



## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (E&T) BEST PRACTICES STUDY (SUMMARY)

### Background

This study—mandated by Section 4022 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-79) (the Act)—reviews research on employment and training (E&T) program components and practices that: (1) assist members of households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to obtain regular employment; and (2) are best integrated with State workforce development systems. This review also included research on the effectiveness of E&T components offered to low-income individuals by other Federal and State agencies, and the private philanthropic sector.

The main objective is to provide Congress, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and individual States with information that can be used to shape SNAP E&T program services to improve the employability, self-sufficiency, and well-being of SNAP clients.

### Methods

A comprehensive review of 160 studies of SNAP E&T and other public workforce development programs was conducted. Studies were reviewed, summarized, and synthesized using citation management techniques and qualitative data analysis software. Each study was coded for relevant information including type of E&T intervention, research methods, and outcomes and analyzed in order to identify practices and program components that appeared to increase participants' skills, employment, and earnings.

### Findings

**Research on SNAP E&T is limited.** The program has evolved since the last FNS study on E&T was published in 1994. FNS is currently overseeing the impact evaluation of the 10 pilot projects authorized by the Act that were recently implemented. The first findings from the evaluation are not expected until 2019.

**SNAP E&T program changes have allowed for more effective service models.** These strategies include:

- Using individualized service plans to address SNAP recipients' strengths and weaknesses as identified through initial assessments;
- Developing third-party partnerships among SNAP E&T programs, community colleges, State workforce development programs, and local non-profit organizations to increase the scope and intensity of available services; and
- Serving individuals who volunteer to participate, rather than mandating participation as condition of eligibility.

**Findings from the broader workforce development evaluation literature strongly indicate that without outside intervention, many working poor will remain in jobs that pay below the poverty level.** Improving the ability of low-income individuals, both working-poor and unemployed, to advance beyond low-wage jobs is the underlying goal of a variety of strategies employed by workforce development agencies. These strategies include:

- Work requirements and work incentives
- Job search assistance and placement supports
- Subsidized employment
- Education and training
- Case management and supportive services
- Focus on in-demand sectors
- Collaboration with other programs to provide comprehensive services to targeted participants

**Stand-alone basic skills instruction and job search assistance programs fall short of helping participants achieve lasting self-sufficiency.** In contrast, more intensive services that combine

several components simultaneously or sequentially appear to be more promising in helping participants achieve the desired improvements in employment and earnings. For example, programs that combine job search and education/training activities with a specific mix of services based upon the individual's needs resulted in higher rates of participation, overall and by component, and longer lasting impacts than single activity programs. Programs that combine basic skills training with contextualized vocational education and those that include both job search assistance and transitional employment subsidies also show benefits.

**Programs leading to academic credentials or community college certificates are often associated with improved outcomes.** This is especially true when the education and training is in a sector that has been targeted for its expected high growth and ability to offer high-wage jobs. Similarly, strategies that connect participants to in-demand fields or careers, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training, also lead to improved earnings.

**The SNAP E&T program has limited resources, so it is important to weigh the available evidence when planning which components to offer participants.** The literature recommends collaboration with non-profit organizations, community colleges, and other programs as one way the program may be able to take advantage of some of the more promising strategies.

### Recommendations

**The findings from the synthesized research suggest SNAP recipients will benefit most from SNAP E&T if services offered by State programs:**

- Are based on assessments of the workforce-related strengths and weaknesses of SNAP clients;
- Comprehensively address individuals' needs for skills training, basic skills education, and overcoming barriers to employment;
- Help participants earn credentials valued by employers in their chosen industry or sector; and
- Develop skills closely linked to labor market demands in the local area.

**State SNAP E&T program designs may need adjustments to maximize use of best practices.**

States that enroll a relatively large number of mandatory work registrants in SNAP E&T services, or that emphasize self-reported job search as a program activity, are less likely to see an increase in self-sufficiency among SNAP participants. In contrast, States that emphasize the delivery of post-secondary education tailored to labor market demands appear to have a better likelihood of improving long-term employment and earnings for participants. However, as 100 percent Federal funding for SNAP E&T program activities is limited, findings suggest this program will remain small in scope unless State SNAP E&T managers can develop partnerships with community-based organizations, colleges, and other providers to leverage additional funds matched with a 50-percent reimbursement from Federal funding.

### For More Information

Paprocki, Anne, Deborah Kogan, and Hannah Diaz. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) Best Practices Study: Final Report*. Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, November 2016. Available online at: [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).