)	0.4	3.1	0.3
Percent of work registrants in E&T (FY 2020)	5.2	15.5	1.9
Primary aspect of E&T design	Partnerships with community colleges	Partnership with a variety of third-party providers	Partnership with workforce development agency
Offered supervised job search in FY 2021	No	Yes	No
Offered job search training in FY 2021	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other E&T components offered in FY 2021	• Work experience • Vocational training • Job retention	• English as a second language • Basic education • Work readiness training • Work experience • On-the-job training • Vocational training • Self-employment training • Job retention • Bridge programs, internships, and other short-term training	• Basic education • Work readiness training • Work experience • Work and technical training • Job retention

Note: ABAWD = able-bodied adult without dependents; FY = fiscal year
[a] As of FY 2021, quarter 4, see https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ABAWD/waivers
Sources: FY 2021 State SNAP E&T plans, FY 2020 FNS-583 data

A. Changes to State SNAP E&T Programs

States made changes to their SNAP E&T programs over the course of the study period (FY 2018–FY 2021), both to strengthen their programs and to respond to the 2018 Farm Bill and the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 3.2 presents a brief description of these changes.

Table 3.2. Changes to State SNAP E&T Programs

State	Changes as a Result of COVID-19 Pandemic	Other E&T Program Changes
Connecticut	Launched a laptop loaner program to provide SNAP E&T participants the technology needed to access and complete their vocational training programs	In fiscal year 2020, onboarded first E&T provider focused solely on job search training, work experience, and job retention provision; previously, all other E&T providers also offered vocational training
Oregon	Provided virtual technical assistance to SNAP E&T providers, expanded allowed service offerings (e.g., housing, car repairs), and permitted purchases of additional program supplies (e.g., bikes as alternate means of transportation when public transit was unreliable)	Continued to expand and recruit new third-party providers to increase access to SNAP E&T in rural areas and among underserved populations
Tennessee	Began to offer virtual activities for SNAP E&T participants	Since fiscal year 2018, has increased number of third-party providers to expand vocational training available to rural SNAP E&T participants

B. Job Search Activity Costs

State E&T staff were asked to estimate the costs of providing supervised job search and job search training activities to E&T participants. Only Connecticut was able to provide these data. Oregon did not require costs to be reported by component—all E&T administrative costs were combined into one line item. As a result, isolating program costs for supervised job search and job search training was not possible for this study. Tennessee did not require AJCs to distinguish between the time staff spent providing job search training activities versus other SNAP E&T activities in their monthly invoices. As a result, job search training costs could not be distinguished from other E&T costs.

In FY 2020, Connecticut budgeted $54,300 for the job search training component and $4.8 million for the vocational training component, which included some job search services. The State budgeted $42,437 and $270,000 in participant reimbursement funds for transportation and childcare expenses, respectively. Actual spending was substantially lower than budgeted amounts, primarily because enrollment was lower than expected. Actual FY 2020 costs for job search training were $22,500 and $2.6 million for vocational training. Actual per-participant costs for job search training were $450, and per-participant costs for vocational training were $1,680.[8]

[8] Data from administrative cost form completed by Connecticut State E&T staff

Chapter 4. Connecticut

Connecticut's SNAP E&T program offered job search support to SNAP participants through two distinct pathways. SNAP participants in need of immediate employment could receive job search training services at one of two CBOs offering the component. The statewide network of community colleges and four CBOs provided vocational training opportunities, including integrated job search, to SNAP participants seeking enhanced employment opportunities or new careers in better paying fields. Both pathways had similar enrollment processes and incorporated similar job search activities, but the program goals and service delivery of the programs were tailored to the different participant needs. SNAP participants in both job search training and vocational training reported high levels of satisfaction with the E&T program and supports provided, although many still experienced significant barriers, such as transportation, to successful participation and employment.

This chapter provides an overview of Connecticut's SNAP E&T program, job search components and processes as of spring 2021, and staff and participant experiences with the program. Quantitative data on job search outcomes were unavailable for Connecticut; see appendix C for further details.

A. Current E&T Program Design

From 2015 to 2020, Connecticut's SNAP E&T program focused largely on providing vocational training to SNAP participants through a network of community colleges and a small number of CBOs. In 2020, the State added a CBO provider offering job search training, work experience, and job retention to reach more underserved populations for whom vocational training may not be appropriate. Connecticut's decision to focus primarily on vocational training in 2015 was a result of evidence suggesting most emerging employment opportunities require some education beyond high school. State E&T staff viewed vocational training as the best way to prepare SNAP participants for better paying jobs and promote self-sufficiency.

> **SNAP E&T Program Priorities**
>
> Our priority is to make sure that SNAP recipients, no matter where they live in Connecticut, even though we're a small State, would have some opportunity to participate.
>
> *—State E&T staff*

To redesign its program, Connecticut expanded its partnerships with community colleges across the State. In 2015, Connecticut partnered with only 1 community college, and by 2018 all 12 community colleges in the State provided E&T vocational training services. Connecticut found the network of community colleges to be a valuable partner because they are situated across the State and near Department of Social Services offices; prior to this partnership, SNAP E&T services were only offered in larger cities. In 2020, Connecticut decided to expand E&T offerings through a partnership with one CBO to focus on job search training without offering a separate vocational training component. This partnership resulted from collaborative discussions between the State and the CBO. While vocational training provides valuable employment skills to SNAP participants, the CBO identified a gap in services for SNAP participants who could not undertake a vocational training program but still required assistance in obtaining employment. The State recognized the opportunity to serve this high-need population and contracted with the CBO to implement job search training, work experience, and job retention E&T components. In March 2021, the State was considering allowing other providers to offer similar E&T services in Connecticut.

1. Statewide Partnerships

Statewide partnerships are an important aspect of SNAP E&T operations in Connecticut, which rely heavily on the community college system to provide vocational training. These partnerships provide several benefits to the program, including ensuring SNAP E&T participants have opportunities aligned with local workforce needs and providing direct support to vocational training provider staff.

> **Need for Job Search Training in Connecticut**
>
> For people experiencing homelessness, people who don't speak English very well, people who haven't graduated from high school, people who are coming out of prison, people who don't have 2 years to wait to start getting income, I felt that they were being left out. To be truly self-supporting, a 2-year degree is probably what it takes … but my argument was at least they have the opportunity to get the first step on the ladder to where we all want people to be, and maybe that's college down the road, maybe that's something else down the road.
>
> *—E&T provider staff*

The State of Connecticut, through the Governor's Workforce Council, convened employers, community colleges, and government agencies to ensure college classes, trainings, and programs aligned with employer needs. To help ensure SNAP E&T vocational training programs meet local labor market needs, community college vocational training providers that want to add a new program to their SNAP E&T offerings must provide the State with labor market information to validate the need for the program within the local labor market. State SNAP E&T staff will deny training programs if labor market information is insufficient or in circumstances where careers require high startup costs or could lead to income volatility (e.g., real estate).

The Connecticut Community Colleges and Universities Board of Regents serves as a liaison between the State and the colleges. The Board of Regents provides guidance to the colleges' SNAP E&T coordinators and other community college staff responsible for coordinating E&T activities and working with participants (e.g., conducting assessments and orientations). The Board convenes quarterly meetings for the coordinators to discuss issues and best practices; these quarterly meetings provide a platform for collaboration and idea-sharing. During the 2020–2021 academic year, these meetings were particularly important for coordinators to quickly address participant needs, technology, and the transition to remote education at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

State E&T staff also worked closely with the Board of Regents to ensure SNAP E&T participants' needs were met throughout the year. For instance, they worked together to pilot a childcare subsidy program for E&T participants. The pilot program changed the eligibility criteria for Connecticut's free childcare program, Care 4 Kids, to ensure all SNAP E&T participants who were attending vocational training at the community colleges would be eligible to receive care for their children at no cost.[9]

B. E&T Providers and Job Search Services Offered

In addition to the CBOs offering job search training, vocational training providers in Connecticut also offered some level of job search support to E&T participants in gaining employment in their field. E&T providers tailored job search services to meet the needs and employment goals of their specific

[9] As of 2021, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities Board of Regents is consolidating all 12 community colleges into a single accredited institution, thereby standardizing all offerings across the State. This consolidation may have implications for job search training offered in Connecticut.

populations. This section provides an indepth review of the job search services offered by four E&T providers in Connecticut that participated in this study: one job search training CBO and three community colleges that provided vocational training (referred to as vocational training providers).

1. Job Search Training CBO

> **Job Search Training Experience**
>
> It's really everything from start to finish. From getting that resume going, to making them feel prepared and confident, to making sure they have interview clothes, work clothes, shoes, transportation.
>
> *—E&T provider staff*

In FY 2020, less than 5 percent (52 of the 1,579) of E&T participants engaged in the job search training program in Connecticut. The job search training CBO was a homeless shelter that also operated a daytime hospitality center. The job search training program primarily served individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness who were receiving services at the CBO. These E&T participants typically faced significant barriers to job seeking and employment, such as former incarceration, mental and behavioral health needs, and lack of access to basic amenities (e.g., stable housing, appropriate clothing). Participation in the State's SNAP E&T program enabled the CBO to increase the services it offered to include job search training activities. The CBO maintained strong partnerships with other organizations and government service agencies in the area and could refer clients to WIOA or Ticket to Work[10] programs as appropriate.

Job search training

> **Job Search Training Activities Offered**
>
> - Resume and cover letter writing
> - Help obtaining identification
> - Online job search, applications
> - Job training referrals
> - Interview preparation
> - Information on applying for jobs for individuals with a criminal record

Participants at the job search training CBO could choose from a variety of activities, including help obtaining an ID for work, filling out paperwork, or writing resumes and cover letters (see text box). Staff at the CBO also worked with participants to navigate the court system to obtain a copy of their criminal record, if necessary. Services were primarily offered through one-on-one meetings with participants, but the CBO also offered workshops. The most popular workshops included interview preparation and applying for jobs for individuals with a criminal record. The job search training CBO also offered client support services, such as interview clothes, work clothes, and transportation support.

2. Vocational Training Providers Offering Job Search Activities

In FY 2020, over 93 percent of E&T participants engaged in vocational training at a community college or CBO. The systematic, statewide approach to implementing SNAP E&T within the community college system has led to relative consistency in E&T administration across the State's community colleges. Each vocational training provider had a SNAP E&T coordinator who recruited participants, assisted them in enrolling for classes, and submitted E&T reporting to the State SNAP E&T office. At some vocational training providers, the SNAP E&T coordinator was a part-time position, while at other, larger institutions, more than one full-time employee assisted with the SNAP E&T program. In addition to SNAP

[10] For details on the Ticket to Work program, see https://www.ssa.gov/work.

E&T, vocational training providers offered WIOA programs, and many had an in-house AJC, which participants could access for further assistance with their job search.

Each of the 3 vocational training providers participating in the study was serving between 45 and 75 SNAP E&T participants at the time of the site visit.

Job search services

Community college vocational training providers have flexibility to offer "job search training-like" services,[11] though participants who engaged in these services were not formally enrolled in a job search training component. Many community colleges integrated job search activities within their vocational training programs after recognizing that SNAP E&T participants required more support than typical community college students, including assistance finding a job in their field of study. Community colleges that did not have the resources to add job search activities were able to refer participants to AJCs for further support.

The three vocational training providers participating in the site visit offered comprehensive integrated job search activities in which job skills courses were primarily taught by dedicated instructors, though E&T coordinators occasionally provided job search activities. At these sites, job search was provided as an additional vocational training class. Two of the vocational training providers required the job skills course for all noncredit students[12] regardless of their participation in SNAP E&T. The timing of the class varied but typically occurred midway through a vocational training program when participants had enough knowledge of their field to successfully tailor a resume, cover letter, and mock interview to the new skills they acquired.

The three vocational training providers offered similar integrated job search activities through the job skills course (see text box). Prior to the pandemic, one of the vocational training providers brought in speakers to talk about financial literacy and job opportunities. Two of the vocational training providers' job skills courses also included a module on soft skills and professional behavior. One vocational training provider used a job search textbook as a model for the class, while the other two used a curriculum developed by a former dean. Instructors indicated they could modify the curricula to fit participants' needs.

Job Search Activities Offered by Vocational Training Providers

- Resume and cover letter writing
- Mock interviews
- Overview of job search process
- Soft skills and professional behavior
- Financial literacy
- Tips for virtual interviews

Specific certificate programs, such as sterile processing, included an externship. Externships enabled participants to put their newly learned skills into practice at local employers. Vocational training provider staff indicated many externships either resulted in full-time job offers or helped participants expand their network to find a job in their field.

[11] Community college vocational training providers not offering a course could refer students to an AJC or other campus career resources.
[12] In general, credit classes lead to a degree and can be transferred to another institution. Noncredit classes are typically offered to students wishing to gain new skills or upgrade existing skills and may lead to licensure or other certification.

Highlighting the variety of services received, vocational training program participants shared several notable takeaways from attending job skills classes:

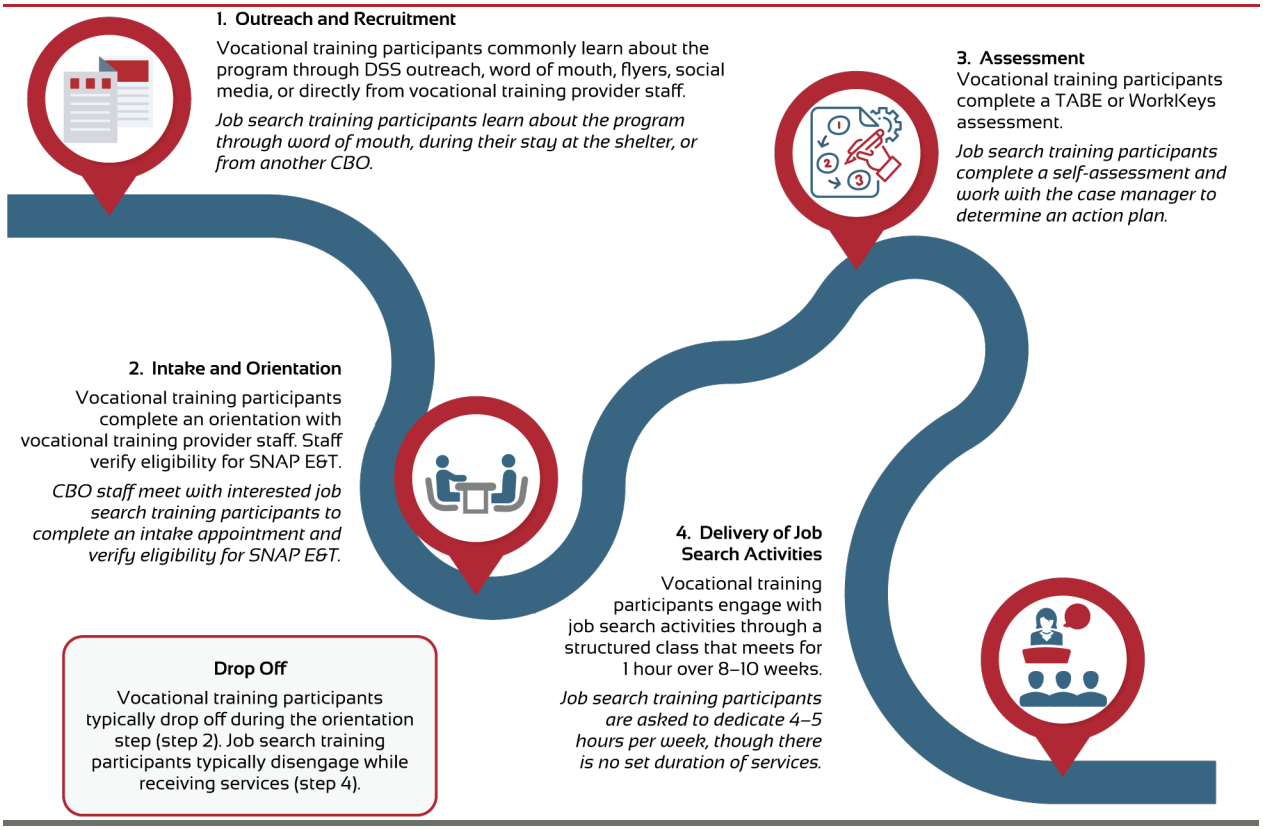
- **Resumes**—learning to properly format resume; shortening and emphasizing only the most relevant experience; making employment gaps less prominent
- **Elevator pitch**—developing a job interview elevator pitch (a summary of themselves and their qualifications)
- **Social media presence**—learning how posts on social media could affect their job search if employers looked them up
- **Identifying available jobs**—learning about various online job search sites (e.g., ZipRecruiter, LinkedIn)

> **Job Skills Experience**
>
> I got my resume down to something more presentable and more condensed. I got down to two pages, and then … down to one. And it's because I've had so many different experiences, but not everybody needs to know about everything. What did I like best? I liked best about it that I was able to get that done.
>
> —*Vocational training participant*

C. Client Engagement Process

The client engagement process varied somewhat between job search training participants and vocational training participants who engaged with integrated job search activities. For job search training participants, activities and timelines were largely based on participants' needs. The process for vocational training participants was much more structured to align with the community college schedule; prospective participants were required to attend an orientation and complete an assessment and typically attended their job skills class for at least an hour a week. Figure 3.1 illustrates this process.

Figure 3.1. Client Engagement Process in Connecticut



Note: CBO = community-based organization; DSS = Department of Social Services; TABE = The Adult Basic Education

Step 1. Outreach and Recruitment

Job search training CBO. Because the CBO's job search training program was small and served only individuals experiencing homelessness, job search training participants and CBO staff indicated that participants primarily learned about job search training through in-person conversations while they were shelter guests or receiving other services from the organization.

Vocational training providers. Participants served by vocational training providers learned about SNAP E&T through local SNAP offices and the Department of Social Services outreach or directly from SNAP E&T providers. State E&T staff reported that local SNAP office caseworkers were trained to provide information about E&T offerings. However, the reported success of local SNAP office referrals varied across the vocational training providers. Only one vocational training provider noted that most participants learned about the program through the local SNAP office. Some local SNAP office staff shared general information about the SNAP E&T program and directed SNAP participants to reach out to the providers for further information. Some local SNAP office and vocational training provider staff felt

E&T Referrals From Local SNAP Offices

Since Connecticut is voluntary, we tell them how [E&T] can help them. But other than that, it's up to [the client] to really push forward. We want to promote [E&T], but we want to stop at a certain point and say, "Listen, now it's the [E&T] coordinators' job [at the community college] to really sell it to the participant."

—Local SNAP office staff

the lack of a "warm handoff" might have dampened participation because it placed the onus on individuals to reach out to the vocational training provider.

In addition to the local SNAP office referrals, vocational training providers conducted a variety of other outreach activities. Most vocational training providers included information about the E&T program on their websites and in course catalogs. Vocational training provider staff indicated that a full-page "advertisement" for SNAP E&T in the course catalog was the most successful strategy to inform prospective participants about the program. Provider staff also posted about the program on social media, sent promotional emails, and connected with other CBOs in the area to generate referrals. Vocational training participants confirmed they learned about the program through various methods, including flyers at the community college, online, word of mouth, SNAP electronic benefit transfer card smartphone app,[13] mailed brochures, email, or staff at the community college.

> **Learning About SNAP E&T**
>
> I called [the community college]. I said, "Can somebody tell me about the free classes?" And they knew exactly what I was talking about. And they connected me to [the SNAP E&T coordinator]. And from there, my life changed.
>
> —*Vocational training participant*

Step 2. Intake and Orientation

Job search training CBO. Staff indicated they typically did not conduct a formal orientation but rather worked with job search training participants individually during the intake meeting to determine which activities would best suit each participant's needs. For example, if a job search training participant had never used an online job board, staff helped them create an account and navigate the site. During the intake meeting, staff also discussed short- and long-term goals with job search training participants.

Vocational training providers. In contrast, SNAP E&T coordinators at the vocational training providers conducted an orientation meeting with prospective vocational training participants prior to registering them for classes. After prospective participants completed an online application expressing their interest, a SNAP E&T coordinator contacted them to orient them to the vocational training program, explain program requirements, and describe classes offered. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, E&T coordinators offered the orientation in person. During the pandemic, the orientation was moved to an online group meeting conducted via Zoom or reworked as a series of one-on-one conversations between the SNAP E&T coordinator and the prospective participant. SNAP E&T coordinators noted most program dropoff occurred during the orientation phase; participants who completed an assessment and enrolled in classes usually completed their vocational training program.

Verification of SNAP participation

Staff at the job search training CBO and the vocational training providers used a file generated by the State SNAP E&T office to confirm E&T eligibility. When necessary, the CBO first assisted clients in applying for SNAP benefits before enrolling them in job search training.

Most vocational training participants registered for community college classes before the start of the semester, sometimes weeks or months prior. The SNAP E&T coordinators verified SNAP E&T eligibility at registration and again when classes started. During the orientation meeting, staff stressed the

[13] Participants using the Providers (formerly known as Fresh EBT) smartphone app received E&T messaging through the app.

importance of maintaining SNAP E&T eligibility in the time between enrollment and the start of classes. If there was a lapse in benefits, the SNAP E&T coordinators emailed State SNAP E&T staff to ensure a local SNAP office caseworker could assist the participant with recertification before classes started.

Step 3. Assessment

Job search training and vocational training participants were required to complete an assessment prior to engaging with E&T.

Job search training CBO. Participants completed a self-assessment in which they described their work history, personal barriers, and the assistance they needed. The case manager used information gleaned from the assessment to develop an action plan for each participant.

Vocational training providers. Vocational training participants completed a proctored exam to measure their reading and math levels. Vocational training providers typically proctored the assessments in person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, two of the three suspended the assessment requirement, though one did continue to proctor the exam in person. Two of the vocational training providers used The Adult Basic Education test, while the other used the ACT WorkKeys assessment.

Vocational Training Assessment

Between your work history, your assessment score, what you've identified as your strengths and your goals and your barriers, we look at the whole picture. It doesn't mean that if you get a bad score, you can't do the program automatically. It might mean that we're worried that you might not be successful in the classroom. If that's the case, and our program's not a good fit, then we're going to help you get connected to another program that might be a better fit.

—E&T provider staff

Vocational training providers used the assessments to help ensure participants enrolled in a program suitable for them. For vocational training programs requiring a minimum score on the assessment, provider staff offered failing participants additional counseling to determine whether their chosen course of study was the best path forward. Sometimes individuals who did not pass were advised to take remedial classes to improve their math and/or reading skills; they could then enroll in the vocational training program upon completion.

Step 4. Delivery of Job Search Activities

Job search training CBO. All job search training activities provided by the job search training CBO, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, were completed in person. Job search training CBO staff reported that meeting participants at the shelter was the most efficient and effective way to provide services because participants often lacked internet or phone access.

Job search training CBO staff asked participants to dedicate 4 to 5 hours a week to job search activities. While the time participants spent in job search training varied, staff were willing to assist someone for as long as needed. Though CBO staff noted program engagement was high, dropoff largely occurred during the participation step, often as a result of personal challenges and barriers participants were facing, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, or unstable housing.

Vocational training providers. The job skills course in the vocational training program was typically conducted in a computer lab at the program facility with weekly 1-hour classes for 8–10 weeks. In March 2020, most vocational training classes and job search activities moved to a virtual platform. The format of virtual job search activity delivery varied across the providers. At one vocational training

provider, job search classes met live via Blackboard. The instructor noted class sizes in a virtual environment had to be kept much smaller than in-person classes to ensure everyone remained engaged. At the two other vocational training providers, job search activities were offered as asynchronous online classes, enabling participants to watch prerecorded lectures on their own time and complete assignments regularly. Postpandemic, instructors hope to offer in-person and remote classes to provide the greatest amount of flexibility for their participants.

Case management activities

Staff at the job search training CBO and the vocational training providers tracked participation and logged their case management interactions in the CTPathways system. Data included demographic information, the date participants started and finished the component, and case notes with details such as the number of jobs participants applied for and challenges participants faced.

Job search training CBO. Staff provided one-on-one case management. The E&T case manager routinely met with participants to discuss their progress, answer questions, suggest new activities (e.g., a workshop they could complete), and determine next steps. The case manager would also set reminders to follow up with participants about their job search progress and whether they had completed tasks, such as submitting a job application, discussed during their last appointment.

Vocational training providers. Within the vocational training component, case management was an important step to ensuring program completion. At one vocational training provider, staff routinely checked attendance and reached out to participants who had missed more than 1 day of class. Several programs included a credentialing requirement that specified the number of classroom hours participants had to complete; missing too many classes could endanger program completion. Several vocational training participants also described how SNAP E&T coordinators maintained contact prior to the start of the program to ensure they were properly enrolled in classes and answer any questions.

Case Management

[The SNAP E&T case manager] constantly sends different job opportunities in case something does come along that I am able, with my disability, to [work at] … [If] we needed any help, he would actually sit down with us [to help us apply].

—*Vocational training participant*

[I] met with [the SNAP E&T coordinator] after the orientation. We had a lot of communication over email to make sure I was set up once he had me registered for classes and everything. I met with him to get my books for the class and when the class was over.

—*Vocational training participant*

D. Participant Motivations and Satisfaction

SNAP E&T participants interviewed for the study reported similar motivations for engaging in E&T activities, but participants' levels of employment readiness, their immediate and long-term goals, and job skills needs differed. This section describes job search training and vocational training participants' motivations, goals, and satisfaction with the program.

1. Motivations and Goals

Participant motivations and goals varied greatly between individuals served by the job search training CBO and the vocational training program at a community college. Job search training participants at the CBO were primarily interested in finding a job and doing so as quickly as possible. Some participants first learned of the CBO because they needed assistance finding housing or were experiencing homelessness. As a result, most job search training participants were focused on finding any job that would help them pay rent and maintain housing and did not share any long-term goals. Only a few participants indicated they were interested in pursuing further training or education once they achieved stability.

Most vocational training participants, however, had stable living situations and enrolled in SNAP E&T to jumpstart a career, advance their career, or change career paths. Participants noted wanting to gain skills to make them more marketable to employers or find a more stable career path. Participation in job search activities was mandatory for some participants to receive their certification, but those who participated saw value in the services provided. For example, one vocational training participant noted they wanted to improve their resume because they were not receiving any interview requests from employers. Another participant acknowledged they were trying to change sectors from warehouse work to an office setting and wanted to take advantage of any assistance available to make that transition. Participants' short-term goals included completing their vocational training program, passing their credentialing examination, or obtaining an entry-level job in their field. Longer term goals included advancing in their industry or finding a job they could look forward to every day.

2. Satisfaction

Job search training and vocational training participants were typically satisfied with their experiences. Job search training participants noted the offerings were comprehensive and the CBO staff were very helpful, great at following up and communicating with participants, and worked hard to motivate the participants to continue their job search. One job search training participant appreciated one-on-one assistance (their preferred mode of engagement).

For several vocational training participants, the job skills course exceeded their expectations. Vocational training participants greatly appreciated the help they received in tailoring their resumes, and one individual indicated the mock interview portion of the class was most useful because it enabled them to have a one-on-one interaction with the instructor tailored to the participant's experiences. Another vocational training participant liked that the SNAP E&T coordinators assisted them even after they completed their program.

Satisfaction and Participant Expectations

I was quite satisfied with [the E&T case manager] and her expertise and her help. She really pushed me to stay motivated and searching.

—Job search training participant

I thought it was very helpful because my resume needed so much tweaking … I was able to find out what needed to be added, what needed to be taken out and … how it should be presented.

—Vocational training participant

E. Participant Outcomes

The expected outcomes of SNAP E&T participation varied greatly between job search training and vocational training providers, yet the ultimate outcomes desired by participants were similar across programs—to gain employment. This section describes participant and provider perspectives on

successful SNAP E&T participation and anecdotal evidence on employment-related outcomes among job search participants.[14]

1. Defining Success

Across respondents, participants' success was largely viewed in the context of participants' goals and employment readiness. While State SNAP E&T staff indicated the ultimate goal was self-sufficiency, local SNAP office staff noted that a client expressing interest in E&T could be considered the first step to success. Job search training CBO staff noted that while obtaining employment is the goal, compiling a resume or learning more about the job search process was a step in the right direction, especially for participants who faced significant barriers to employment. As such, even minor accomplishments should be treated as a success. Vocational training providers shared more defined measures of success for E&T participants: program completion, receipt of a credential, and employment in a well-paying job in their field.

Incremental Successes

You have as broad [of a] front door as you can, you give people as much opportunity as you reasonably can [and as much] support as you reasonably can. And not everybody will succeed, but your measure is still how many people get jobs and keep them.

—E&T provider staff

Participant Views of Success

Definitely to get a job that pays me a living wage where I can … live comfortably and not struggle. And also get hours that work with my kids' schedule.

—Vocational training participant

I would say a career [because] I don't have a career. I have [what] I call odd jobs like cashiering and stuff like that. This would be a career.

—Vocational training participant

Despite different objectives leading to E&T participation and barriers to employment, job search training and vocational training participants shared similar views of successful program participation. Almost all participants described a successful outcome as one in which they were employed in the job of their choice or able to establish a stable career. Some vocational training participants viewed passing their upcoming examinations and receiving their licenses or credentials as a success.

2. Obtaining Employment

Job search training CBO staff reported that before the COVID-19 pandemic, participants primarily found jobs in restaurants, retail, fast food, warehouses, janitorial services, and landscaping; during the pandemic, participants who secured work found jobs in retail, construction, and home care. Four of the 12 job search training participants interviewed found jobs: one working for the CBO, two at fast food establishments part time, and one in hospitality. The job search training participants who found jobs indicated that although their SNAP benefits decreased, they were still eligible for the program.

At the vocational training providers, program completion rates ranged from 65 to 80 percent, but little was known about participant employment outcomes. At the time of the study, the vocational training providers did not systematically track employment outcomes of participants. Because most vocational training interviewees were still participating in or had recently completed the program, none reported having secured employment as a result of their participation.

[14] Because Connecticut did not have any job search training participants in FY 2018, quantitative data on outcomes are unavailable. Appendix C presents employment-related outcomes for FY 2018 vocational training participants.

F. Facilitators, Barriers, Promising Approaches, and Planned Improvements

The Connecticut SNAP E&T program has evolved to offer job search activities through two mechanisms that serve two different groups of SNAP participants. The job search training CBO reported few significant barriers or facilitators to program operations in its fledgling year, while the vocational training providers reported both facilitators and barriers to program operations and participation. Participants in both programs benefited from case management and support services, yet still faced some common barriers to participation.

1. Facilitators

Use of 100 percent administrative funds. Vocational training providers indicated the receipt of 100 percent administrative funds was a key facilitator to implementing the SNAP E&T vocational training program. Using 100 percent administrative funds, the State covered the costs of initially implementing E&T at each provider, including SNAP E&T coordinator salaries and other program startup costs. As of the time of the study, the State has continued to cover 100 percent of the administrative costs of operating vocational training, including the salaries of the SNAP E&T coordinators, but these funds were not guaranteed each year. Under the 50/50 reimbursement funding model, the vocational training providers would not have received any funds until the first participants had completed their vocational training programs; 100 percent administrative funds enabled them to build a program that helped E&T participants succeed.

Availability of support services. Regardless of where and how participants received job search training, support services played a large role in the potential for success. Job search training CBO staff reported that assisting clients with clothes for interviews or providing gas cards was key to ensuring participants could find and keep a job. Similarly, vocational training providers offered critical supports such as covering the costs of books and materials and loaning laptops to participants.

Development of long-lasting relationships. Several E&T participants noted they were in touch with providers even after they had stopped participating in job search training. For example, two participants noted CBO staff helped them apply for and receive bus passes so they could get to their new jobs.[15] Vocational training participants reported SNAP E&T coordinators sent them job postings even after they completed their training.

Dedicated SNAP E&T coordinators and job search instructors. Each vocational training provider had a dedicated SNAP E&T coordinator to conduct community outreach, answer questions from prospective participants, and help current participants address barriers. Several vocational training participants noted they felt the SNAP E&T coordinators would help them in any way possible to be successful in the program. All three vocational training providers the study team spoke with had dedicated instructors whose primary responsibility was teaching the job skills courses. They ensured the classes were comprehensive, up to date, and, to the extent possible, tailored to the circumstances of individual participants. These job skills course instructors were also familiar with the job search process and showed a strong commitment to participant success.

[15] These services would have been provided through the job retention component offered by the CBO.

2. Barriers

Technology needs. Using SNAP E&T funds, vocational training providers can implement a laptop loaner program to help meet participants' technology needs. Two of the three vocational training provider study sites noted that the time needed for IT to clean, assign, and reissue laptops was a significant limitation of the laptop loaner program. This time-consuming process often resulted in vocational training participants starting classes using their mobile phones while waiting for laptops. As classes moved online, the situation became particularly challenging because laptops were necessary to join and effectively participate in the virtual classes.

> Laptops
>
> I was told SNAP doesn't allow [laptop purchases]. I don't know if that's something that could change. It would be great because then we wouldn't have that obstacle of a student applying, needing a laptop, waiting for IT. That takes time, too. There've been students who are working off their cell phones, waiting for IT to give them a laptop.
>
> *—E&T provider staff*

Vocational training provider staff noted purchasing laptops for participants outright instead of implementing a laptop loaner program would overcome these barriers. SNAP regulations prohibit using 100 percent funds to purchase laptops outright for SNAP E&T participants[16]—a purchase permitted with WIOA funds. Vocational training providers advocated strongly for the loosening of restrictions on the use of E&T support funds to include laptop purchases to ensure successful completion of vocational training programs.

Limits on SNAP E&T enrollment. Vocational training program tuition for E&T participants was reimbursed at 50 percent by the State E&T program using 50/50 funds.[17] As a result, vocational training providers might be disincentivized to enroll E&T participants compared with non-E&T participants (e.g., for a $1,000 program, the vocational training provider would only be reimbursed $500). Two of the vocational training providers in the study reported enrolling E&T participants on a first-come-first-serve basis, as any other prospective student. One of the community college vocational training providers, however, preferred to fill class seats with non-E&T students first before opening spots to E&T participants. E&T participants at this provider often had to wait until the last minute to enroll in classes or, in some instances, were unable to enroll because there were too few spots left for E&T participants. Staff indicated that long waits and uncertainty regarding enrollment could lead some potential participants to not enroll in the program because they might not have enough lead time to secure childcare or prepare for classes.

Relationship between vocational training providers and local SNAP office caseworkers. SNAP E&T coordinators at the vocational training providers indicated they had a strong working relationship with the State SNAP E&T staff. However, one SNAP E&T coordinator noted it would be helpful to have access to a SNAP caseworker at a local office. State SNAP E&T staff had to pass any eligibility-related requests to a caseworker to resolve; having a direct line of communication could expedite these requests. Fostering a better relationship between the vocational training providers and the local SNAP offices could also increase E&T referrals from local offices in areas where they were infrequent.

Participant circumstances. Participants discussed several barriers to participation in job search training and vocational training, including childcare, transportation, and personal barriers (e.g., lack of stable

[16] States could use 50 percent reimbursement funds to purchase laptops as a participant reimbursement.
[17] FNS does not require States to use 50/50 funds for tuition.

housing, former incarceration). Job search training participants at the CBO primarily faced transportation barriers. Several participants noted that getting around in their area was difficult without a car.

The primary barriers for vocational training participants included childcare and difficulties with remote operations. Two individuals noted that childcare was a barrier, and the shift to remote learning helped overcome this challenge because they no longer needed to find childcare. However, not all participants were enthusiastic about remote learning. Some participants struggled with using Blackboard, getting their books, or connecting with SNAP E&T coordinators at the vocational training providers because they could not simply drop by their offices.

Barriers to Participation

Finances … To be honest, because if [the SNAP E&T case manager] hadn't given me the bus tickets, I don't even make enough to be able to Uber back and forth to get to work.

—Job search training participant

I for sure did not have childcare while I did this. I'm really fortunate that everything was remote because had it not been remote, I wouldn't have had somebody to watch my kids for it … just finding childcare those hours is tough and affording it is hard. So I was glad that it was at home.

—Vocational training participant

3. Promising Approaches

State E&T staff have recently begun to look for opportunities for "stacking credentials," particularly in the healthcare field. While the State usually allowed an individual to participate in only one training program through SNAP E&T,[18] exceptions were made for approved stackable credentials that facilitated advancement within a field. For example, an individual who completed a certified nursing assistant (CNA) course via SNAP E&T could then also enroll in a phlebotomy course to attain a better paying position.

4. Planned Improvements

The job search training provider and vocational training providers shared plans for improving the E&T program in the near future, including better coordination with local area employers and implementation of processes for monitoring and measuring participant outcomes.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, job search training CBO staff hope to build more relationships with area employers to create a hiring pipeline, particularly for formerly incarcerated and homeless individuals. One job search training participant reiterated the need for better connections with area employers to improve employment prospects.

[18] Allowing participants to only participate in E&T once is a State decision, not a Federal program requirement.

While the job search training program is relatively new to Connecticut's E&T program, thereby limiting prospects for examining outcomes among participants, the vocational training program has been in place for several years without close examination of participant outcomes. In spring 2021, the Board of Regents was working with the Connecticut Department of Labor to generate a report of earnings for vocational training participants in the eight quarters following program participation. Similarly, in FY 2021, the State SNAP E&T office began implementing an upgrade to the SNAP E&T CTPathways system to track and assess employment outcomes by vocational training program. These activities will enable the State to better ensure E&T vocational training programs lead to positive participant outcomes.

Chapter 5. Oregon

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) administers a robust E&T program through partnerships with a variety of statewide providers. Oregon's E&T program, commonly referred to as the SNAP Training and Employment Program, or STEP, evolved considerably since 2013 to expand the type and geographic reach of services. Consequently, Oregon offers a wide range of opportunities statewide for job search support through its supervised job search and job search training components. SNAP participants engaged in supervised job search or job search training reported high levels of satisfaction with the E&T program and noted the support services the program offered often helped bridge barriers to participation. However, many potential participants still faced barriers such as lack of transportation, childcare, and necessary technology to communicate with E&T provider staff remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among E&T participants, those who engaged in supervised job search or job search training were more likely to be employed, had higher mean earnings, and found a job more quickly than those who did not engage in either of the two components.

This chapter provides an overview of Oregon's SNAP E&T program, job search components and processes as of spring 2021, staff and participant experiences with the program, and quantitative data on job search outcomes for FY 2018 E&T participants. Appendix D provides supplemental tables.

A. Current E&T Program Design

ODHS began piloting STEP in 2013 and fully transitioned to this updated version of its SNAP E&T program in 2019. Oregon's former E&T program, called the Oregon Food Stamps Employment Transition (OFSET), only provided employment-related services to voluntary SNAP participants, primarily through the job search training and job search components. ODHS transitioned from OFSET to STEP to provide more comprehensive support services and additional training opportunities and, a result, increased the number of E&T providers from 2 to 27 between 2013 and 2021. In FY 2022, Oregon will prioritize the expansion of services in urban and rural areas with a focus on equity and diversity by recruiting providers that work with historically underserved populations (e.g., communities of color, youth aged 18–24, individuals making the transition from incarceration).

The Oregon E&T program is administered by staff at the State and district levels. State E&T staff provide guidance on program operations, develop State-level policy, approve new E&T providers, and complete required Federal reporting. ODHS also employs district representatives who work closely and meet regularly with providers on the ground to answer questions and provide State-level updates. The district representatives also orient new provider hires to E&T. Starting in FY 2019, the State piloted and rolled out a new E&T Navigator position at the district level to increase E&T enrollment among SNAP participants. E&T Navigators worked closely with staff at local SNAP offices to ensure SNAP participants referred to E&T services enroll in the program.

1. E&T Providers

As of February 2021, ODHS offered E&T services through 27 E&T providers and 96 local sites across the State. Providers included the Oregon Employment Department (OED) with 37 locations statewide, the community college consortium (17 community colleges), CBOs (e.g., Goodwill, Dress for Success), and a State university.

Organizations interested in providing E&T services applied to do so through ODHS. In their proposal, organizations were required to provide their anticipated costs, proposed services and activities, an explanation of support services, and an estimate of the number of individuals to be served. Organizations authorized to provide E&T services had to submit an updated plan annually to ODHS to maintain their provider status. ODHS worked closely with providers during the annual planning process to ensure planned services aligned with Federal and State E&T priorities. Broadly, priorities included providing participants with career connections that would guide them out of poverty and ensuring all participants had access to E&T services.

ODHS encouraged providers to customize their E&T offerings to best suit the needs of their communities. While ODHS did not require providers to target specific individuals for E&T participation, providers could opt to focus on certain population groups in their area. For example, some providers specifically served veterans, women, youth experiencing homelessness, participants with disabilities, or immigrants. Participating in E&T enabled providers to expand services to these historically underserved populations and receive additional resources that could benefit their clients, such as transportation assistance or job search workshops.

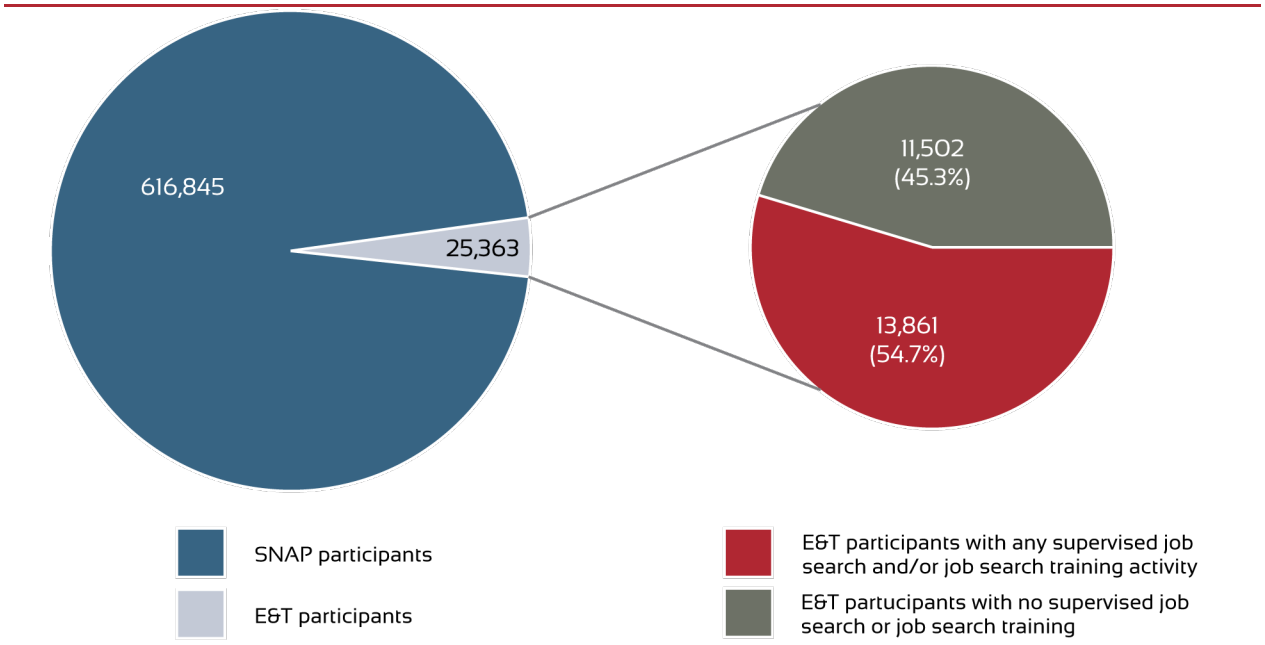
2. E&T Services Offered

Providers in Oregon offered a wide range of E&T services to participants across 14 different components (see text box). In FY 2018, only a small share of SNAP participants (4.1 percent) enrolled and engaged in E&T activities (see figure 5.1 and appendix table D.1). Among those who did, most engaged in either supervised job search or job search training or both (54.7 percent; see figure 5.1). Less than 7 percent of E&T participants engaged in the vocational training, job retention, work experience, or basic foundational skills components (see figure 5.2).

E&T Components in Oregon, FY 2021

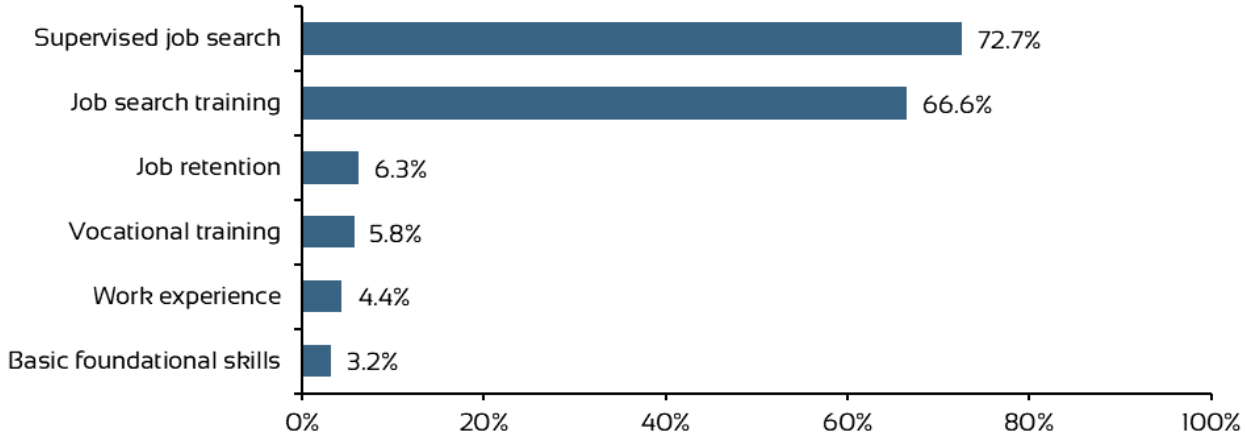
- Supervised job search
- Job search training
- Job retention
- Basic education/foundational skills instruction
- Vocational training
- English language acquisition
- Integrated education and training/bridge program
- Work readiness
- Self-employment training
- On-the-job training
- Short-term training
- Preapprenticeship/apprenticeship
- Internship
- Work experience

Figure 5.1. SNAP, E&T, and Job Search Training Participation in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 616,845
Note: FY = fiscal year
Source: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

Figure 5.2. Participation in E&T Components in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 14,803
Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 because participants could enroll in more than one component.
FY = fiscal year
Source: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

B. Job Search Providers, Activities, and Participants

Supervised job search and job search training are central components of Oregon's SNAP E&T program. This section provides an indepth review of the job search and other support services offered by E&T

providers in Oregon that participated in this study and describes characteristics of participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training.

1. Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training Providers

In FY 2021, nearly all E&T providers in Oregon (25 of 27) offered supervised job search and/or job search training as part of their E&T program. The majority of these providers (18 of 27) offered both job search training and supervised job search. All providers offering job search training and/or supervised job search also offered other E&T components (e.g., vocational training, basic education).

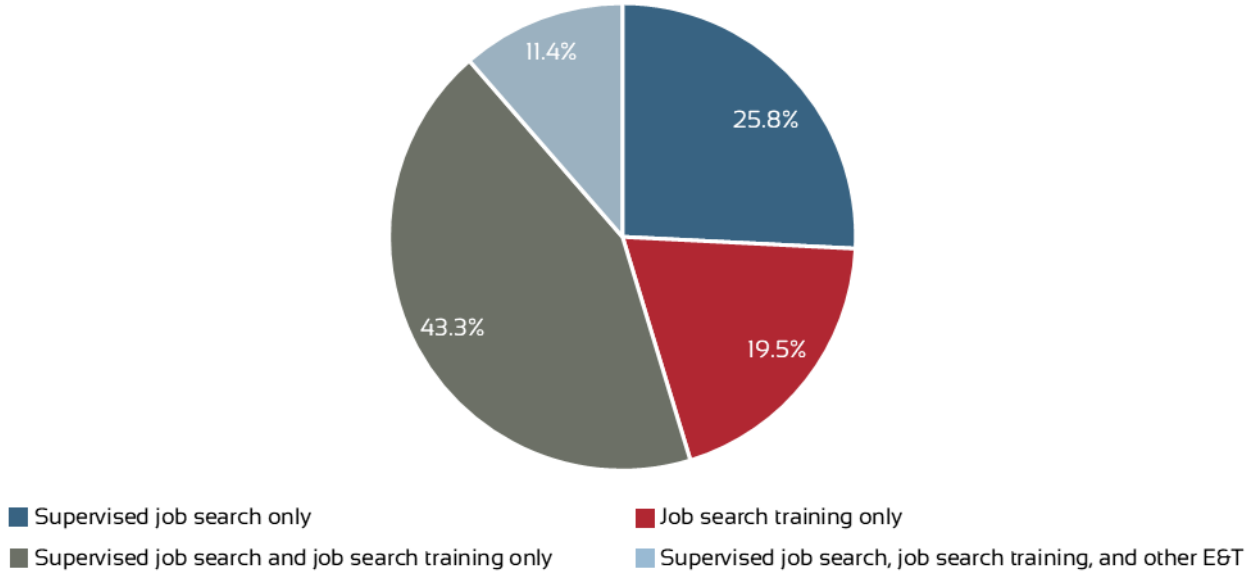
Supervised job search and job search training providers ranged from large statewide operations (e.g., OED WorkSource Centers) to small CBOs with one location. Most participants who engaged in supervised job search and job search training received services from one of three providers: OED WorkSource, Goodwill, or the community college consortium; each of these providers offered other E&T components in addition to supervised job search and job search training.

2. Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training Activities

Individuals who needed assistance finding a job typically engaged in both supervised job search and job search training. In FY 2018, over 40 percent of supervised job search and job search training participants engaged with both components simultaneously (see figure 5.3). Through supervised job search, E&T providers assisted participants with navigating the job search process, identifying job openings, and submitting job applications. Job search training offered additional activities to support participants' employment goals, including workshops or resume development. In general, supervised job search was geared toward participants whom E&T provider staff considered to be job ready, while job search training was reserved for those who needed to improve their job search skills before seeking employment. The relatively high number of participants engaging in both components points to the complementary nature of these activities.

Occasionally, supervised job search and job search training participants also enrolled in other E&T components. In FY 2018, 11.4 percent of supervised job search and job search training participants engaged in another E&T component, such as vocational training.

Figure 5.3. Enrollment in E&T Components Among Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training Participants in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 13,861
Note: FY = fiscal year
Source: Insight tabulations of Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

Supervised job search

Supervised job search must take place in a State-approved location. State E&T staff reviewed and approved proposed locations providers included in their annual E&T plans. Approved locations were often provider offices but also included public libraries and coffee shops where internet access was free and providers could work with participants in a quiet setting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon approved the use of video platforms (e.g., Zoom) and telephone for supervised job search activities.

> **Supervised Job Search**
>
> It really is more wraparound supports to the individual to ensure that they're more successful, that they really are focusing on the leads for employment that best fit their individual assessment, where their strengths are, where their challenges may be, and just setting them up for success by having all of the resources they need to be successful in submitting those applications … having the cover letter, having the resume, having whatever is needed all in one place.
>
> *—State E&T staff*

To engage in the supervised job search component, participants first completed an individualized employment plan (IEP), which included tracking, reviewing, and assessing progress toward established goals. Through supervised job search, E&T providers assisted participants in finding job openings and completing job applications. Provider staff followed up with participants at least once a month to document progress toward securing employment and worked with participants to adjust their IEP if circumstances changed.

Job search training

Through the job search training component, participants could attend workshops and receive one-on-one assistance to help prepare for the job application process. In Oregon, job search training included

resume writing assistance, mock interviews, job placement services, and workshops on overcoming a criminal background. Participants could also learn to improve their soft skills or work toward a national career readiness certificate. One common job search training activity was the completion of a master job application. Provider staff likened this master application to a "cheat sheet" participants could use when applying for a job because it contained all pertinent information, including contact information for previous employers. Provider staff also helped participants obtain legal documents, such as a birth certificate or a driver's license.

Job search training activities varied based on provider location and caseload size. Providers in more rural areas, for example, offered one-on-one job search training, while providers in more populous urban areas hosted workshops to reach more participants at once. Providers also customized their services to best meet client needs. For example, providers offered courses on job seeking for mature workers and webinars on remaining motivated during the job search process.

Integration with other program components

Clients participating in a vocational training component could also receive job search assistance tailored to their field of training. For example, students in a CNA vocational training program had the opportunity to access job placement services specific to the healthcare industry. Interviewed participants who engaged with job search as part of their vocational training component received assistance with resume and cover letter development and interview preparation. Throughout the vocational training, which typically lasted several weeks, participants indicated time was set aside weekly to search for a job. Participants drafted their resumes or cover letters during class or as homework and worked with an instructor one on one to refine the content.

Job Search Activities in Vocational Training

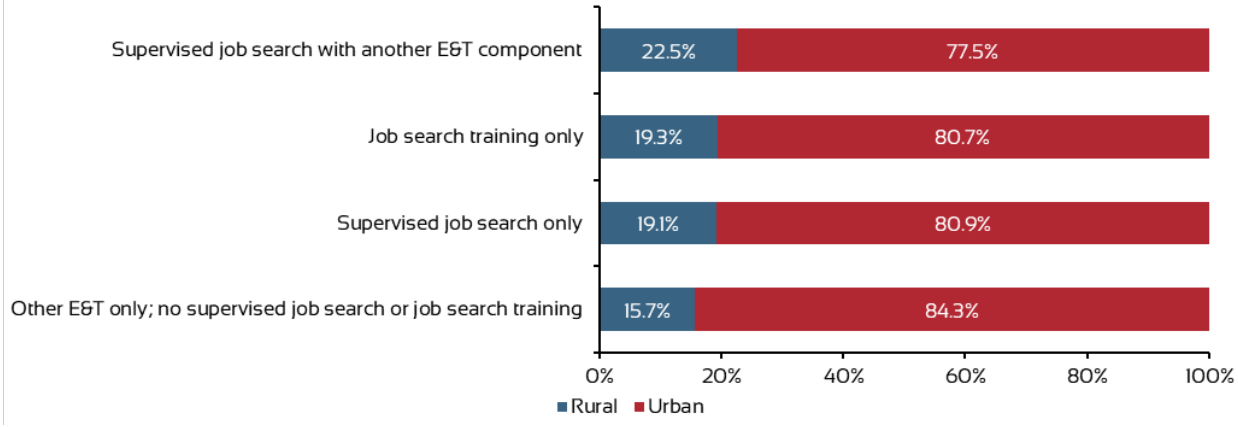
I appreciated them streamlining the resume and making it appropriate for the industry that I was trying to get into. And they told me how to dress during the interview and how to talk, and they gave a lot of really good advice on how to deal with certain people.

—E&T participant

3. Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training Participant Characteristics

Between 77.5 and 80.9 percent of E&T participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training in FY 2018 resided in urban areas (see figure 5.4 and appendix table D.3). State E&T staff noted that although E&T providers were available throughout the State, participants in rural areas faced greater barriers to E&T participation (e.g., lack of childcare, inadequate transportation).

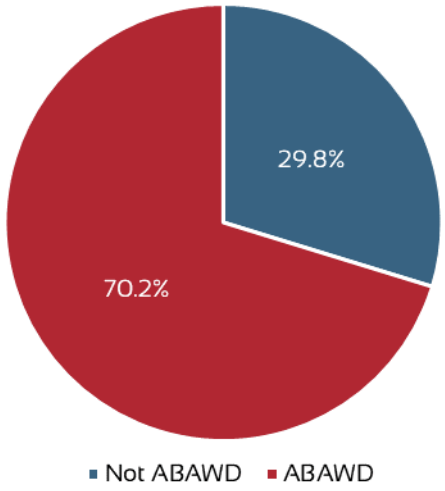
Figure 5.4. E&T and Job Search Participants in Oregon by Urbanicity, FY 2018



N = 14,500
Note: FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Over two-thirds of supervised job search and job search training participants were ABAWDs (see figure 5.5 and appendix table D.3). ABAWDs, who by Federal regulations must satisfy monthly work requirements to remain enrolled in SNAP, could use E&T to meet their requirements.

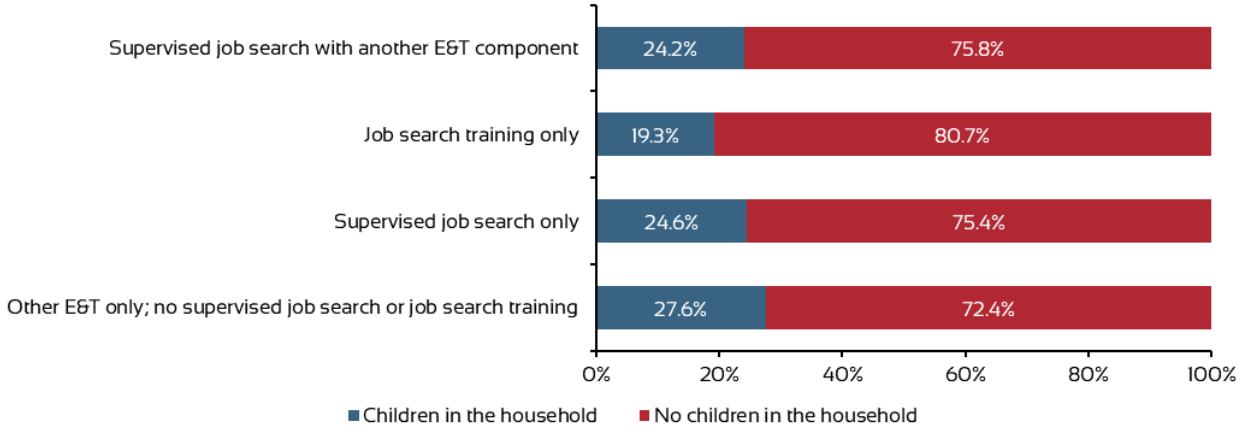
Figure 5.5. Job Search Participants in Oregon by ABAWD Status, FY 2018



N = 13,498
Note: ABAWD = able-bodied adult without dependents; FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

The vast majority (75.4 to 80.7 percent) of participants did not have a child in the household (see figure 5.6 and appendix table D.5). E&T provider and local SNAP office staff noted participants with children struggled to engage with E&T activities because of limited childcare options.

Figure 5.6. E&T and Job Search Participants in Oregon by Presence of Children in Household, FY 2018



N = 14,500
Note: FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

4. Support Services

E&T providers must offer participant reimbursements. In Oregon, these support services for supervised job search and job search training participants included transportation, interview clothing, internet access, and childcare. According to E&T provider staff and participants in Oregon, transportation assistance (e.g., gas card, bus pass) was the most frequently requested and received support service. Participants noted these support services helped eliminate or reduce barriers to obtaining employment.

Support Service Referrals

Not only did [provider] connect me with work things, but it also connected me with the community and other services, like the rental assistance … It got the information I needed to go and get that help.

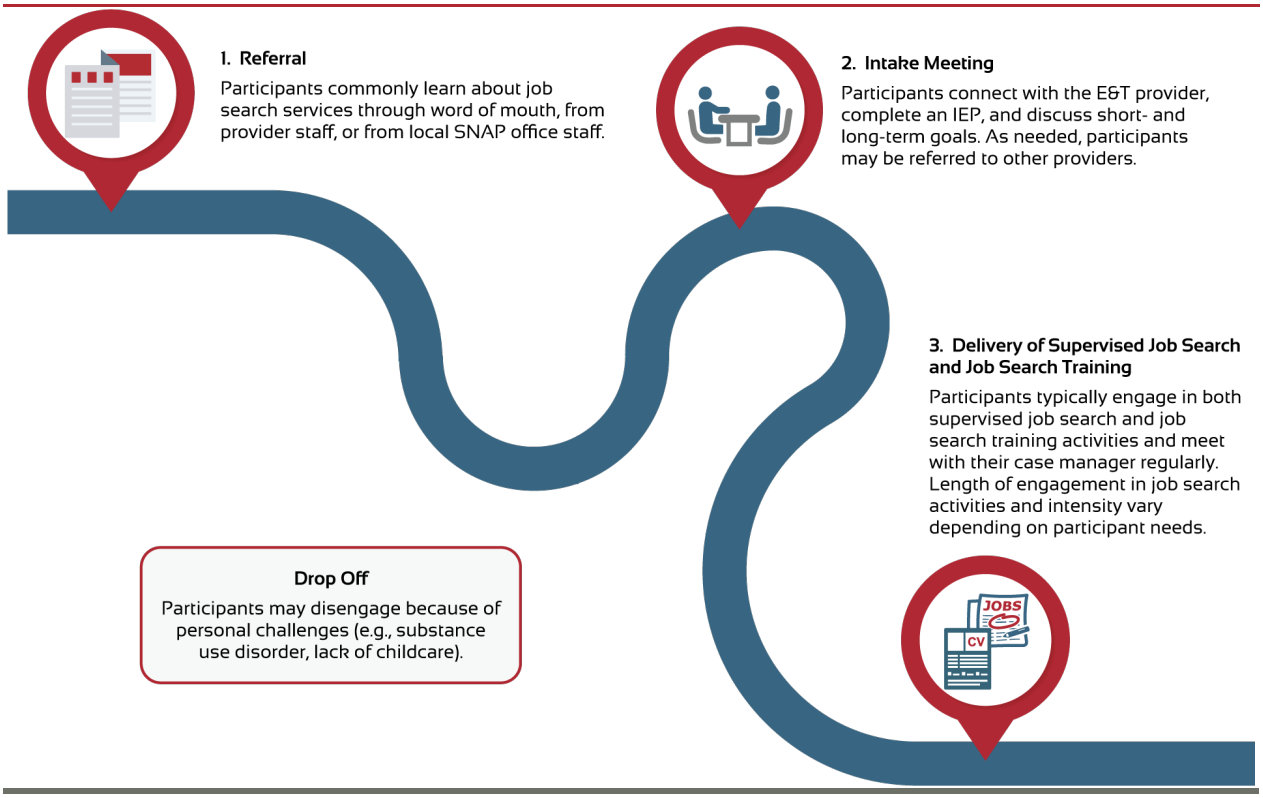
—E&T participant

Interviewed participants learned about support services during the orientation process and reported receiving the services they needed. Participants who received clothing assistance, either in the form of a clothing voucher or a gift card to a local store, used the assistance to purchase clothing for interviews and work boots or uniforms required for a specific job. A few participants reported receiving assistance paying for their internet bills when E&T services were remote. When a provider could not offer a particular service a participant needed (e.g., housing, hygiene products), staff referred the participant to a different provider or social service resource that could assist them.

C. Client Engagement Process

E&T participants engaged in job search activities through multiple pathways. Some participants engaged directly and only in supervised job search and/or job search training, while others were referred to job search after completing another component or engaged in job search activities that were integrated into another component. Figure 5.7 illustrates the typical progression through supervised job search and job search training for new E&T participants and those referred to a job search provider after completing a different E&T component. When job search assistance was integrated into another component (e.g., vocational training), participants completed in steps 1 and 2 when they first enrolled in E&T.

Figure 5.7. Oregon E&T Process Map

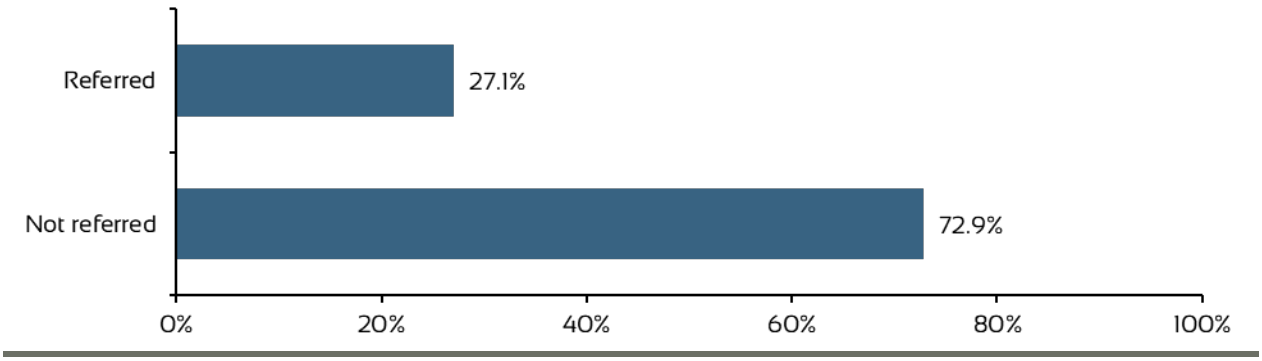


Note: IEP = individualized employment plan

Step 1. Referral

Prospective participants learned about E&T in a variety of ways, including word of mouth, provider outreach, flyers at a local SNAP office, and formal referrals from local SNAP eligibility workers. In FY 2018, most participants enrolled in supervised job search and/or job search training were not formally referred by their local SNAP office (see figure 5.8 and appendix table D.2a).

Figure 5.8. Percentage of Supervised Job Search and/or Job Search Training Participants With Local SNAP Office Referrals in Oregon, FY 2018



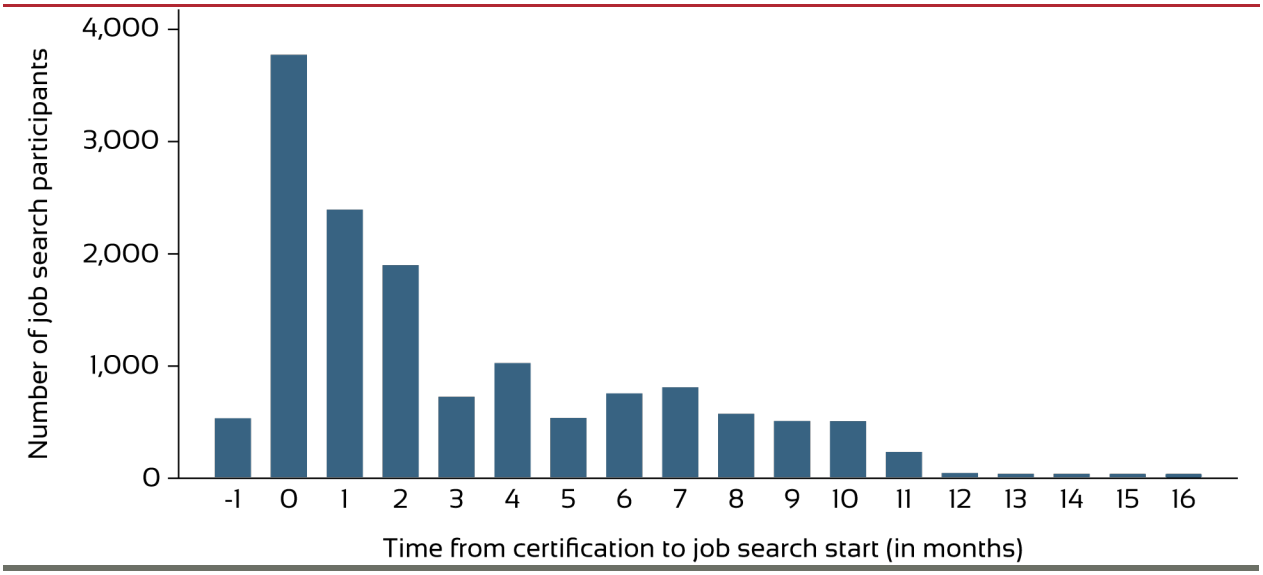
N = 13,861
Note: FY = fiscal year
Source: Insight tabulations of Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

Step 2. Intake Meeting

Regardless of how they learned about E&T, participants had to complete an intake meeting with E&T provider staff before engaging in any other E&T activities. During their intake meeting, participants registered for iMatchSkills, the State's E&T database, and completed an IEP that assessed work history, skills, and barriers to employment. Provider staff reviewed short- and long-term goals with participants and determined how best to meet these goals, including which E&T components and activities would be most suitable for them. For example, provider staff determined if the participant could benefit from both supervised job search and job search training. If the provider conducting intake believed the participant would be better served by a different E&T provider, the participant received an immediate referral. Participants who engaged with a new provider needed to attend a new intake meeting.

In FY 2018, most participants who enrolled in supervised job search or job search training did so within the same month as their SNAP certification (see figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9. Number of Months Between SNAP Certification and Start of Job Search Activities in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 13,861
Note: Negative months indicate the participant may have been referred to E&T during their recertification interview, which typically takes place about 12 months after initial certification. FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Step 3. Delivery of Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training

Participants typically started supervised job search or job search training component activities the same day as their intake appointment. The amount of time participants spent in either component depended on their needs and overall goals. Some participants had low levels of engagement (e.g., only requiring assistance with updating a resume), while others required a hands-on approach that included regular check-ins with a case manager. Most interviewed participants did not know at intake how long they would participate in the program. Some participants achieved their goals within a few days, while others worked with a provider for more than 1 year. According to E&T provider staff, participants who required

more assistance typically engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training for a longer period.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most supervised job search and job search training component activities were conducted in person at E&T provider offices, and participants typically received services without an appointment. Beginning in March 2020, E&T providers pivoted to remote services and engaged with participants over the phone, via video calls, or through other virtual video platforms. Some E&T providers allowed clients to come into the office but only during one-on-one appointments. Providers also organized drive-by job fairs and used mirrored computers to enable staff and participants to work on a job application together while remaining socially distant. Providers anticipate many activities will return to an in-person format when safety permits but indicated they might continue to provide some services virtually for participants who are unable to travel to a provider office.

Case management. Participants engaged in supervised job search and job search training were required to meet regularly with a case manager. Typically, participants received case management and one-on-one job search assistance from the same E&T provider staff member, whereas job search workshops may have been taught by other provider staff. For example, during a participant's monthly appointment, staff would provide both case management (e.g., check on progress, review goals) and any necessary job search assistance (e.g., updating a resume, signing up for additional workshops).

Most interviewed participants reported checking in with their case manager weekly or biweekly to discuss progress. Those in frequent contact with their case manager anticipated working with provider staff until they had obtained employment or started an education program. In some instances, case managers kept in touch with participants referred to a different E&T provider to ensure the participants were making progress and their needs were being met.

Case Management

My [case] worker is very efficient about staying in touch with me and sending me my information that I need in a timely manner. I'm never like, "Where is this guy?" I think it's just really cool to have a person who is on top of it. You have to engage, obviously, because you can't just let it go. As long as you reply, they definitely help you.

—E&T participant

D. Participant Motivations and Satisfaction

Participants interviewed for the study were focused on short-term goals, engaged in job search services because they needed a job to pay their bills, and were satisfied with their experience.

1. Motivations and Goals

Most interviewed participants discussed only short-term goals, engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training because they were actively seeking a job, and were willing to apply for any open positions in their area. Some participants, however, wanted to work with a case manager to identify a new, higher paying career path. A few participants indicated they intended to pursue further education through a vocational training program or obtain their GED. Of the four participants who engaged with job search activities through the vocational training component, all did so because it was a requirement

of their vocational training program. These four participants attended the same vocational training program and did so with the goal of finding a well-paying job with good benefits.

> **Motivation and Goals**
>
> The ultimate goal is self-sufficiency, and you know I'm not there yet … we've had to kind of set the long-term goals aside to focus on short-term goals.
>
> *—E&T participant*
>
> I went because I was looking for a more stable job and a job that … paid me livable wages and worked with the hours that I was available to work due to having kids.
>
> *—E&T participant*

2. Satisfaction

Most participants were satisfied with their job search experience. Participants emphasized that the support they received from their case manager or other E&T provider staff was helpful, and they were pleasantly surprised by case managers' hands-on approach and willingness to help. A few participants mentioned that searching for a job was overwhelming; case manager assistance and the activities offered helped break down the process and make it more manageable.

> **Satisfaction**
>
> When I talked to [provider staff], they were really nice and made me feel that it's a progress and it's okay, and that they're there for me to help me out, and it's okay to make some mistakes—that's how we're going to learn. And it … gave me more of a positive push that, okay, now I want to try it again.
>
> *—E&T participant*

About one-quarter (8 of 29) of the interviewed participants were not satisfied with their experience and reported that E&T provider staff did not offer adequate guidance. One participant with a disability noted the provider's office was not easily accessible, and staff were unsure how to handle their disability. Another individual thought the program would be more helpful than it was and attributed it to participating virtually rather than receiving hands-on assistance in a classroom setting.

E. Participant Outcomes

Ultimately, the goal of supervised job search and job search training was to help participants find a well-paying job. Though only about one-fifth of interviewed participants found employment, FY 2018 data show over 70 percent of participants were employed after participating in supervised job search or job search training. Among those employed, however, earnings were low (approximately $12,000 per year), and most participants were still eligible to receive SNAP benefits.

1. Recognizing Small Steps

The E&T providers the study team spoke with defined participant success broadly but ultimately reported it meant the ability for participants to live healthier and more independent lives. Long-term success may involve obtaining secure employment and self-sufficiency, but incremental steps were also important. For example, supporting a participant with a long spell of unemployment in holding down a

job (for even a few days) or introducing a participant to services that reduced or eliminated a barrier to employment could be considered a success.

2. Completing Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training

E&T provider staff often did not know why a participant stopped engaging in job search activities. Some individuals stopped participating because they secured employment. One E&T provider staff member noted many participants secured employment but at low-paying jobs that might not lead to self-sufficiency. Six of the 29 interviewed participants reported securing employment after participating in supervised job search and/or job search training. These individuals found jobs in the construction, logistics, and healthcare sectors. Most participants who did get a job reported they found employment with the help of their case manager.

> **Previous Experience With Job Search**
>
> I've just worked with [provider] off and on. I actually prefer them over the temp agencies. They're far more responsive, and they have great suggestions on how I can improve myself.
>
> *—E&T participant*

Participants might have also stopped engaging in supervised job search and/or job search training because of personal barriers. Three of the 29 interviewed participants reported disengaging from the program without securing employment or starting a training program; their reasons for doing so included preference to apply for jobs independently, dissatisfaction with their case manager, or the need to handle personal matters.

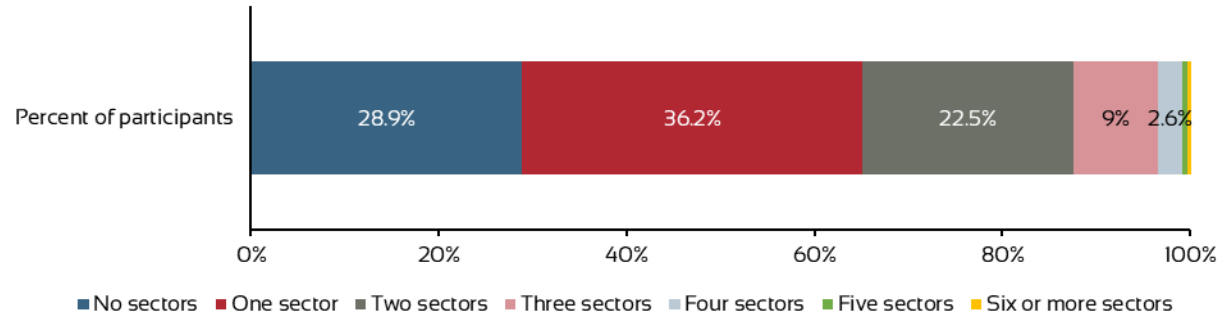
Provider staff noted reengagement was common among participants who dropped out of E&T activities, but the length of time between engagements and reasons for reengagement varied widely. Participants who found employment might also reengage if they lost their job or wanted to augment their skills through another E&T component. Four of the 29 interviewed participants noted they had worked with a provider off and on over the years.

3. Obtaining Employment

In FY 2018 and FY 2019, over 70 percent of supervised job search and job search training participants were working after participating in job search activities; about one-third were working in more than one sector, suggesting they either had more than one job or had switched sectors within the study period (see figure 5.10 and appendix table D.7).

Supervised job search and job search training participants most commonly worked in the following five industries: administrative support, waste management, and remediation services; retail trade; accommodation and food services; healthcare and social assistance; and manufacturing (see appendix table D.8). Jobs in the administrative support, waste management, and remediation services sector include administrative assistant, clerical worker, janitor, and security guard.

Figure 5.10. Number of Employment Sectors After Engaging in Supervised Job Search or Job Search Training in Oregon, FY 2018–2019



N = 13,861
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Sectors are based on the North American Industrial Classification System codes.
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Employment outcomes

Participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training were more likely to be employed in the quarter after participating in E&T than those who did not participate in any job search activities (see table 5.1). Employment among those who participated in the supervised job search component along with another component was almost 9 percentage points higher than among those who did not engage in any job search activities. A higher percentage of participants who engaged only in the job search training component also were employed in the quarter after starting E&T than the quarter prior to their participation.[19]

Mean quarterly earnings varied slightly among E&T participants. In general, mean quarterly earnings were similar across all four groups. Those who only participated in supervised job search had the highest mean quarterly earnings ($4,063), and those who engaged in neither supervised job search nor job search training had the lowest mean quarterly earnings ($3,613; see table 5.1).

Time to employment was also lower among the supervised job search group than among individuals who did not engage in either supervised job search or job search training (0.5 versus 0.9 quarters, or about 6 weeks versus 11 weeks, on average).

Table 5.1. Employment Outcomes of E&T Participants in Oregon, FY 2018–2019

	Before E&T Participation		After E&T Participation			
Component(s)	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter Before Starting E&T[a]	Sample Size (*N*)	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter After Starting E&T	Mean Quarterly Earnings Among Those With Earnings ($)	Mean Time to Employment (Quarters)[b]	Sample Size (*N*)
Supervised job search only	56.5	3,243	52.5	4,063.79	0.5	3,581

[19] Employment could not be determined for participants who began E&T during the first quarter of FY 2018. As a result, this population is different than those who engaged only in job search training over the study period.

Component(s)	Before E&T Participation		After E&T Participation			
	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter Before Starting E&T[a]	Sample Size (*N*)	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter After Starting E&T	Mean Quarterly Earnings Among Those With Earnings ($)	Mean Time to Employment (Quarters)[b]	Sample Size (*N*)
Supervised job search with another E&T component[c]	57.4	6,507	52.6	3,938.40	0.6	7,217
Job search training only	48.4	1,631	51.3	3,892.70	0.6	2,700
No supervised job search or job search training	32.3	784	44.0	3,613.81	0.9	1,002

Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter
FY = fiscal year
[a] Employment prior to E&T start could not be determined for participants who engaged in E&T during the first quarter of FY 2018. As a result, sample sizes are lower for this column.
[b] Mean time to employment refers to the number of quarters, on average, it took for a participant to find employment after participation in an E&T component. Individuals who were employed in the same quarter as their E&T participation had a value of zero quarters to employment.
[c] Other E&T components can include job search training.
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Among participants who only engaged with supervised job search, most received services from OED or a CBO (see table 5.2). On average, those who received services from OED had better employment and earnings outcomes than those who received services from a CBO.

Table 5.2. Employment and Earnings Outcomes in Quarters After Participating in Only Supervised Job Search in Oregon by Provider Type, FY 2018–2019

Provider Type	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter After Starting E&T	Mean Quarterly Earnings Among Those With Earnings ($)	Mean Time to Employment (Quarters)[a]	Sample Size (*N*)
CBO[b]	46.8	3,499.69	0.8	862
OED WorkSource	54.5	4,203.70	0.5	2,541
Other[c]	54.5	4,386.74	0.5	156

Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter
CBO = community-based organization; FY = fiscal year; OED = Oregon Employment Department
[a] Mean time to employment refers to the number of quarters, on average, it took for a participant to find employment after participation in an E&T component. Individuals who were employed in the same quarter as their E&T participation had a value of zero quarters to employment.
[b] Includes Goodwill and other CBOs
[c] Includes community colleges and other supervised job search providers (not CBOs)
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Caution should be used in interpreting these results because they do not infer a causal relationship between supervised job search and/or job search training participation and employment outcomes and earnings. First, the unadjusted means do not adjust for other participant characteristics that may

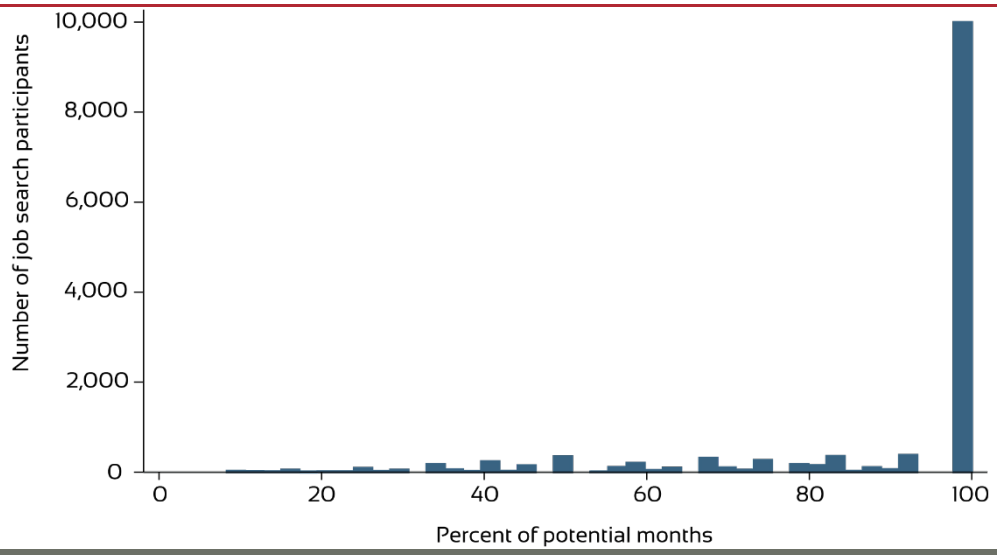
influence employment and earnings (e.g., prior work history, field of employment, local labor market conditions). Analyses are based on quarterly earnings after the start of E&T activities, so components that require a longer duration to complete may not produce outcomes as quickly as supervised job search and job search training. Supervised job search and job search training participants may self-select into the program because they are more motivated to find a job quickly.

SNAP participation

Participants who found employment did not earn enough to lose SNAP benefits. Many of the interviewed participants were still actively participating in E&T services and noted their SNAP benefits remained unchanged. One participant discontinued their benefits once they secured employment, and another noted their benefits fluctuated month to month because they sometimes took on additional work, which increased their income.

Most participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training in FY 2018 were enrolled in SNAP for all potential months and did not leave the program (see figure 5.11). Observing SNAP participation over a longer period of time, however, may reveal different participation patterns.[20]

Figure 5.11. Percentage of Potential Months of Enrollment in SNAP Among Supervised Job Search and Job Search Training Participants in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 13,861
Note: Potential months refers to the maximum number of months a client could have appeared in the SNAP data. Participants who first enrolled in SNAP in August 2018 and were still in the SNAP administrative data in September 2018 were enrolled in SNAP for 100 percent, or all, months because the study only collected data from October 2017 to September 2018. Participants who first enrolled in SNAP in December 2017 but were no longer in the SNAP administrative data starting in May 2018 were enrolled in SNAP for 50 percent, or 5 of 10 potential months.
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

F. Facilitators, Barriers, and Promising Approaches

ODHS has worked to strengthen collaboration among State E&T staff, providers, and employers and in recent years piloted the E&T Navigator position to increase participation in E&T. Still, participants faced

[20] The study team only collected 1 year of SNAP administrative data.

barriers (e.g., lack of transportation or childcare) to engaging in supervised job search, job search training, and E&T more broadly; insufficient funds for support services might exacerbate participant barriers.

1. Facilitators

Collaboration among providers and State E&T staff. ODHS encouraged E&T providers to work collaboratively to best serve clients. In response, providers shared information, became familiar with services offered by other E&T providers in their area, and made referrals as needed through the State's E&T database, iMatchSkills. This database facilitated information sharing across E&T providers and streamlined coordination of services because client information (e.g., activities and support services received) entered by one provider could be viewed by all providers in the State, State SNAP E&T staff, and local SNAP office staff.

To further promote collaboration, State SNAP E&T staff held monthly technical assistance calls to answer provider questions and facilitate provider relationships. Local SNAP offices also maintained strong relationships with nearby E&T providers and met to share information on how to best serve E&T participants.

Support services. Local SNAP office staff and E&T providers emphasized the importance of support services. For many clients, assistance with transportation, childcare, housing, and clothing helped bridge the gap between securing a job and maintaining employment.

Strong ties with local employers. E&T providers had strong relationships with local employers. For example, E&T provider staff described working closely with employers to fill vacant positions. Employers reached out to E&T provider staff when looking to hire, and E&T staff referred participants to apply for these openings.

2. Barriers

Insufficient funding. While support services were important to providing quality services, State E&T staff and E&T providers reported barriers related to insufficient funds for support services.[21] Staff indicated this barrier affected participants in urban and rural locations differently. For example, limits on gas funds potentially posed a challenge to E&T participants in rural areas because participants with a car sometimes traveled significant distances to find a job or reach provider offices. Similarly, while E&T provider staff could offer bus passes to participants, much of the State lacks a well-connected public transportation system; therefore, the passes were sometimes of little use. E&T providers also noted E&T funding and support services were not designed to overcome larger barriers affecting participants, such as mental illness or substance use disorders, lack of affordable housing, lack of reliable childcare, and lack of public transportation networks. These issues did, however, affect the participants' ability to engage with job search activities.

Barriers to Participating

Because I'm homeless … I didn't have access to a computer, and COVID did not make that any easier because the library and the employment department were shut down for public use.

—E&T participant

[21] There is no Federal cap on participant reimbursements for support services; funding is determined at the State level.

Participant barriers. Interviewed participants discussed several barriers to participation, including personal barriers (e.g., incarceration, disabilities), homelessness, lack of adequate transportation, and the transition to remote services during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to E&T provider staff, participants often lacked the equipment (e.g., computers or telephones) necessary to communicate remotely with local SNAP office and E&T provider staff. In particular, the growing homeless population within the State struggled to engage with provider offices remotely; maintaining contact with providers even before the pandemic and office closings was challenging for this population. Another barrier the pandemic exacerbated was the increase in participants' childcare responsibilities as a result of closed schools and daycares. Because they could not find childcare, some participants were unable to engage in E&T.

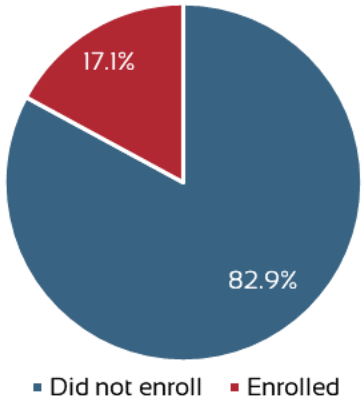
Participants offered minimal suggested changes to E&T, though some recommended the State offer increased flexibility in support services. One participant received a gas card for a gas station that was more expensive than others. The participant noted it would have been preferable to receive a gas card for a gas station with lower prices. Another participant mentioned receiving a clothing voucher to a store that did not sell the items needed for the job.

3. Promising Approaches

E&T Navigators. FY 2018 SNAP administrative data showed most SNAP clients referred to E&T did not enroll in the program (see figure 5.12 and appendix table D.2). Recognizing this issue, in 2019 Oregon piloted the E&T Navigator position to improve case management services, support SNAP participants (USDA, 2020), and, ultimately, increase E&T enrollment among referred participants. Navigators were experienced SNAP eligibility workers or TANF family coaches who provided hands-on support to participants at local SNAP offices and facilitated referrals to E&T providers and case management. Navigators also met regularly with local E&T providers to provide technical assistance and encourage collaboration. As of FY 2021, all but 2 of Oregon's 16 ODHS districts had at least 1 E&T Navigator.

State E&T staff reported the E&T Navigator role helped increase the number of referrals and enrollment in E&T services. E&T Navigators helped mitigate dropoff and keep participants engaged by guiding them through the process of identifying providers, arranging transportation, and providing case management (e.g., following up with clients who have not reached out to a provider, helping clients secure information requested from the provider).

Figure 5.12. E&T Enrollment Among SNAP Participants Referred by Local SNAP Office in Oregon, FY 2018



N = 25,272
Note: FY = fiscal year
Source: Insight tabulations of Oregon FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

Targeted outreach. To boost E&T participation, some E&T Navigators and providers conducted targeted outreach to identify candidates for supervised job search and job search training, including recently incarcerated individuals. In these cases, staff contacted returning citizens to determine whether they planned to apply for SNAP and, if so, whether they were interested in E&T opportunities. Navigators also contacted clients who transitioned off TANF and were receiving SNAP to offer them further assistance via E&T (E&T is not available to TANF participants).

Chapter 6. Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) administered its SNAP E&T program in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD). Tennessee offered SNAP participants across the State job search training, job retention, basic adult education, vocational training, work readiness training, and work experience services. Job search training was offered only through DLWD's statewide network of American Job Centers (AJCs). E&T participants commonly engaged in job search training because they wanted to find a job to pay their bills; most were satisfied with the services they received. Over three-quarters of E&T participants were employed after engaging in job search training activities.

This chapter provides an overview of Tennessee's SNAP E&T program, job search training component and processes as of spring 2021, staff and participant experiences with the program, and quantitative data on job search outcomes for FY 2018 E&T participants. Appendix E provides supplemental tables.

A. Current E&T Program Design

DHS administers the Tennessee SNAP E&T program in partnership with DLWD, a sister agency with expertise in employment and training and a cadre of workforce development programs funded by WIOA. With its WIOA funding, DLWD offers workforce development services statewide through a network of AJCs that serve as centralized hubs for job seekers to gain job search skills and access resources. With its SNAP E&T funding, DLWD contracts with other providers to promote further workforce development opportunities and expand service offerings for SNAP participants.

DHS has delegated the management and provision of SNAP E&T services to DLWD through an interagency agreement since 2017. As the agency responsible for administering SNAP E&T in Tennessee, DHS maintains program oversight, receives funding from FNS, completes Federal reporting requirements, and works closely with DLWD to ensure FNS regulations and participants' needs are met. DHS also performs a full review of DLWD's processes, systems, and programs at least once a year to verify continued alignment with FNS regulations and guidance. Meanwhile, DLWD maintains day-to-day program operations, manages a network of AJCs, and contracts with third-party providers that offer additional SNAP E&T components (e.g., vocational training, basic adult education).

> **Rural Services**
>
> [Through] our partnership with UT Extension, since they're really rural focused, they've helped us identify gaps that we have in the State through their resource mapping. We're able to see where our presence is … and we might need to contact more community partners because they have their eyes on the ground and can help us fill in in those spaces.
>
> *—DLWD staff*

To inform the SNAP E&T program design and offerings, DLWD has collaborated with two key organizations:

- **Local workforce development boards** assisted DLWD in selecting and vetting E&T providers and aligning E&T strategies with labor market dynamics and trends. This collaboration promoted the implementation of E&T components that would help participants develop job skills to match employment opportunities in their area. Tennessee has nine local workforce development areas, defined as groups of several counties with similar labor markets; each area had a board composed of elected officials and other stakeholders such as private employers, union representatives, academic personnel, and community members.

- **The University of Tennessee (UT) Extension** helped DLWD identify gaps in E&T resources in rural areas and opportunities to expand services through partnerships with CBOs serving rural communities.

1. E&T Providers

DLWD partnered with several third-party providers, including community colleges, UT Extension, United Way of Middle Tennessee, Goodwill, Equus, and other CBOs to provide participants additional E&T services and a broader range of E&T components (see text box). Third-party providers offered components not available through the AJCs, such as work readiness training, and expanded the types of training available to E&T participants (e.g., Goodwill offered a CNA training program). Several third-party providers also subcontracted with additional entities to increase opportunities for specialized training and certification programs.

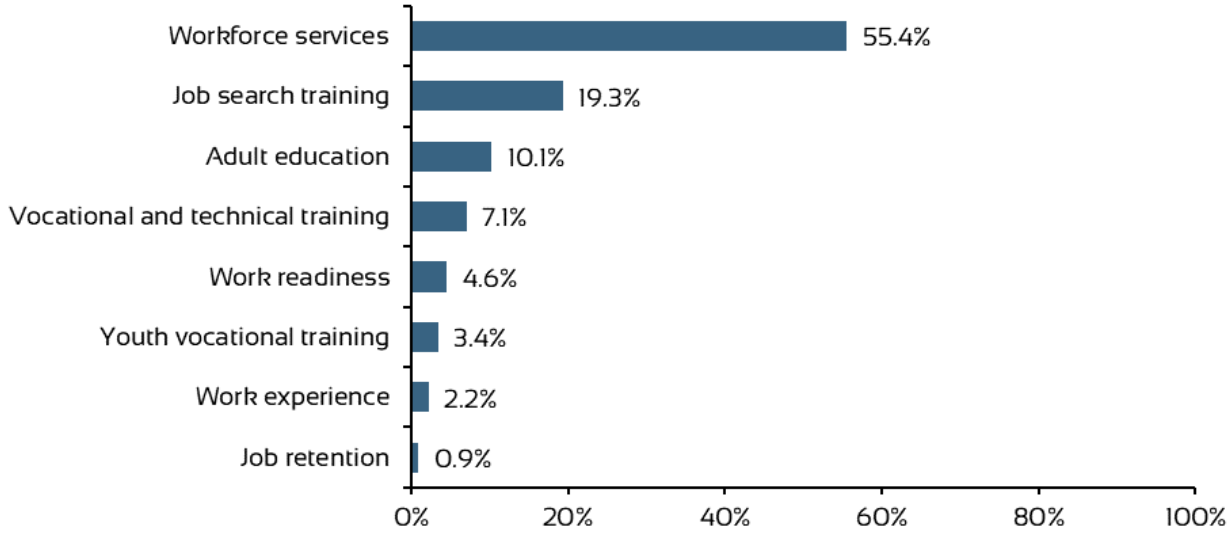
E&T Components in Tennessee, FY 2021

- Job search training
- Job retention
- Basic adult education
- Career/technical education training (i.e., vocational training)
- Work readiness training
- Work experience

2. E&T Services Offered

Among the 848 individuals participating in E&T in FY 2018, about 20 percent engaged in the job search training component (see figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Participation in E&T Components in Tennessee, FY 2018



N = 848
Note: FY = fiscal year
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

B. Job Search Training Activities and Participants

Participants could engage in job search training as a sole SNAP E&T component or in sequence with other E&T components. In Tennessee, job search training was typically offered to participants through a

network of AJCs located across the State. AJCs were staffed by career specialists who, in addition to job search training, offered career counseling and mentoring, case management, skills assessments and testing services, money management assistance, referrals to other SNAP E&T component providers (e.g., third-party providers offering vocational training or adult basic education), and referrals to social services and community organizations. While the AJCs were the sole official provider of SNAP E&T job search training services in Tennessee, other providers could incorporate tailored job search services into vocational rehabilitation and training, certificate programs, or other E&T components. For example, a CNA training program also provided participants with field-specific resume development, interview skills, and hiring fairs.

1. Job Search Training Activities in Tennessee

Job search training in Tennessee included activities ranging from registering for a job search website to resume writing and practice interviews (see text box for a full list of job search training activities). DLWD did not specify which job search training activities an AJC had to offer. As a result, AJCs customized their offerings to meet the needs of their participants. For example, while one site may offer regular job fairs and referrals to vocational training programs, another site serving participants with significant barriers to employment could offer more workplace readiness activities (e.g., soft skills, hygiene).

Job Search Training Activities

- Account creation on Jobs4TN, the State-sponsored job board, or use of websites such as Indeed or LinkedIn
- Resume writing and development of a master resume
- Workplace readiness skills, such as hygiene and soft skills
- Interviewing skills, including practice interviews and using the online platform The Big Interview
- Access to online certificate courses using the platform Alison
- Job fairs

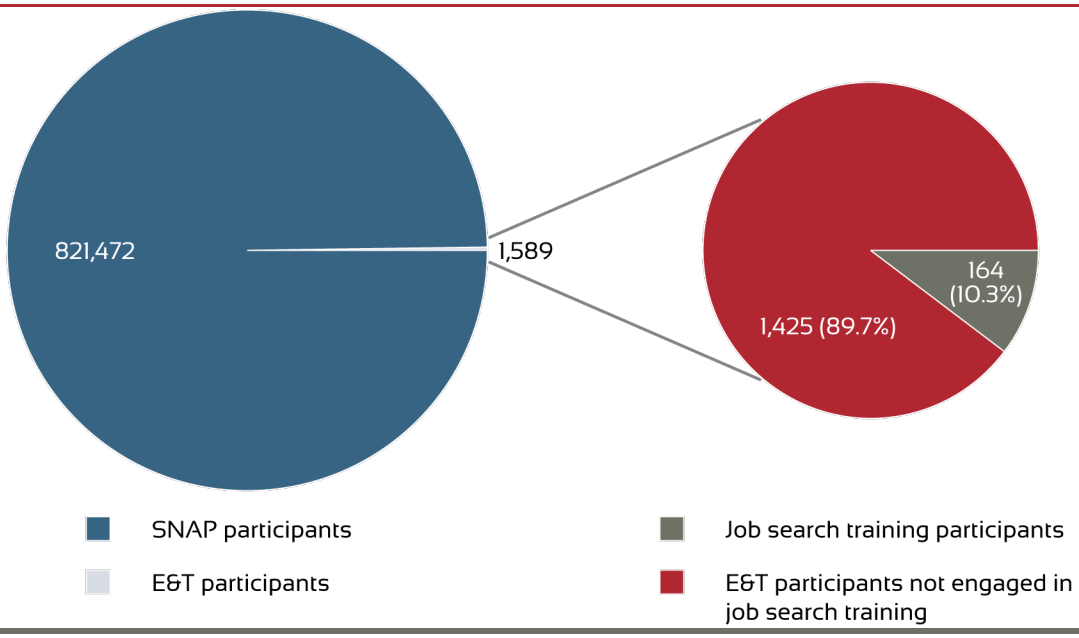
AJC career specialists typically offered job search training activities in person as one-on-one sessions or in small workgroups. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, DLWD and the AJCs quickly pivoted to offer remote job search training services. DLWD developed a virtual AJC that helped participants access and learn about services online rather than in person through physical AJC offices. AJCs also hosted drive-by job fairs, which saw high turnout; staff considered continuing these virtual events postpandemic because of their success.

Overall, job search training participants reported that job search training introduced them to different types of jobs than the ones they were originally pursuing. Several participants reported they would not have known about the Jobs4TN website if not for seeking help from the AJC. One participant noted the Jobs4TN website had jobs that were not posted on other platforms, and the ability to store their "master" resume and past applications in one place eased the job search process. Participants found the mock interview practice and help with online job search to be particularly useful. One participant appreciated that the AJC career specialist served as a character reference on their job applications after the participant spent several weeks working with the specialist.

2. Job Search Participant Characteristics

In FY 2018, 164 individuals or 10.3 percent of all SNAP E&T participants engaged in job search training (see figure 6.2). One in 10 job search training participants enrolled in a second E&T component (see appendix table E.4).

Figure 6.2. SNAP, E&T, and Job Search Training Participation in Tennessee, FY 2018

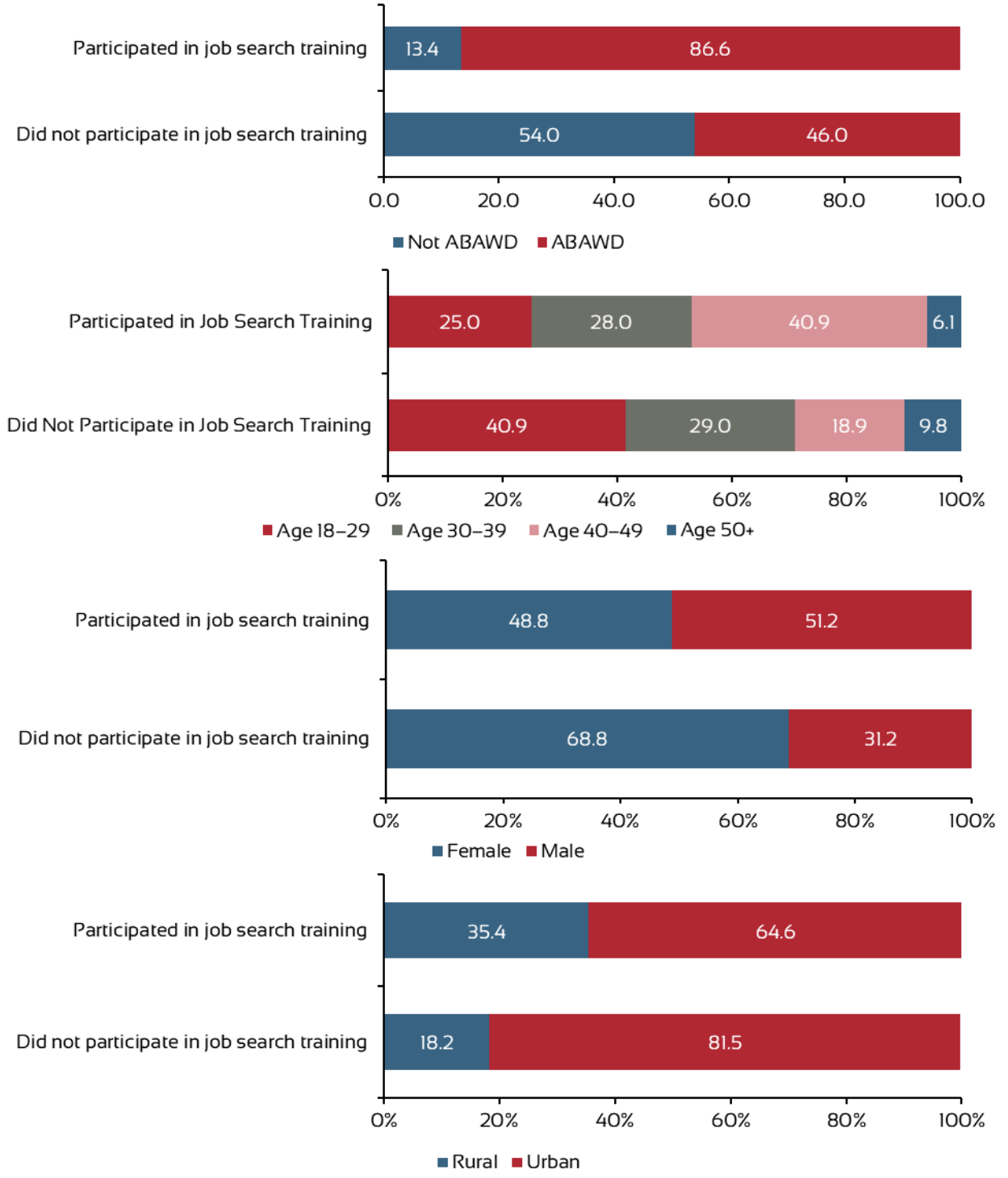


Note: Includes all SNAP participants in the data who accepted a referral, whether they went on to have an intake encounter or participate in an activity
FY = fiscal year
Source: Tennessee FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

A large majority (86.6 percent) of job search training participants were ABAWDs (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 49, not disabled, and without dependent children in their household) compared with 46.0 percent of other SNAP E&T participants (see figure 6.3 and appendix table E.5). The local SNAP office staff the study team spoke with confirmed ABAWDs frequently engaged with job search training to help meet their ABAWD work requirements.[22] Compared with individuals who did not participate in job search training, job search training participants were more likely to be over age 40 (47.0 versus 28.7 percent, respectively), male (51.2 versus 31.2 percent), and live in a rural area (35.4 versus 18.2 percent).

[22] In FY 2018, Tennessee had a partial ABAWD waiver during which ABAWDs in only certain geographic areas were subject to work requirements. Tennessee implemented a statewide waiver in FY 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 6.3. Selected Characteristics of E&T Participants Who Have and Have Not Participated in Job Search Services in Tennessee, FY 2018



N = 1,589

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100. All differences between the two populations were significant at a *p*-value of < 0.001. ABAWD = able-bodied adult without dependents; FY = fiscal year

Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

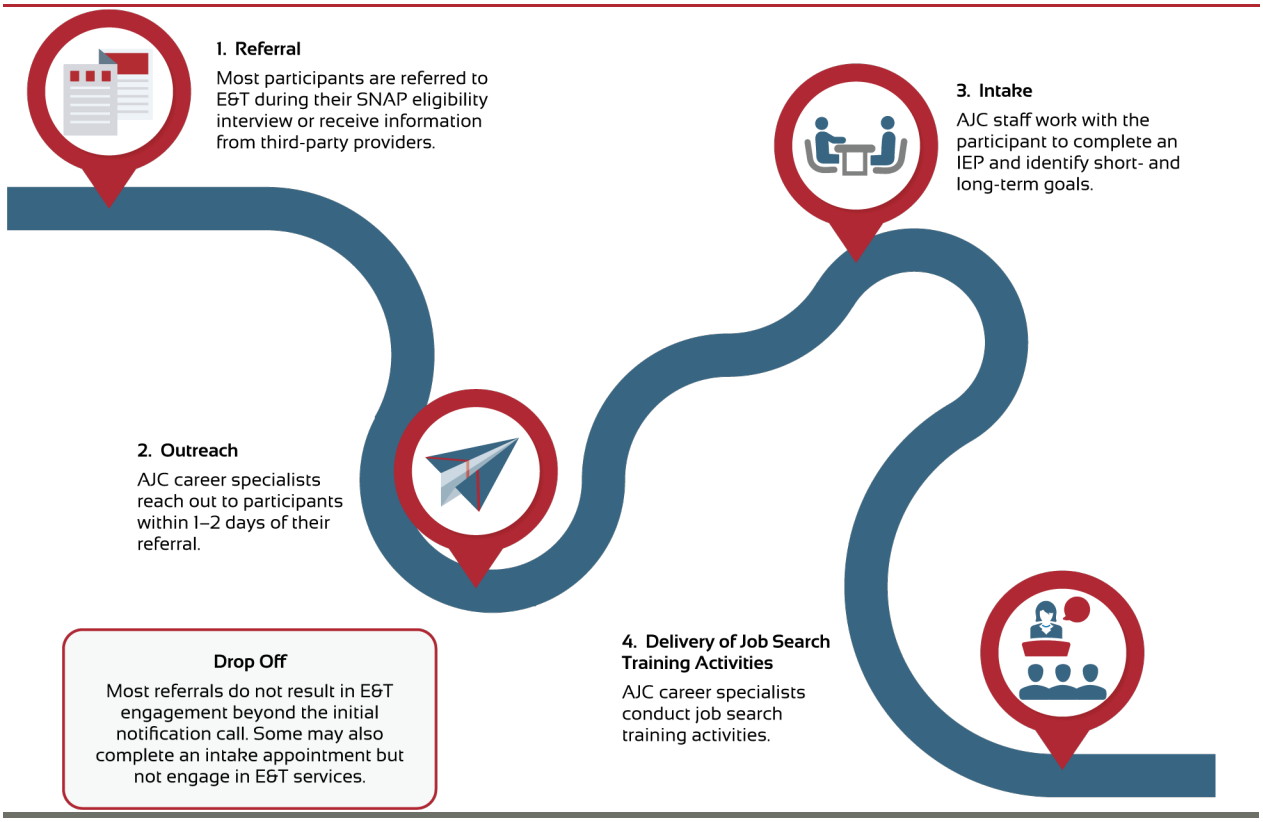
3. Support Services

Job search training participants could receive several types of support services. The primary support services offered included bus passes and gas cards because many participants did not have access to a vehicle or reliable transportation. AJC staff could also refer participants directly to the State's childcare program to sign up for childcare services. Most job search training participants were aware of the support services offered by SNAP E&T; they typically learned about them during a conversation with the caseworker during their intake or subsequent appointments. Job search training participants reported receiving gas gift cards or gas reimbursements, clothing for interviews, and childcare assistance.

C. Client Engagement Process

SNAP participants could begin their engagement with E&T in several ways (e.g., referral from a local SNAP office, walk-in to the AJC). However, all E&T participants were required to complete an intake appointment prior to engaging in services. Figure 6.4 summarizes the typical client engagement process.

Figure 6.4. Client Engagement Process in Tennessee



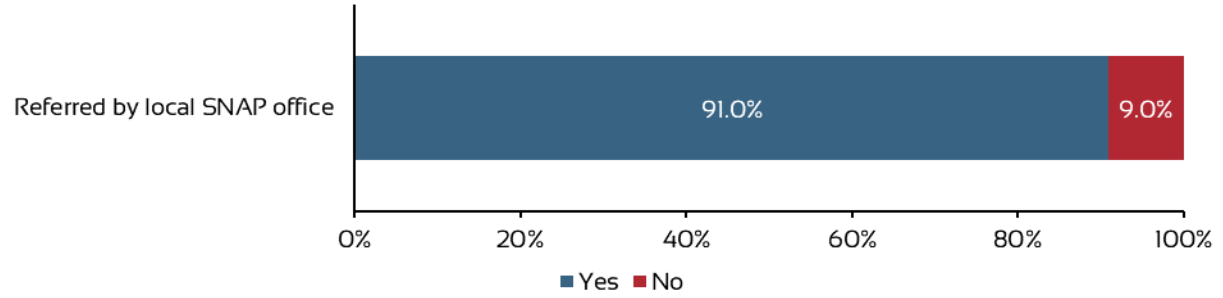
Note: AJC = American Job Center; IEP = individualized employment plan

Step 1. Referral

SNAP eligibility workers referred most SNAP E&T participants to the program during a certification or recertification interview. In FY 2018, 91 percent of participants were referred to E&T through this method (see figure 6.5 and appendix table E.2). The SNAP eligibility system supported caseworkers in

promoting SNAP E&T to potential participants. For SNAP participants with work requirements (e.g., ABAWDs), a reminder screen appeared during the interview and prompted a discussion about E&T. For other SNAP participants, eligibility workers could use a script to introduce the E&T program.[23] Eligibility workers recorded participants' E&T interest in the eligibility system, and referrals were transferred electronically to the DLWD system. The AJC closest to the participant's home address would receive the referral.

Figure 6.5. Percentage of SNAP E&T Participants Referred by Local SNAP Office in Tennessee, FY 2018



N = 1,589
Note: Enrollment indicates the participant completed, at minimum, an intake appointment with AJC staff.
AJC = American Job Center; FY = fiscal year
Source: Tennessee FY 2018 SNAP administrative and E&T data

Fewer participants learned about SNAP E&T from other assistance programs (e.g., workforce development programs, veterans-serving organizations, programs to alleviate homelessness) or by walking into the AJC. For these cases, AJC staff determined whether the client was receiving SNAP benefits using the Jobs4TN system and encouraged potentially eligible nonparticipants to apply for SNAP. Some AJCs were co-located with local SNAP offices, facilitating SNAP enrollment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, SNAP offices closed, making it more challenging to enroll participants in both SNAP and E&T.

Step 2. Outreach

Participants referred to SNAP E&T by their SNAP eligibility worker typically heard from the AJC career specialist within 1 or 2 days. AJC staff contacted prospective E&T participants via phone to provide more detailed information about the program and schedule an appointment to complete the intake process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, AJC staff also contacted prospective E&T participants via letter, text, or email. AJC staff logged outreach attempts and their results in the Jobs4TN system.

Step 3. Intake

During the intake appointment, AJC staff worked with clients to assess their skills and work history, identify any potential barriers to employment that need to be addressed (e.g., lack of identification or email address), discuss short- and long-term goals (as applicable), and explore suitable career paths given their history and background. Using knowledge of local job sectors and workplaces, AJC staff worked with participants to develop a strategy to reach their goals. The strategy included specific E&T activities, such as job search training or vocational training, and could include a referral to another

[23] Before the COVID-19 pandemic, local eligibility workers were familiar with local E&T offerings and could provide clients with additional information specific to their area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, certifications moved to a statewide processing system to handle the increased volume of calls, and eligibility counselors relied more heavily on the scripted messages describing generic E&T offerings.

provider if those activities were not offered by the AJC. Individuals who wanted to become a CNA, for instance, could be referred to a provider offering CNA training. The goals and recommended activities were documented in participants' IEPs. Intake appointments were typically completed in person, but AJC staff pivoted to phone appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many participants did not continue with E&T after the intake process. AJC staff indicated a substantial number of SNAP participants realized during intake they were not ready or able to enroll in E&T services because of life circumstances.

Step 4. Delivery of Job Search Training

When E&T participants' IEPs specified job search training as a suitable activity, career specialists typically worked with participants one on one in person at the AJC. Some AJCs also offered group workshops to supplement the one-on-one sessions. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, most encounters took place via telephone or a video conferencing platform such as Zoom. By spring 2021, AJCs allowed some limited in-person encounters again for those who needed to access websites and other electronic resources on an AJC computer but had not resumed in-person group classes or workshops.

Job Search Training Experience

I like the regular contact in terms of discussing what's working, what's not working ... I like the fact that there is accountability that I have to go to [my caseworker] and let her how I'm reaching out to the different employers. I also like the fact that she's saying, "Okay, well, we've been doing this for this long, and let's regroup and try something else." And saying, "We've been doing the job searches, so far I haven't had a job offer." Then she's recommending another option, which is retraining. I like the fact that there are options that are being offered and suggestions that are being made and effort on behalf of her and myself.

—Job search training participant

The duration and intensity of job search training varied by participant. Participants might have seen the career specialist at the AJC once (e.g., for help navigating an online application) or weekly over a longer period (e.g., to complete a work history, develop a resume, gain interviewing skills). Several job search participants reported they were asked to apply to three jobs a week and had weekly meetings with their AJC career specialist.

D. Participant Motivations and Satisfaction

Overall, participants engaged in job search training to meet their immediate needs and were satisfied with their SNAP E&T experience. In particular, some participants appreciated the encouragement and support they received from AJC staff.

1. Motivations and Goals

Generally, individuals participated in job search training because they wanted to find a job to pay their immediate bills. Several expressed a desire to use every resource available to them in their job search, including assistance from staff at the AJC. Some participants, however, had longer term plans to build a career or break into a new field. For example, one participant wanted to find a job that would help them meet their long-term goal of a stable career path in a field well suited to them. Another participant had a short-term goal to find a job as a CDL truck driver, with a longer term aim of starting their own trucking business. Still another participant noted they first wanted to find a job in the dental field and, in the long term, go back to school to receive training as a dental hygienist.

Participant Motivation

I'm a stay-at-home mother, and it's hard to figure out work. And when you don't have childcare, and you don't have transportation and stuff like that—and they offer all that. So I was just interested in it because I needed some extra help and extra guidance.

—Job search training participant

2. Satisfaction

Most participants who engaged in job search training activities were satisfied with the support they received. Several individuals appreciated the ability to create and post an online "master" resume that enabled them to apply for several jobs at once. Two participants said the services were "low stress" because they were helpful and free. Participants reported being impressed with and encouraged by the consistent communication and followup from their career specialist. One participant commented they liked the AJC weekly job fairs and appreciated the availability of computers and printers at the AJC.

Satisfaction

[Working with the career specialist at the AJC] absolutely helped. I think [my resume] just looks more professional, and if it's down to two people, and somebody has a nice resume and the other person doesn't, I'm not saying that would be the difference, but it certainly could be.

—Job search training participant

I would give them a 10 [out of 10] because [the AJC staff] were really prompt; they were kind. For me, they followed up, and they did what they said they were going to do.

—Job search training participant

A few participants expressed dissatisfaction with their job search training experience, primarily related to communication challenges with the AJCs. Two participants struggled to make or maintain contact with their career specialist at the AJC. Another participant described the process to initiate job search training activities as "tedious" because many phone calls and emails were exchanged before they received hands-on job search help. One participant also noted the limited number of job postings in their area on Jobs4TN; most postings were for jobs in urban areas.

E. Participant Outcomes

AJC career specialists defined success differently for job search training participants who were and were not work ready. For participants who were work ready, finding any job that helped them pay their bills and improve their situation was considered a success. According to FY 2018 data over three-quarters of job search training participants were employed post-E&T participation. E&T participants who engaged only in job search training had higher mean earnings than E&T participants who engaged in other components.

1. Defining Success

AJC career specialists shared that there was no single metric to define success for all E&T participants. While obtaining a job that led a participant to self-sufficiency was one definition of success, AJC career specialists believed that success for job search training participants should also be defined and tracked in terms of small, achievable goals—not just whether participants found steady jobs. For E&T participants who were work ready, gaining any employment and improving their current situation would be considered a success. For example, one AJC career specialist noted that success for one participant could be defined as finding a job that allowed flexibility with their children's school schedule, regardless of whether the job paid a high enough wage to enable the family to move off SNAP.

> **Participant Success**
>
> Success would look like [participants] gaining employment or even just improving where they were before they came into the program. Maybe they came in with no resume—now they have a resume, and it's updated, and they can use that for employment.
>
> *—DLWD staff*

Career specialists recognized that some SNAP E&T participants were not ready for employment; for them, trying something new or moving out of their comfort zone could be considered a success. Career specialists often guided individuals toward job search activities that would build their self-esteem, even if that small "success" was just one step on the path to employment, such as creating their first resume or learning how to apply for a job online. Instead of encouraging job applications that would likely lead to disappointment and feelings of failure, staff recommended and facilitated other activities to improve work readiness, such as hygiene care or assistance navigating a criminal background. Staff considered completion of the HiSET (high school equivalency) program a great success, even if self-sufficiency might still be a distant goal.

2. Obtaining Employment

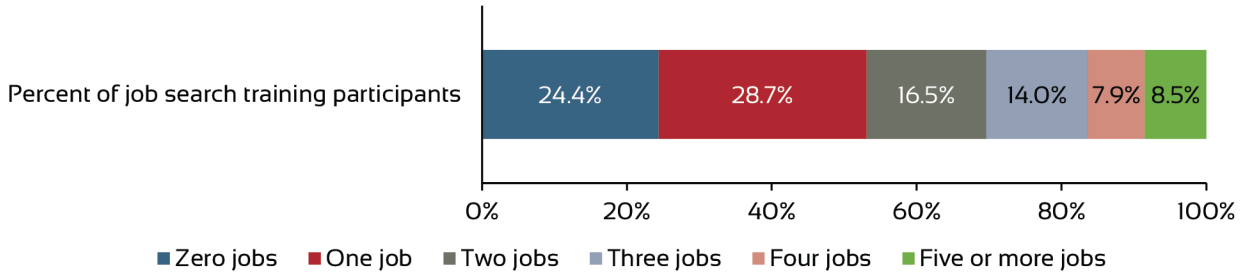
Only about one-third of the SNAP E&T participants interviewed were employed at the time of the study. Of these participants, some had found a job through the Jobs4TN website, while others found a job through other means. All of these participants noted the resume assistance they received was essential, and several participants credited finding a job directly to the job search training services they received at the AJC. For example, one participant explained they worked with a career specialist and had been applying for jobs for 8 months without success. The career specialist helped the participant get additional schooling in a field with more job opportunities.

> **Employment Outcomes**
>
> I feel, in general, it's being a huge success just to be able to stand on my own two feet and realize what I got. And that I can help others. And having the program and being able to do it without having to worry about the financial part of it was really nice as well.
>
> *—Job search training participant*

FY 2018 and FY 2019 UI wage data indicate most participants were employed after engaging in job search training; more than 75 percent of participants had wages from at least one job (see figure 6.6 and appendix table E.9). Only about a quarter (28.7 percent) of participants had one job throughout the study period; a plurality of participants held more than one job, indicating they either held multiple jobs at one time or had changed jobs during the study period.

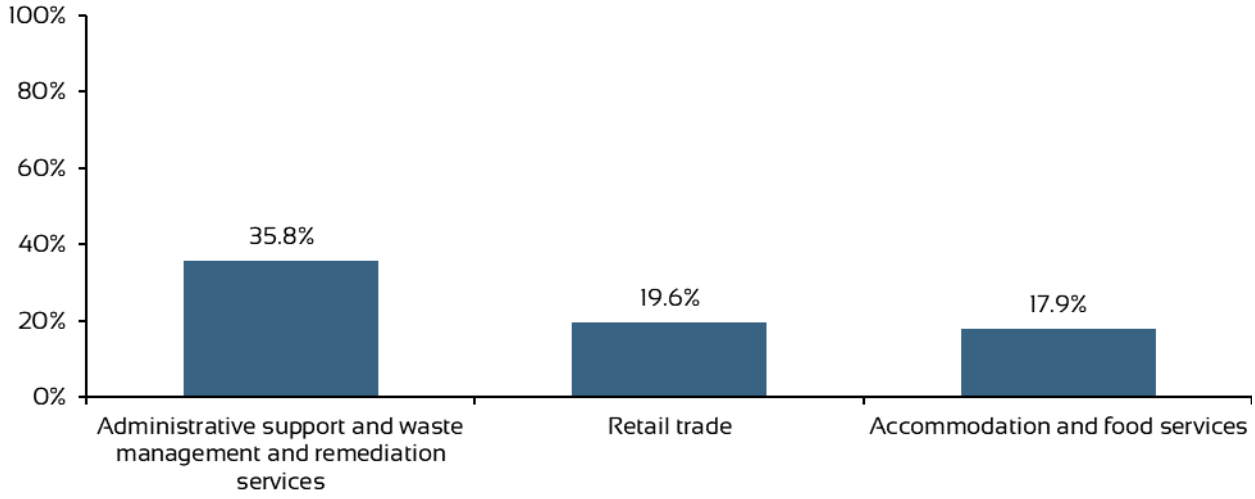
Job search training participants most commonly held jobs in the following five industries: administrative support, waste management, and remediation services (35.8 percent); retail trade (19.6 percent); accommodation and food services (17.9 percent); healthcare and social assistance (12.2 percent); and manufacturing (7.1 percent; see figure 6.7 and appendix table E.10).

Figure 6.6. Number of Jobs Held After Participation in Job Search Training in Tennessee, FY 2018–2019



N = 164
Note: FY = fiscal year
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Figure 6.7. Percentage of Jobs Held in Top 3 Sectors Among Job Search Training Participants in Tennessee, FY 2018–2019



N = 164
Note: Sectors are based on the North American Industrial Classification System.
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Table 6.1 presents unadjusted mean quarterly earnings, the percentage of participants employed in the quarter prior to and in the quarter after starting E&T, and mean time to employment for E&T participants in Tennessee. Individuals who participated only in job search training had higher mean quarterly earnings on average compared with those who either did not participate in job search training or participated in job search training in addition to another component. A larger percentage of participants across all three groups were also employed after participating in E&T.[24]

[24] Employment could not be determined for participants who began E&T during the first quarter of FY 2018.

Table 6.1. Employment and Earnings Outcomes After Participation for Job Search Training Participants in Tennessee, FY 2018–2019

Component(s)	Before E&T Participation		After E&T Participation			
	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter Prior to Starting E&T[a]	Sample Size (*N*)	Percent of Participants Employed in Quarter After Starting E&T	Mean Quarterly Earnings Among Those With Earnings ($)	Mean Time to Employment (Quarters)[b]	Sample Size (*N*)
Job search training only	48.6	138	51.7	3,345.70	1.71	149
Job search training with another E&T component	28.6	14	73.3	1,749.49	1.29	15
No job search training; other E&T only	55.3	519	56.0	2,593.46	1.7	684

Note: Excludes SNAP participants who had only an E&T intake encounter or assessment
FY = fiscal year
[a] Employment prior to E&T start could not be determined for participants who engaged in E&T during the first quarter of FY 2018. As a result, sample sizes are lower for this column.
[b] Mean time to employment refers to the number of quarters, on average, it took for a participant to find employment after participation in an E&T component. Individuals who were employed in the same quarter as their E&T participation had a value of zero quarters to employment.
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Caution should be used in interpreting these results because they do not infer a causal relationship between job search participation and employment outcomes and earnings. First, the unadjusted means do not adjust for other participant characteristics that may influence employment and earnings (e.g., prior work history, field of employment, local labor market conditions).[25] Second, analyses are based on quarterly earnings after the start of E&T program activities, so any training components that take longer to complete may not produce outcomes as quickly as job search training. Job search training participants may also self-select into the program because they are more motivated to find a job quickly. Finally, sample sizes are low, further limiting the generalizability of the findings.

F. Facilitators, Barriers, and Promising Approaches

The strong relationship between DHS and DLWD, both at the State and local level, was a key facilitator to program operations. It enabled E&T participants to benefit from DLWD's other programs (e.g., WIOA), led to the development of an integrated E&T system across the State (i.e., Jobs4TN), and provided DHS the ability to focus on statewide strategies for program improvement. However, the E&T program also faced barriers, including challenges with the referral process; participants reported challenges with a shift to virtual operations and transportation.

[25] The study team does not present regression results for Tennessee because the models violated the assumptions of homoskedasticity and normality. The sample size for job search training participants also was small (*n* = 164).

1. Facilitators

Strong relationship between DLWD and DHS at all levels. The strong relationship between DLWD and DHS was cited as a key facilitator to the success of Tennessee's E&T program. DHS and DLWD maintained frequent communication at the State and local levels to ensure smooth SNAP E&T operations and enhance referrals. DHS and DLWD regularly convened workgroups to provide local SNAP office and E&T provider staff an opportunity to suggest program improvements, learn about available services, and share information about E&T provider activities. The workgroups helped ensure local SNAP office staff could accurately represent the E&T program to SNAP participants and offer appropriate referrals to increase E&T uptake.

Local SNAP office and AJC staff also consistently described a productive and collegial relationship, frequently cohosting events and attending each other's meetings and trainings when possible. Even in more geographically widespread rural areas, where cohosting activities is not as common, staff reported strong working relationships and collaboration to mutually support their shared clientele. Staff explained this open communication and collaboration helped foster E&T referrals, particularly when eligibility counselors conducted in-person interviews and appointments.

Leveraging multiple programs' resources. The integration of SNAP E&T within the DLWD's WIOA program also proved beneficial for participants. AJCs could refer participants to WIOA programs and receive support services funded by WIOA. For example, vocational training participants could receive laptops through a loaner program established with WIOA funding.

Building relationships with clients. Local SNAP office and AJC staff expressed hope that building and maintaining supportive, nonjudgmental relationships with participants was a key to long-term success because it could make individuals more likely to seek and use additional services in the future that might lead to employment. These relationships were particularly key for job search training participants who had significant barriers to employment and were not "work ready" upon SNAP E&T enrollment (e.g., lacked ID, lacked email address, had limited soft skills).

2. Barriers

Challenges with referral processes. Some local SNAP office and AJC staff suggested the move from local office processing to statewide eligibility processing during the COVID-19 pandemic led to fewer referrals because eligibility workers were not familiar with the E&T provider services in all areas. For example, eligibility workers in Nashville could provide more detailed information to participants about the AJC in Nashville but might not have been able to do so for participants in another region of Tennessee, leading to less participant interest in referrals. Though the SNAP eligibility system prompted the local SNAP office staff to determine whether a SNAP participant wanted to receive a referral to E&T, the system did not provide a detailed description of the SNAP E&T services offered in the participant's area. Expanding these descriptions in the system could help SNAP eligibility workers provide participants with more accurate and indepth information about E&T services available in their area, potentially resulting in more successful referrals.

Shift to virtual services during COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to a virtual platform for SNAP job search activities was challenging for participants. AJC job search training services that were previously delivered in person, such as learning to complete online job applications, setting up a Jobs4TN account, and learning to use online job search tools, were conducted over the phone, with the client looking at a website from their home or other location. This mode of training was problematic for individuals who did not own or have access to a computer or could not access the internet—a challenge that affected individuals in rural areas disproportionately. DLWD staff noted many in rural areas were unable to access services when the AJCs closed. One participant also reported finding virtual services to be less helpful than in-person services.

> **Virtual Services**
>
> We depend on the American Job Centers resource rooms and on libraries or other connectors like Goodwill, United Way community centers, or community rec centers. And during COVID, when those closed down, if you did not have a laptop, even when everything was virtual, that was a challenge in itself.
>
> *—DLWD staff*

Transportation. Despite the availability of bus passes and gas cards, transportation remained a major barrier for E&T participants, especially in rural areas. One participant noted the gas card was not enough to fully cover the costs of driving to the AJC in their rural area. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, DLWD explored the possibility of creating business accounts with rideshare companies (e.g., Uber, Lyft) to help alleviate transportation barriers but still encountered challenges in rural areas, where the number of rideshare drivers was limited. The onset of the pandemic ended the pilot project.

3. Promising Approaches

Tennessee's SNAP E&T program used existing program partners within the State to ensure SNAP participants' workforce development and job readiness needs were met. In doing so, the State was able to implement several promising approaches to further the success of the program for participants and providers.

- **Focus on State-level strategies.** By delegating E&T operations to DLWD, DHS could focus its efforts on establishing State-level strategies to better address the needs of SNAP E&T participants. DHS State E&T staff worked closely with the child support and childcare divisions of DHS to promote E&T and ensure availability of childcare for E&T participants. One partnership aimed to increase SNAP E&T participation among noncustodial parents by allowing those who had fallen behind on child support payments to lessen fines or punishments by volunteering for E&T. Another collaboration resulted in State-sponsored childcare services for SNAP E&T participants when referred by the E&T provider.

> **Childcare Services**
>
> One of the great things about the partnership with DHS [is that] when [DLWD staff] noticed that childcare was a barrier for some participants … DHS jumped on it and was proactive, and now we have a childcare policy.
>
> *—DLWD staff*

- **Systems integration**. Tennessee used Jobs4TN, an online tool, for several aspects of E&T operations, including checking participants' SNAP enrollment, tracking E&T participation, and providing clients with open employment opportunities. AJC staff used Jobs4TN to check SNAP enrollment for self-referred participants and record participant engagement in E&T, including encounters with providers, enrollment in programs, program completion, and cessation of participation/reasons for leaving (when known). State E&T staff and local SNAP office staff received autogenerated status update emails from Jobs4TN, which enabled Tennessee to closely monitor statewide SNAP E&T participation. Clients used Jobs4TN for several activities, including registering for work and applying for jobs.

Chapter 7. Key Findings, Recommended Practices, and Opportunities

Supervised job search and job search training provision varied across the three study States, although all offered similar job search activities. In Connecticut, SNAP E&T was primarily provided through community college vocational training providers, which also offered job search activities to participants. Oregon administered supervised job search and job search training to a large proportion of SNAP E&T participants through partnerships with CBOs, OED, and community colleges. In Tennessee, a partnership with DLWD leveraged the job search training skills of experienced AJCs to provide job search activities to participants. This chapter provides a high-level overview of the key findings and conclusions across the three study States (section A); recommended practices for serving job search participants, including during the COVID-19 pandemic (section B); and opportunities for continued program success (section C).

A. Key Findings

1. Job Search Program Characteristics

This section summarizes the job search activities across the three States and highlights any differences in program design and delivery.

Types of activities. Across States and E&T providers, the most common job search activities within the job search training and the vocational training components were resume or cover letter assistance, mock interviews, and individualized job search plan development. E&T providers also commonly directed participants to job search websites and connected them with local employers. Oregon participants, who commonly engaged in both supervised job search and job search training, frequently indicated the most helpful services they received were job search training activities, such as assistance creating or updating a resume.

Awareness of SNAP E&T. In Oregon and Connecticut, participants most frequently learned about supervised job search or job search training through word of mouth, flyers, or directly from E&T providers. Participants were commonly enrolled by the E&T provider when seeking services in a provider office; most of these individuals were already receiving SNAP benefits, and E&T providers verified SNAP participation prior to E&T enrollment. In Tennessee, most job search training participants were referred directly by local SNAP offices.

Intake process. Intake processes were similar across study States. During the intake meeting, E&T providers assessed participants' needs, goals, work history, and potential barriers to participation and determined which job search activities would best suit their needs. Provider staff also assessed participants' background to inform career path decisions because a criminal record, for example, would disqualify the participant for certain jobs (e.g., security guard).

Duration and intensity of job search services. The duration and intensity of participant engagement in supervised job search and job search training varied based on their needs, goals, and plans. Some participants only required assistance updating their resumes and therefore engaged with job search services for a short time (e.g., a few days). Typically, participants remained engaged with providers until they were able to find a job. However, those who disengaged often did so because of personal barriers, such as substance use disorders, unstable housing, or lack of childcare.

Job search services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, supervised job search and job search training services were typically offered in person, and participants could drop by a provider office when they required assistance. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, E&T providers moved to an online service model. Participants and providers described this shift to virtual appointments and limited in-person appointments as challenging. Some participants did not have access to the internet or computers to engage in services remotely. Staff were also not accustomed to providing services remotely and had to adapt their internal processes and workflow. Still, E&T provider staff demonstrated resilience and employed creative solutions to ensure services were available to all participants. For example, in Connecticut, E&T provider staff experimented with online class formats and kept remote classes smaller than in-person classes to support student engagement. In Oregon, E&T providers set up mirrored computer stations to help caseworkers better assist participants while remaining socially distanced. In Tennessee, staff held drive-by job fairs.

2. Participant Perspectives

Across the three study States, most interviewed participants were focused on short-term goals and generally satisfied with the job search services they received; some participants faced barriers that limited their engagement in program activities. A summary of participants' motivations, satisfaction with the program, and barriers to participation follows.

Motivation. Most interviewed participants were focused on short-term goals, such as finding any job that would help them pay their bills. Only a few participants described long-term goals as their motivation for participation (e.g., returning to school to obtain a degree). Some participants were seeking a job that would put them on a career path or a higher paying career path in a new sector. For example, one participant wanted to find a job in a dentist's office and then continue their education to become a dental hygienist.

Satisfaction. Overall, most interviewed participants were satisfied with their job search experience. Many appreciated the guidance E&T provider staff offered and felt it moved them closer to achieving their goals for employment. Participants who engaged in job search activities in conjunction with a vocational training component often did so because they were required to; many reported being surprised by how useful the classes were in helping them tailor their resumes to a new sector or brush up on interviewing skills.

Only a few participants expressed dissatisfaction with their job search experience noting that E&T provider staff were difficult to reach or provided guidance that was not aligned with participants' job search needs.

Barriers to participation. Interviewed participants reported barriers that limited their engagement with job search services, including access to virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation, and childcare. Transportation and childcare were common barriers to participation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, though they persisted, despite changes to service provision, during the pandemic.

- **Access to virtual services.** Many participants lacked the equipment (e.g., computer, telephone, internet) necessary to engage remotely with E&T provider staff. Some vocational training participants also struggled to adapt to virtual services and reported problems accessing school materials online and reaching E&T provider staff.

- **Transportation.** Though many job search services were offered virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, some E&T providers continued to offer in-person services, and some job search activities required an in-person model (e.g., healthcare-related vocational training programs in phlebotomy). Participants who found a job were also typically employed in a field that required them to work in person. Adequate transportation to E&T providers and employers was cited as a barrier to participation and job retention. Some participants noted it was difficult to get around without a car where they lived. Even though participants could obtain bus passes from E&T providers, the transportation assistance provided often did not completely alleviate the barrier because public transit in their area was limited (e.g., bus lines did not run to their workplace or stopped before their shift ended).
- **Childcare.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, childcare facilities were closed in some areas, and in rural areas especially, participants lacked access to reliable childcare providers. Several participants without access to childcare said virtual job search services made it easier to participate because they could do so while at home with their children. Other participants, however, struggled to care for their children while engaging with E&T; this issue was particularly salient for vocational training participants.

3. Labor Market Outcomes

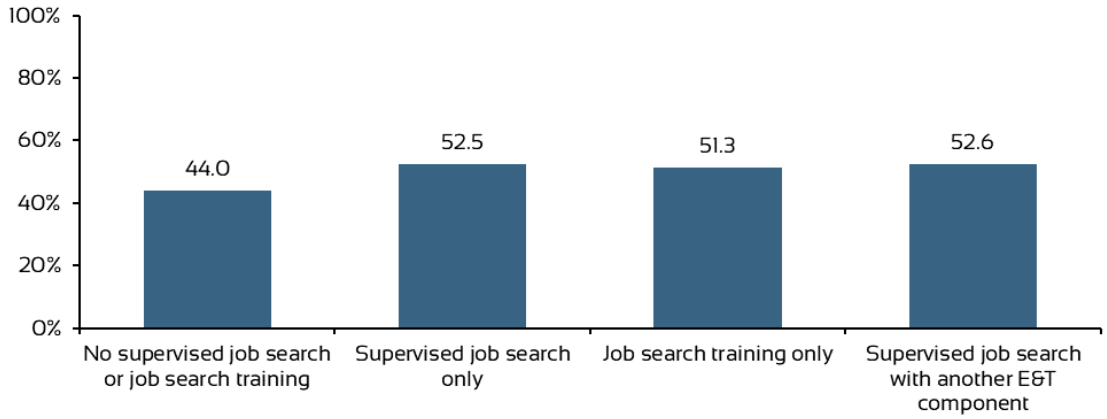
This report presents limited findings on labor market outcomes for Oregon and Tennessee.[26] In both States, most participants were employed in the months after engaging in supervised job search and/or job search training activities, were employed in similar employment sectors, and had slightly higher earnings than E&T participants who did not participate in supervised job search and/or job search training during the study period.

Types of jobs. In Oregon and Tennessee, most supervised job search and/or job search training participants were employed in the administrative support, waste management, and remediation services job sector. Jobs in this sector include administrative assistant, clerical worker, janitor, and security guard. The second most common employment sector in Oregon was healthcare and social services; in Tennessee, it was retail trade.

Percentage employed. In Oregon, a higher percentage of E&T participants who engaged in supervised job search and/or job search training were employed 3 months following their program start date compared with E&T participants who did not engage in either component. Only 44 percent of participants who did not engage in supervised job search and/or job search training were employed in the 3 months after starting their program, compared with the more than 51 percent of individuals who engaged in supervised job search or job search training (see figure 7.1).

[26] Connecticut was unable to provide data on job search activities.

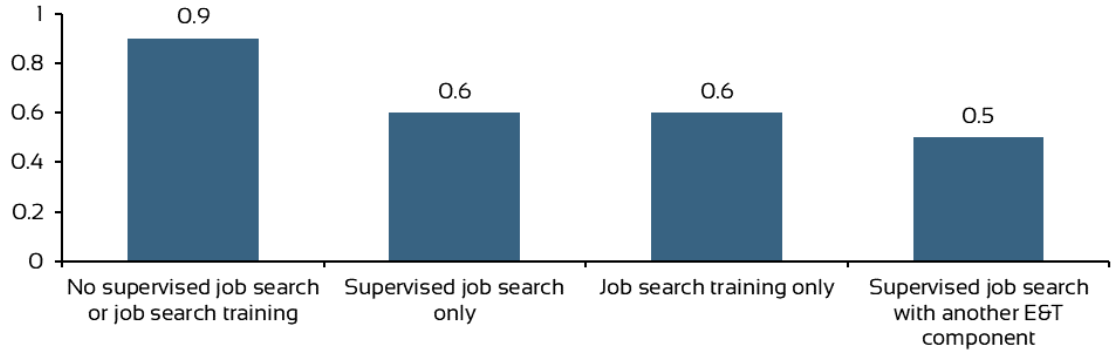
Figure 7.1. Percentage of Participants Employed 3 Months After Starting E&T in Oregon, FY 2018–2019



N E&T only =1,002; *N* supervised job search only = 3,581; *N* job search training only = 2,700; *N* supervised job search and other E&T component = 7,217
Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Time to employment. Similarly, individuals who participated in supervised job search and job search training activities had a shorter mean time to employment (see figure 7.2). Those who participated in supervised job search along with another E&T component had the shortest mean time to employment, 0.5 quarters (or approximately 6 weeks) following enrollment in E&T.

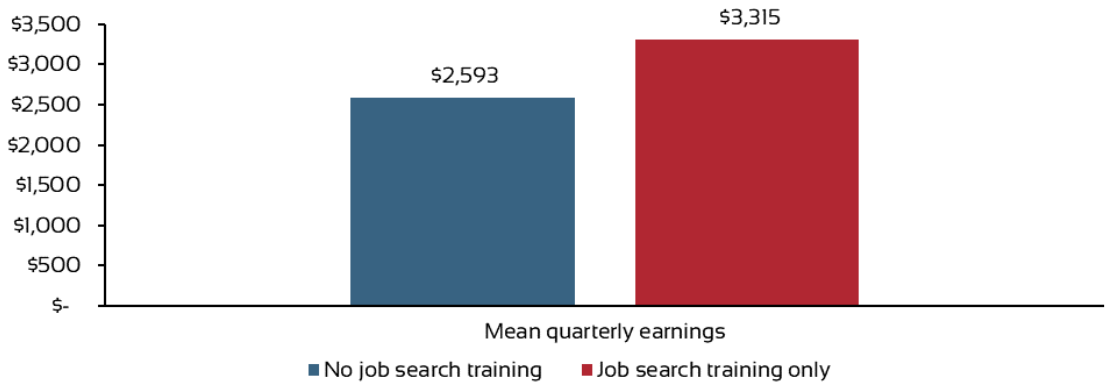
Figure 7.2. Mean Time to Employment After Starting E&T in Oregon, FY 2018–2019



N E&T only =1,002; *N* supervised job search only = 3,581; *N* job search training only = 2,700; *N* supervised job search and other E&T component = 7,217
Note: Excludes those who only had a SNAP Training and Employment Program orientation or other intake encounter. Mean time to employment refers to the number of quarters, on average, it took for a participant to find employment after participation in an E&T component. Individuals who were employed in the same quarter as their E&T participation had a value of zero quarters to employment.
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Oregon FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 SNAP administrative data, FY 2018 E&T data

Earnings. In Tennessee, individuals who participated in job search training and no other E&T component had higher mean quarterly earnings than those who did not participate in job search training ($3,315 versus $2,593; see figure 7.3). However, these earnings were relatively low (about $13,000 per year), and most participants did not earn enough to leave SNAP (see appendix figure E.1).

Figure 7.3. Mean Quarterly Earnings Among E&T Participants in Tennessee, FY 2018–2019



N E&T component, no job search training = 684; *N* job search training only = 150
Note: Excludes those who had only an intake encounter or assessment and those with no earnings
FY = fiscal year
Sources: Tennessee FY 2018 and FY 2019 quarterly unemployment insurance wage data, FY 2018 E&T data

Findings suggest that some activities participants can engage in through supervised job search and job search training may be helpful in finding employment.[27] In Oregon, participants who engaged in supervised job search, job search training, or both had higher rates of employment and were employed more quickly than those who did not participate in any job search. In Tennessee, job search training participants had slightly higher quarterly earnings (about $700) than those who did not participate in job search training. However, on 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 many were working more than one job or in more than one sector. These findings suggest that although supervised job search and job search training may help participants find employment, the jobs participants obtain after engaging with either of these two components are unlikely to enable long-term self-sufficiency.

Caution must also be used in interpreting these findings for three reasons. First, the unadjusted means do not adjust for other participant characteristics that may influence employment and earnings (e.g., prior work history, field of employment, local labor market conditions). Second, supervised job search and job search training participants may self-select into the program because they are more motivated to find a job quickly. Third, the study did not use an experimental design, and results cannot be generalized to other States or populations.

Still, interviewed participants noted they were able to find employment because of the assistance they received from their E&T provider and were grateful to be working with a caseworker who helped motivate them during their job search. Participants in all three States, regardless of whether they received job search assistance through supervised job search, job search training, or vocational training, worked closely with a caseworker or other E&T provider staff throughout their job search engagement, suggesting external accountability may be important to participant success. All interviewed participants described typical job search training activities (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews) as the most useful aspects of their program engagement.

[27] Some caution must be used when interpreting findings from these quantitative data because the study could not control for other participant characteristics that may influence employment and earnings, and participants may have self-selected into these program components because they were more motivated to find a job quickly. These results are not generalizable to other States or populations nationwide.

B. Recommended Practices

Throughout the study, the team identified several practices that can help foster success for supervised job search and job search training participants.

- **Facilitate warm hand-offs.** Although prospective participants may indicate their interest in E&T, the vast majority of participants who are referred to the E&T program do not enroll. To boost referral conversions, Oregon implemented a pilot program that placed SNAP E&T Navigators in local SNAP offices. These individuals met with prospective E&T participants to help them learn about the E&T providers in their area and determine which E&T services may best suit their needs. E&T Navigators often facilitated a warm hand-off to the provider to ensure the participant "made good" on their interest. E&T Navigators were also able to provide transportation assistance to prospective participants before they formally engaged with E&T to ensure they could get to provider offices.
- **Celebrate small successes.** Across the three States, E&T providers focused on specific and immediate needs of their participants, even if doing so did not immediately result in the participant finding a "good job." Providers noted that for participants facing high barriers to employment or those who have been out of the workforce for a long time, small wins, such as obtaining necessary identification or getting called in for an interview, should be considered successes.
- **Serve the unique needs of participants with criminal records.** Several E&T providers designed specific program activities to support participants with criminal records. In Connecticut and Oregon, E&T providers offered workshops to help these individuals navigate the job search process. For example, the workshop empowered participants to understand their rights, what potential employers could and could not ask, and how to reframe their experiences in a more positive light. E&T provider staff in Connecticut and Tennessee also steered participants with criminal records toward suitable jobs.
- **Use E&T administrative funds for startup costs.** To bring all Connecticut community colleges onboard as E&T providers, the State SNAP E&T office used a portion of its 100 percent administrative funding as "startup" funds. These funds enabled the community colleges to ramp up operations, including recruiting, training, and hiring part-time SNAP E&T coordinators to help develop the E&T program at each college and support prospective students. This funding helped assuage community colleges' financial concerns about joining the program and ensured the availability of funding until 50/50 reimbursement funds were provided.
- **Combine job search and job search training services**. Two of the three States offered only job search training (and not supervised job search). In Oregon, the only State that offered a supervised job search component, most participants were enrolled in both supervised job search and job search training. All participants the study team spoke with described typical job search training activities (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews) as the most useful aspects of their E&T participation and indicated those skills were most helpful in finding a job. These findings suggest supervised job search alone may not provide enough assistance to E&T participants, and combining supervised job search with more intensive activities, such as job search training, may be more beneficial.

- **Provide hybrid remote and in-person services.** While remote services were very beneficial to some participants, others struggled with not being able to engage with their caseworkers and E&T providers in person. As the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, E&T provider staff should consider providing hybrid services to the extent possible. Remote E&T services can help overcome some barriers to participation, such as lack of transportation and childcare, and ensure participants stay engaged in the program. On the other hand, participants with unreliable internet access or those less familiar with job search websites can benefit from seeing a caseworker in person. Hybrid services can help ensure providers can assist the widest possible range of participants.
- **Encourage collaboration across providers.** It is important for E&T providers, local SNAP offices, and State SNAP offices to collaborate to best meet the needs of participants. E&T providers in Oregon commented that they did not feel pressured to compete for participants. Instead, they assessed participants' goals and needs and referred them to another provider if necessary. To ensure successful referrals, E&T provider staff must be familiar with the services offered by other providers in their area. State SNAP E&T staff in Oregon helped facilitate collaboration by coordinating regular technical assistance calls between local SNAP offices and E&T providers.

C. Opportunities for Program Improvement

Based on a synthesis of findings across the three study States, the study team recommends two potential areas for State-level improvements to E&T services.

- **States could require SNAP E&T providers to track participation and outcomes.** Providers, in general, had no way to measure program success because participants rarely reported back if they were successful in finding employment. Even if a participant reported success, there was no systematic way to track the outcomes in E&T data systems. Though States are required to report aggregate program completion and earnings data to FNS (i.e., States must submit data on five National Reporting Measures), participant-level employment data would help providers gauge which services are most impactful for participants. For example, in FY 2021, the Connecticut SNAP E&T office was upgrading its SNAP E&T system to enable the State to track participant outcomes by vocational training program. Data on the duration of services, specific activities participants engaged with, and reasons for ending program engagement could also facilitate further analyses and help States and providers better understand how more intense participation (e.g., longer participation, engagement in a wider variety of activities) is associated with participant outcomes.
- **States could encourage better communication between local SNAP offices and providers**. The study found a wide variation in the SNAP E&T referral processes among States and within local SNAP offices. Tennessee had an automated referral process that enabled provider staff to receive contact information the next day for SNAP participants who expressed interest in E&T. However, caseworkers' discussion of E&T with participants varied, with some caseworkers skipping over the referral screen if the eligibility interview was running long; a referral would not be generated without the participant's consent. Oregon and Connecticut did not have automated referral processes and provided participants with E&T information on an ad hoc basis during SNAP eligibility and recertification interviews. In Connecticut, some E&T providers indicated they received few or no referrals from local SNAP offices, while other providers received many. Differences in referrals across SNAP offices suggest a standardized approach to outreach could be beneficial. State E&T staff could also consider learning from what works well at local SNAP offices that refer many clients to E&T and share those practices across the State.

In addition to these recommendations for State-level improvements, study States and SNAP E&T providers recommended FNS extend 100 percent funding to purchase laptops outright for participants. For participants whose job search activities are integrated with a vocational training component, the use of a laptop is essential. However, E&T providers could not use 100 percent SNAP E&T funding to purchase laptops for students;[28] they were only able to establish a laptop loaner program, which providers felt was an administrative hassle because participants had to return the laptops upon completing their vocational training. For many participants, job search continues after their classes end; not having a laptop hampers their progress.

[28] As of 2022, FNS regulations do not allow States to use 100 percent funding for any participant reimbursements, including laptop purchases. Instead, States can purchase the laptops as participant reimbursements using 50/50 reimbursement funds.

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