

USDA SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (E&T) CHARACTERISTICS STUDY (SUMMARY)

Background

The purpose of the United States Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) E&T program is to assist members of SNAP households in gaining skills, training, or experience that will increase their ability to obtain regular employment. Each of the 53 State SNAP agencies operate an E&T program. SNAP participants who are not specifically exempted by statute are subject to work requirements as a condition of SNAP eligibility, which may include participating in a SNAP E&T program. This population accounts for about a third of all non-elderly adult SNAP participants.

This study was conducted to better understand the characteristics of SNAP work registrants and SNAP E&T participants, the barriers they face when trying to find work, their training needs, and the services they receive through SNAP E&T programs, and the characteristics of E&T service providers.

Methods

Two nationally representative samples were surveyed: (1) Work registrants and E&T participants (2,136 respondents) from 25 States were surveyed between September 2015 and March 2016; and (2) E&T service providers (387 respondents) from 23 of the 25 study States were surveyed between October 2015 and April 2016. In addition, 15 focus groups were conducted in 5 States.

Data limitations: Administrative data on

SNAP participants and the list of SNAP E&T providers for sampling were obtained from States early in 2015. State data did not uniformly flag participant status (i.e. work registrant or E&T participant).

Additionally, SNAP E&T programs have evolved considerably in recent years, even from the beginning to the end of this study. The study findings represent the programs in early 2015, but the programs continued to evolve since then.

Findings

Work Registrants and E&T Participants

About one-third of work registrants and E&T participants were employed at the time of the survey. Another 10 percent of respondents had never been employed. Work registrants employed part time tended to work fewer hours than E&T participants, but tended to hold their jobs longer. E&T participants were slightly more likely to have graduated high school.

A small percentage of each group held jobs that fell into the top 5 most in-demand occupations in the area. Less than half of each group had recently held such a job. E&T providers suggested that the SNAP participants most needed basic skills and soft skills training to become employable in the local area.

The top two reasons E&T program participants cited for their participation were to keep SNAP benefits and for help in obtaining employment. In focus groups,

E&T participants emphasized their desire for a stable career, but often focused on finding immediate employment to cover basic living expenses.

Most E&T participants reported on the survey being either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the program and services they received. However, focus group participants—who were mostly enrolled in job search or job search training—reported dissatisfaction with the services they received.

Few E&T participants indicated that they received a certification, license, or degree through the program. Notably, a much higher percentage of E&T providers reported that credentials were offered and earned by participants. It is unclear why providers and participants held such contrasting views.

More than a quarter of both work registrants and E&T participants reported three or more barriers to obtaining and retaining employment. The commonly reported barriers were health issues, transportation issues, lack of education, and caring for a family member with health issues. The majority of respondents did not report experiencing discrimination when searching for a job.

E&T Providers

E&T providers reported offering more types of support services (e.g., transportation assistance, child care reimbursements, assistance applying for public benefits) and at higher percentages than what participants reported receiving. The most common support services participants reported receiving were help with applying for government benefits and transportation assistance.

E&T providers represented a mix of private, government, and other sectors, such as quasi-governmental or public-private partnerships. E&T providers most commonly described themselves as American Job Centers¹ (AJCs), community-based organizations, and community colleges/vocational education organizations. Mandatory State providers were more frequently AJCs (42.1 percent) compared to voluntary State providers (24.2 percent). States with voluntary programs used community colleges as their most common provider (40.4 percent). States with mandatory programs used community colleges much less frequently (12.5 percent).

The total cost per participant for the typical E&T provider was \$1,805.20 of which \$1,196.14 was administrative costs (i.e. overhead and staff salaries), and \$609.06 was direct services costs, which included basic education, job training, higher education, and support services. Of direct service costs, providers spent the most on job training, at 34.4 percent. The next most expensive service category was support services at 33.8 percent.

For More Information

Rowe, Gretchen, Elizabeth Brown, and Brian Estes. SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Characteristics Study: Final Report. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, October 2017. Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

¹ “American Job Center” is a unifying name for online and in-person workforce development services, established by the U.S. Department of Labor pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.