



Building Skills through SNAP Employment and Training:

Recommendations from
Lessons Learned in Four States

By Brooke DeRenzis and David Kaz | April 2016

Overview

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), supports employment and training activities to increase self-sufficiency for SNAP participants. SNAP E&T can expand opportunities for low-income people to enhance their skills, credentials, careers, and ultimately, their families' financial well-being. Yet few states have fully realized SNAP E&T's potential to provide skill-building opportunities. In fact, many states are leaving federal SNAP E&T dollars on the table¹, which could instead be used to provide education, training, and support services.

In 2015, National Skills Coalition (NSC) and Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) partnered to help four states expand skills-based SNAP E&T programs. This policy brief shares recommendations for states based on lessons learned from our work with Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, and Oregon.

Specifically, this brief makes the following recommendations for those looking to expand skills-based SNAP E&T programs at the state level:

- Staff and stakeholders should work with SNAP E&T agency leadership to develop a vision for a skills-focused program and implement a strategy to achieve that vision.
- States should use pilot programs to test and refine strategies for expanding SNAP E&T programs.
- SNAP E&T programs should build on the strengths and experience of existing workforce development efforts, and should align SNAP E&T with other programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- SNAP E&T programs should use federal funding and administrative tools to partner with community colleges and community-based organizations as service providers.

The brief also identifies a set of common challenges in developing skills-based SNAP E&T programs and makes recommendations for how state SNAP E&T agencies can address them.



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SNAP E&T Basics

All states must operate SNAP E&T programs under federal law. However, states have flexibility on the size and scope of their SNAP E&T programs, as well as the types of employment and training activities offered. Permissible SNAP E&T activities include: job search and job search training; workfare; work experience; educational programs to improve basic skills and literacy; vocational training and postsecondary education; and job retention services.

States can choose to operate mandatory programs, in which certain SNAP recipients must participate in E&T in order to receive benefits, or all-voluntary programs, in which SNAP recipients choose to participate in E&T.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provides funding to states annually to operate SNAP E&T programs. There are three types of federal SNAP E&T grants available to states:

- *E&T Program Grants ("100 percent funds")*: Formula-based grants received by all states to pay for SNAP E&T administrative expenses, such as state staffing and overall planning, implementation, operations, and partner providers' administrative expenses. These grants can also be used to pay for direct program expenses like tuition and fees, case management/career navigation, and job development. In Fiscal Year 2016, these grants will total \$90 million. If a state does not spend its entire grant by the end of the fiscal year, FNS can reallocate the unspent funds to another state that has requested additional 100 percent funds.
- *Fifty Percent Reimbursement Grants ("50-50 funds")*: Reimbursement grants of 50 cents per dollar to states for SNAP E&T program costs exceeding those covered by E&T program grants, or for supportive services provided to participants, such as transportation, child care, and books and supplies. Costs eligible for 50 percent reimbursement must be paid for from certain non-federal funding sources, such as state, local, or philanthropic funds, referred to in this brief as 50-50 match sources.
- *ABAWD Grants*: Grants available to states that pledge to provide an employment and training opportunity to able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) during the final month of SNAP eligibility. Total grants are capped at \$20 million per year.

For more information on SNAP E&T, see National Skills Coalition. *Training Policy in Brief: SNAP Employment and Training Program, Updated November 2014*. Available at: http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/NSC_TPIB_SNAP_2012-02.pdf



Why States Should Use SNAP E&T for Skill-Building

In today's economy, people need skills to find family-supporting jobs. Most jobs require some education or training beyond high school. Middle-skill jobs, which require more than a high school degree but less than a bachelor's degree, make up the largest share of the labor market.² The credentials that qualify workers for these middle-skill jobs pay off. On average, the earnings of a postsecondary certificate holder are 20 percent higher than those of someone with only a high school diploma.³

Many SNAP participants need more education and training to succeed in middle-skill jobs. A recent study found that only 20 percent of SNAP households included someone with education beyond high school.⁴ Yet, SNAP participants may face difficulty accessing and persisting in post-secondary education and training programs. Challenges might include limited access to child care or transportation, low literacy or numeracy skills, or limited knowledge of training options.

SNAP E&T has the potential to help participants address barriers and build their skills.

- 1 John Fritze. "Maryland expands food stamp program after losing federal money" The Baltimore Sun. March 2, 2016. Reported that over half of the states did not use SNAP E&T formula grants in 2015. <http://www.baltimore-sun.com/news/maryland/bs-md-food-stamps-20160302-story.html>
- 2 NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2012 and American Community Survey data, 2012.
- 3 Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, and Andrew R. Hanson. "Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees" Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2012.
- 4 Rachel Gragg and David Kaz. "Replicating Success: Recommendations and Best Practices from Washington State's SNAP E&T Program (BFET)," National Skills Coalition and Seattle Jobs Initiative, June 2014.

SNAP E&T has the potential to help participants address barriers and build their skills. In fact, SNAP E&T is one of the few federal workforce development programs with the flexibility to combine education, training, and support services for low-income and low-skilled people.⁵

It is also unique in that state and philanthropic investments can be used to access additional federal dollars, thereby broadening SNAP participants' access to skill-building opportunities. States interested in using SNAP E&T programs for skill-building do not need to create new education and training programs from scratch. Rather, they can leverage the expertise and resources of existing organizations that provide services to low-income people, such as community colleges and community-based organizations. For these reasons, SNAP E&T can play a critical role in expanding opportunities for low-income people to enhance their skills, credentials, careers, and ultimately, their families' financial well-being.

By helping more people gain skills and credentials, SNAP E&T can also benefit employers. As the economy adds jobs and baby boomers begin to retire, businesses are looking to hire new workers. Yet employers often report that they cannot find enough skilled workers to fill jobs. SNAP E&T can help solve this challenge by training participants for skilled jobs that are in demand in their local labor markets.

Federal policy has also created an imperative for states to develop skills-based SNAP E&T programs. When WIOA passed in 2014, it created new opportunities for SNAP E&T to partner with other workforce development programs. WIOA requires states to develop strategies for coordinating services to better serve low-income people. States have the option to create and implement "combined plans" to align SNAP E&T with education and training services provided by WIOA programs, as well as with key skills strategies like sector partnerships and career pathways. In 2014, the Obama Administration also directed federal agencies to make training programs more "job-driven" or responsive to the needs of employers with available jobs. In response, the Undersecretary for Food Nutrition and Consumer Services issued an official communication to state SNAP agencies urging them to make E&T programs job-driven,⁶ and the agency launched a SNAP to Skills Project (being led by SJI) to help states do this work.⁷ State SNAP E&T programs should build on these federal policies to develop and expand skills-based programs.

5 Take for example, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). WIOA mostly supports workforce development activities. In Program Year 2014, only 7 percent of WIA Adult exiters received supportive services and only 20 percent of WIA Adult exiters who received intensive or training services also received supportive services (Social Policy Research Associates. "PY 2014 WIASRD Data Book." Revised January 19, 2016). While TANF targets services to low-income families, a very small portion of TANF funds are invested in skill-building activities. Only 6.8 percent of federal and state TANF spending in FY 2014 was on work-related activities, and only a portion of work-related activities were related to education and training. (Administration for Children and Families, "TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY 2014" available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/tanf-and-moe-spending-and-transfers-by-activity-fy-2014)

6 Official communication from Kevin W. Concannon, Undersecretary Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services to all SNAP Commissioners available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/E&T_121615.pdf

7 See USDA Announcement at www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2015/10/0302.xml&contentonly=true



Expanding Skills-Based SNAP E&T in Four States

Despite its potential, few states have fully utilized SNAP E&T to increase skill-building opportunities. In 2015, National Skills Coalition (NSC) and Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) partnered to help four states expand skills-based SNAP E&T programs through 50-50 funded partnerships with community colleges and other organizations (referred to as “third-party partnerships”). SJI provided direct technical assistance to states based on their experience helping Washington State develop and expand its Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program. BFET has demonstrated how states can scale up skills-focused SNAP E&T programs using 50-50 funds so that more low-income people can succeed in family-supporting jobs. Through partnerships with all 34 of the state’s community and technical colleges and over 30 community-based organizations, Washington’s BFET program serves 28,000 people annually with a budget of nearly \$30 million.⁸

Seattle Jobs Initiative provided direct technical assistance to teams in Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland and Oregon. This brief shares recommendations based on lessons learned from those states, which reinforce best practices from Washington State.⁹ Descriptions of each state’s SNAP E&T technical assistance project are provided in the tables on the following pages.

⁸ For more information on BFET, see David Kaz with Rick Krauss, “Washington State’s Basic Food Employment & Training Program,” Seattle Jobs Initiative, June 2014.

⁹ Some of the best practices identified through this project were also identified as best practices from Washington State’s SNAP E&T program. See Gragg and Kaz, 2014.



| CONNECTICUT | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| SNAP E&T Agency | Department of Social Services (DSS) |
| Project Lead | DSS |
| Skill-Building Activities | Through DSS's third-party partnerships with community colleges, SNAP E&T participants can enroll in occupational training that leads to certificates in in-demand occupations. Third-party partnerships with community-based organizations provide job coaching, case management, and work readiness training. |
| E&T Program Status at Project's Start | Connecticut has an all-voluntary SNAP E&T program. At the project's start, DSS used 100 percent funds to contract for job search and workfare, and they had limited third-party partnerships with four community colleges, one private college, and one community-based organization, funded with 50-50 funds. DSS did not have dedicated E&T staff to focus on expanding their program. |
| Key Accomplishments through Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSS repurposed some of its 100 percent funds to build E&T staff capacity • DSS added two new community colleges as third-party providers • DSS provided new funding guidance so that partners could make better use 50-50 funds to support skill-building activities. |

| IOWA | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| SNAP E&T Agency | Department of Human Services (DHS) |
| Project Lead | DHS in partnership with Kirkwood Community College |
| Skill-Building Activities | Through DHS's pilot with three community colleges, SNAP E&T participants can enroll in community college programs that provide career pathways that lead to short-term certificates in in-demand occupations. |
| E&T Program Status at Project's Start | Iowa has an all-voluntary SNAP E&T program. At the project's start, DHS had just launched a pilot with three community colleges using 50-50 funds. Kirkwood Community College serves as the lead partner for all community college partners. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, the pilot had 140 students, and only planned to expand the program to an additional 45 students in FY 2016. |
| Key Accomplishments through Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHS has adopted plans to add two to three additional community colleges in FY 2016 and two new community-based organizations as third-party providers in FYs 2016-17. • DHS adopted a goal to involve all 15 of the state's community colleges as partners over time. |

| MARYLAND | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| SNAP E&T Agency | Department of Human Resources (DHR) |
| Project Lead | DHR |
| Skill-Building Activities | Through DHR's third-party partnerships with community-based organizations and a community college, SNAP E&T participants are able to enroll in short-term occupational training programs. |
| E&T Program Status at Project's Start | Maryland transitioned to an all-voluntary SNAP E&T program in 2015. At the project's start, DHR had third party partnerships with three community-based organizations and one community college. All 100 percent funds were allocated to a majority of DHR's 24 county administrations for contracted job search activities. However, DHR had plans in place to expand its partnerships using 50-50 funds. |
| Key Accomplishments through Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHR repurposed a major portion of 100 percent funds from supporting job search to providing ABAWD services within eight counties and to increase E&T staff capacity • DHR developed a comprehensive self-assessment tool to on-board new third party partners • DHR launched a pilot program in Baltimore, which will add one additional community college and up to four new community-based organizations as third-party providers |

| OREGON | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| SNAP E&T Agency | Department of Human Services (DHS) |
| Project Lead | Portland Community College (PCC), leading a consortium of six colleges |
| Skill-Building Activities | OR's community colleges have career pathways programs that provide credit-bearing stackable credentials for in-demand occupations, along with career coaching. The community college consortium is planning to expand SNAP E&T participants' access to these career pathways through third-party partnerships with DHS. |
| E&T Program Status at Project's Start | At the project's start, PCC was working to develop a plan for a consortium of community colleges to become third-party partners in order to expand the state's SNAP E&T program. Oregon's community colleges have career pathways in place that could help SNAP E&T participants build skills, but do not have adequate capacity to meet the needs and number of SNAP recipients. In addition, the consortium was challenged with finding adequate sources of "match" for 50-50 funds. |
| Key Accomplishments through Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community college consortium developed significant knowledge on a set of key issues for administering SNAP E&T services as third-party partners • The consortium developed and submitted to DHS a plan for participating in SNAP E&T as third-party partners using 50-50 funds; acceptance of the plan is contingent on FNS approving the colleges' match funding source. • Each community college developed an agreement with its local workforce development agency to leverage existing resources and services. |



Leadership from state and federal SNAP E&T agencies is critical to expanding skills-focused SNAP E&T programs.



Recommendations for Supporting Best Practices

Cultivate leadership within state and federal SNAP E&T agencies

Leadership from state and federal SNAP E&T agencies is critical to expanding skills-focused SNAP E&T programs. At the state level, it's important for agency leaders to champion a vision for program expansion and put in place a strategy and resources for achieving it. In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services' senior leadership supported a "blueprint" for program expansion and advocated for additional staff capacity to carry it out. In Maryland, agency leadership developed a skills-focused vision for the state's SNAP E&T program and organized expansion activities around that vision.

FNS regional offices also play a key role in supporting states' expansion of skills-based programs. During the technical assistance project, all of the states checked in with FNS regional offices as they developed their plans for expansion to ensure they were adhering to program guidelines. In Maryland and Iowa, representatives from FNS's regional offices participated in state-hosted information sessions for potential SNAP E&T partners, sharing the agency's commitment to job-driven E&T programs.

Use pilot programs to test expansion strategies

States looking to expand skills-based SNAP E&T programs should think about starting with pilot programs. Pilots provide the opportunity to test expansion strategies, refine administrative procedures, build on lessons learned, and create political support that can facilitate subsequent expansion. Pilot programs can focus on specific populations, geographies, or provider groups.

Maryland and Oregon are both using pilot programs to test their expansion strategies. Maryland is piloting a SNAP E&T project in the City of Baltimore aimed at building the skills of SNAP participants. The Baltimore pilot will include noncustodial parents on SNAP as a priority population. Maryland chose to focus on noncustodial parents in Baltimore for a few key reasons. First, there is political momentum for expanding economic opportunities for low-income Baltimore residents generally, and in particular for helping low-income noncustodial parents build skills necessary to succeed in family-supporting jobs. Second, there are several experienced workforce development service providers in Baltimore on whose expertise the SNAP E&T program can build. Finally, Baltimore's philanthropic community has invested in workforce development and supportive services for low-income residents, and is interested in opportunities to use its investments to leverage 50-50 funds. Maryland's Department of Human Resources is now in the process of choosing a community college and community-based organizations to provide SNAP E&T services to SNAP recipients, with a focus on noncustodial parents on SNAP in Baltimore.

Oregon's Department of Human Services is also in the process of launching a pilot program with a consortium of six community colleges in order to test strategies with college partners. While Oregon has third-party partnerships with community-based organizations in the state, the community college pilot is the first to test a consortium model focused on helping SNAP E&T participants earn postsecondary credentials. The community college consortium, led by Portland Community College, is particularly interested in using SNAP E&T to expand access to their career pathways programs. The consortium hopes that the pilot will help them, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services, eventually expand to include all 17 of the state's community colleges as SNAP E&T providers.



Build on existing workforce development strategies

States should use SNAP E&T programs to expand SNAP participants' access to existing workforce development programs that have demonstrated success rather than trying to create programs anew. By aligning SNAP E&T with efforts already underway, agencies can provide skill-building opportunities for participants without having to develop an abundance of in-house workforce expertise and programming.

Iowa, Oregon, and Maryland are giving more SNAP E&T participants access to career pathways and sector partnerships. Iowa's Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE)¹⁰ program and Gap Tuition Assistance Program¹¹ work together to help low-income students earn short-term occupational credentials. The PACE program integrates adult education, workforce readiness, and occupational skills training and uses "pathway navigators," people who provide career and service counseling; the Gap program provides assistance to cover tuition, direct training costs, required books and equipment, and fees for things like industry testing services and background checks. Both programs are state-funded and are an eligible "match source" for 50-50 funds.

Oregon's community colleges also have career pathways programs.¹² These programs provide credit-bearing stackable certificates for in-demand occupations, which can be earned in less than a year and can count toward longer-term degrees. Colleges also have pathway navigators to provide career coaching. Some of Oregon's colleges provide Adult Basic Skills pathways, which give students in adult education, ESL, and developmental education courses an accelerated "on-ramp" to career pathways by integrating basic literacy and numeracy skills instruction with occupational training. Oregon is planning to use SNAP E&T to increase SNAP participants' access to Adult Basic Skills career pathways.

¹⁰ See Pathways for Academic Career and Employment Act, Iowa Code Chapter 260H <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/260H.pdf>

¹¹ See Gap Tuition Assistance Act, Iowa Code Chapter 260I, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/260I.pdf>

¹² For more information on Oregon's career pathways, see <http://www.mypathcareers.org/>

By using third-party partnerships, states can build on existing education and training programs to provide more services to more people.



While Iowa and Oregon are focused on connecting participants to career pathways at community colleges, Maryland has the opportunity to connect SNAP E&T participants to training developed by sector partnerships. Sector partnerships bring together multiple employers in an industry with education, training, labor, community-based organizations and others to address that industry's local skill needs. Maryland's Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) program¹³ provides grants and technical assistance to 40 sector partnerships across the state so they can develop and implement skills training. Many of these partnerships include community-based organizations. By partnering with community-based organizations that participate in EARN partnerships, Maryland can expand SNAP E&T participants' access to job-driven training.

Aligning SNAP E&T with existing skill-building efforts can also provide more opportunities for participants to continue building their skills after they exit SNAP E&T. Iowa, Connecticut, and Maryland are exploring opportunities to expand SNAP E&T partnerships with credit-bearing community college programs (in addition to existing partnerships with non-credit programs) so that participants interested in continuing their education after SNAP E&T can do so using Pell grants.

Use federal funds and administrative tools to develop third-party partnerships

Washington State's BFET program was able to expand by leveraging the expertise and resources of community colleges and community-based organizations. In this "third-party partnership" model, state SNAP E&T programs contract with experienced organizations to provide services such as adult basic education, vocational training, and support services. The providers pay for services using funds eligible for 50 percent reimbursement grants from the federal government, such as state or philanthropic grants. The state SNAP E&T program, which is reimbursed directly by FNS, then passes federal reimbursements back to its third-party partners. By using third-party partnerships, states can build on existing education and training programs to provide more services to more people.

¹³ For more information on EARN Maryland, see their website at <http://www.dllr.state.md.us/earn/>

Each of the states that participated in our technical assistance project sought to develop new third-party partnerships in order to expand the reach of their E&T programs. Based on their experiences, we have identified best practices for developing third-party partnerships.

Utilize 100 percent funds to develop program infrastructure and seed new partnerships

States should purposefully use their formula-funded E&T program grants (“100 percent funds”) to support the development of third-party partnerships.

First, states can use 100 percent funds to build the program infrastructure required to develop and operate third-party partnerships. This infrastructure includes dedicated E&T staff responsible for brokering and managing partnerships and data management systems capable of tracking participation, expenses, and reimbursements.

Second, states can use 100 percent funds to seed partnerships with new providers. There are administrative complexities associated with providing services with 50-50 funds,¹⁴ and organizations often must develop new administrative systems (such as those used for participant tracking and invoicing) to become third-party providers. This upfront investment can create a barrier for organizations to act as SNAP E&T providers, even if they are otherwise a good fit. Seed funding can help bring new partners to the table by covering the initial administrative costs associated with becoming a third-party provider.

Connecticut and Maryland both provide examples of states that have repurposed 100 percent funds to support third-party partnerships. At the beginning of this technical assistance project, Connecticut’s Department of Social Services did not have any staff wholly dedicated to SNAP E&T and thus lacked the capacity to expand existing partnerships or develop new ones. The Department of Social Services addressed this issue by using 100 percent funds to support two full-time staff who dedicate 90 percent of their time to SNAP E&T and can focus on growing skills-focused partnerships. Prior to this decision, Connecticut was using 100 percent funds to support job search and workfare. Maryland, which previously used 100 percent funds for job search and job readiness, will repurpose a portion of these funds to support two new full-time positions dedicated to developing and managing new partnerships. Both states have requested additional 100 percent funds from FNS to seed new partnerships.

Host informational meetings for current and prospective partners

In many states, few workforce development agencies, providers, and stakeholders are aware of SNAP E&T’s skill-building potential. State SNAP E&T programs can host informational meetings for current and prospective partners in order to elevate the program’s visibility and generate interest. These meetings can also help state SNAP E&T programs identify potential partners and start to build a process for working collaboratively with stakeholders on overall program design and improvement.

State project leads in Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland and Oregon each organized and hosted in-person informational meetings with current and prospective partners. These meetings covered:

- The state’s SNAP E&T program and its commitment to working with partners to create skill-building opportunities for participants
- Best practices from Washington State’s BFET programs, shared by SJI and through peer-to-peer discussions with Washington State’s community colleges



¹⁴ Gragg and Kaz, 2014.

- Fundamental elements of a third-party partnership model
- Tools for assessing an organization's readiness to become a third-party provider
- Next steps for SNAP E&T program expansion

State leads reported that the sharing of best practices from Washington State were key to concretely illustrating for prospective partners how a third-party partnership model works and the benefits of being a SNAP E&T contractor.

In both Iowa and Oregon, the state SNAP E&T agency is partnering with a lead community college to bring additional community colleges to the program as third-party partners. Accordingly, informational meetings in these states focused on community college partners. In contrast, Connecticut and Maryland are utilizing community-based organizations in addition to community colleges as third-party providers. Connecticut and Maryland both conducted a workforce development mapping exercise to identify prospective partners, and those partners were invited to the informational meeting.

Develop assessment and administrative tools for partners

After a prospective partner demonstrates interest in SNAP E&T, additional steps must be taken to determine the organization's "readiness" and "fit" for SNAP E&T. Assessment tools makes it easier for both state SNAP E&T agencies and potential partners to make this determination. They can also be used to help organizations who are not yet ready to become SNAP E&T providers pinpoint where they need to build additional capacity.

Such assessments can drill down on a number of issues that affect an organization's ability to be a third-party provider, such as:

- The population served by the organization (focus on low-income people)
- The types of services the organization provides
- Sources of funding that can be utilized for 50-50 match
- Adequate cash flow to provide services prior to reimbursement
- Administrative capacity to carry out participant tracking and invoicing
- Educational and/or employment outcomes for participants

All four states focused on strengthening their assessment processes and reported that more standardized assessments have helped them do a better job of recruiting and identifying partners. Maryland, for example, developed an online assessment tool that interested organizations can use to assess their readiness. More than 20 organizations interested in participating in the Baltimore SNAP E&T pilot program completed self-assessments in order to determine whether to submit an application to become a third-party partner. Maryland's Department of Human Resources will use self-assessments to help them choose third-party partners.

In addition to assessments, states can develop other tools that help streamline the administrative process for third-party providers. These include template forms for participant tracking, invoices, and cost-matching. Maryland, which developed these forms along with automated processes for reporting and reimbursements, explained that these tools create efficiencies that make it easier to work with multiple third-party providers and add new providers to the program.



Recommendations for Overcoming Key Challenges

Work with stakeholders to develop match sources for 50-50 funds

In order to expand SNAP E&T programs using 50-50 funds, providers must have a non-federal “match source” — funds eligible for 50 percent reimbursement. Dedicated funding for low-income students at community colleges is often a key match source. State and local government dollars, as well as philanthropic investments in employment, training, and supportive services for low-income people, can also be a match source.

With the exception of Iowa, the states found that limited match sources proved to be a challenge for expanding their SNAP E&T programs. The states identified the following ways to grow match sources:

- *Resource mapping:* State SNAP E&T agencies are sometimes unaware of the variety of funding streams that support education, training, and supportive services for low-income people. Resource mapping can help agencies identify funding streams that could potentially be match sources, as well as the service providers utilizing these funding streams.
- *New or redirected state funding:* The ability to leverage state funds to draw down additional federal SNAP E&T funds may serve as an incentive for legislators to dedicate new funding (or redirect existing funding) to education and training programs that serve low-income people. For example, Oregon’s community colleges are continuing to pursue legislative

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strategies that would expand resources for their career pathways programs, which in turn would provide more opportunities for low-income students and increase their match source. When engaging state policymakers on workforce development programs for low-income people, state agencies, advocates, and stakeholders should discuss the potential of leveraging SNAP E&T 50-50 funds.

- *Engaging philanthropic partners:* Foundations and other philanthropic partners who support education and training providers are often interested in opportunities to use their investments to attract additional resources. SNAP E&T agencies and stakeholders should engage philanthropic partners to identify ways to leverage their investments to expand skills-based SNAP E&T programs. For example, Maryland's Department of Human Resources has engaged the Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative to help them develop the Baltimore SNAP E&T pilot project.

Educate Provider Partners on the Use of Support Services

SNAP E&T can help fund support services, such as career navigation, child care, transportation, and books and supplies. These support services are often critical for helping low-income people participate and succeed in education and training. Yet, state SNAP E&T agencies and/or their partners sometimes have a narrow view of the types of services that SNAP E&T can support, which can limit the program's potential.

For example, in Maryland, third-party partners weren't fully utilizing SNAP E&T participant reimbursements, which include supports like child care, transportation, and books and supplies. Maryland's Department of Human Resources responded to this issue by conducting partner training sessions focused on how to budget and apply for participant reimbursements. In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services considered ways to broaden their program's support services to include career navigators, and are now working with colleges and community-based organizations to determine which partners are best positioned to provide those services.

In developing their SNAP E&T programs, state agencies should determine how they can fully utilize funding to provide a combination of direct employment and training services and supportive services. For example, state SNAP E&T programs can facilitate partnerships between community colleges that provide occupational training services and community-based organizations that provide job readiness and support services to deliver a range of complementary services to participants, thereby increasingly their likelihood of success.

Align SNAP E&T with Other Key Programs in the Workforce System

SNAP E&T is not a well-known program within the broader workforce development system, which can make partnering more challenging. Strategic alignment between SNAP E&T and other workforce programs is important to make efficient use of existing resources, and to help SNAP E&T participants continue their education and training. In a well-aligned workforce system, participants can more easily transition from SNAP E&T to training supported by other programs, such as WIOA or Pell.

The states participating in our project identified the following opportunities to better align SNAP E&T with the broader workforce system:

- *Participate in WIOA planning and implementation:* WIOA underscores the importance of aligning programs to provide services to populations with barriers, including low-income people. SNAP E&T agencies can provide input on key workforce strategies being developed and implemented through WIOA. Under WIOA, states must develop a state plan every four years that describes their key workforce development strategies and how they will use federal and state programs to operationalize those strategies. States have the option to create combined plans that describe how they will align SNAP E&T with WIOA and other federal and state workforce development programs. Even if states do not develop combined plans, they can still use the planning process to bring SNAP E&T to the workforce table. For example, Connecticut's SNAP E&T staff participated in meetings to craft the unified WIOA state plan, which raised the program's visibility within the workforce system. Since states must complete their plans by April 1, 2016, SNAP E&T agencies should also identify opportunities to engage in WIOA implementation. Such opportunities might include participating in state workforce board meetings and contributing to the development of career pathways, sector partnerships, and other key skills strategies.
- *Coordinate with TANF:* TANF and SNAP E&T programs can coordinate service delivery to more effectively serve low-income people. Skills-based SNAP E&T programs can provide low-income people who are ready for employment and/or training with needed services (including support services) while at the same time "stopping the clock" on their use of time-limited TANF benefits. SNAP E&T can also be a critical next step toward self-sufficiency for those nearing the end of their TANF benefits. By transitioning from TANF to SNAP E&T, people can continue to increase their skills and employment prospects while receiving critical support services.
- *Develop strategic partnerships with American Job Centers (one-stops):* Under WIOA, local areas must support American Job Centers, which provide jobseekers and workers with access to a variety of services. WIOA requires public benefits recipients and other low-income people to receive priority for career and training services through the American Job Center system. SNAP E&T programs can work with American Job Centers to make referrals to SNAP E&T programs, conduct skills assessments, and help SNAP participants access a broad range of services available through the workforce system. For example, Maryland's SNAP E&T agency is working to create partnerships with American Job Centers in order to connect able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) to the employment and job training activities they need to remain eligible for SNAP benefits.¹⁵ In addition, because FNS will soon set reporting requirements for SNAP E&T, Maryland's Department of Human Resources is actively investigating the feasibility of sharing data systems with Maryland's American Job Center system.



¹⁵ ABAWDs can receive only three months of SNAP benefits in a 36-month period unless they work or participate in a qualifying employment and training program for at least 20 hours a week, or participate in a workfare program. Under federal law, this requirement can be waived for ABAWDs living in areas with high unemployment.

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NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

National Skills Coalition is a broad-based coalition working toward a vision of an America that grows its economy by investing in its people so that every worker and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. We engage in organizing, advocacy, and communications to advance state and federal policies that support these goals—policies that are based on the on-the-ground expertise of our members.

National Skills Coalition was founded in 1998 as The Workforce Alliance in response to a series of federal policies that signaled the end of national investments in the skills of America's workers at a time when skill gaps were growing in key U.S. industries. Since then, we've demonstrated that investments in skills work. We've shown that diverse stakeholders can find agreement around specific reforms that will improve a variety of workforce education and training policies. And we have documented that the American public is strongly supportive of a deeper investment in the skills of America's workers. We continue to mobilize support for a new national skills agenda that cuts across public policies, and simultaneously serves a wide range of U.S. workers and industries.

National Skills Coalition is governed by a Board of Directors and advised by a national Leadership Council drawn from the ranks of business, labor, community colleges, community-based organizations, and the public workforce system.

SEATTLE JOBS INITIATIVE

Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) creates opportunities for students, workers, and businesses to succeed by helping education and job training programs meet the demands of a new economy. We find and apply solutions for people to gain the skills they need for good jobs that create prosperity for all in today's marketplace.

As a workforce intermediary, SJI combines direct program services with efforts to improve the workforce system serving low-income adults. Our innovation, research and policy arm is currently focused on significantly increasing the number of low-income/low-skill adults who access and persist in community college programs that lead to middle-wage job opportunities within local labor markets. SJI is leading efforts to develop and share knowledge, tools and best practices on the labor market value of postsecondary education, college/career navigation, and meeting obstacles to college completion. SJI also focuses increasing funding for education and training for low-income adults, as well as on labor market research aimed at ensuring workforce systems are meeting the needs of local employers while providing individuals with skills leading to middle-wage jobs.



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

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