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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Community Partner Outreach Toolkit

The Basics

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In this section, you will learn about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the reason for the name change, benefits of the program and how to use this toolkit in order to complement your SNAP outreach efforts.

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What is SNAP?

SNAP is the new national name for the Federal Food Stamp Program (FSP). Each year SNAP helps an average of more than 45 million people in 18 million households supplement their grocery budgets. As the cornerstone of the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net, SNAP is a vital program, particularly for some of our society's most vulnerable citizens, including children and seniors. Because of the nutrition benefits to participants and the economic benefits to the Nation and to States and communities, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has made increasing participation in SNAP a priority. Increasing participation in SNAP requires the combined efforts of National, State, and local public leaders as well as nonprofit community agencies, employers, and anyone else who touches the lives of potentially eligible people.

The Benefits of Participation in SNAP

SNAP is an investment in our future. It offers nutrition benefits to participating clients, supports work, and provides economic benefits to communities. However, too many low-income people who are eligible for the program do not participate and thus forgo nutrition assistance that could stretch their food dollars at the grocery store. Their communities lose out on the benefits provided by new SNAP dollars flowing into local economies.

In fiscal year 2008, only 66 percent¹ of those eligible for SNAP benefits participated. The most common reason eligible people do not participate is because they do not realize they may be eligible. Others choose not to apply because of myths or misunderstandings about SNAP benefits or because of stigma that continues to persist. Others make a cost-benefit decision that the time involved in applying for benefits is not worth the expected return. Some do not want to accept government assistance. For specific populations, there may be additional compounding factors, such as language barriers for legal immigrants, or time and transportation barriers for the working poor. Seniors may not understand the nature of the program and choose not to apply for benefits, thinking children or families need the help more.

Outreach and education are powerful tools in overcoming barriers to SNAP participation. Even a small increase in SNAP participation can have a substantial impact. If the national participation rate rose 5 percentage points, 1.9 million more low-income people would have an additional \$1.3 billion in benefits per year to use to purchase

Related Resources

[SNAP Talking Points and Messages \[PDF | 316 KB\]](#)

[Addressing Concerns of Seniors Applying for SNAP Benefits \[PDF | 644 KB\]](#)

[SNAP Questions and Suggested Answers \[PDF | 316 KB\]](#)

[Common SNAP Myths \[PDF | 380 KB\]](#)

[SNAP Fact Sheet \[PDF | 416 KB\]](#)

[SNAP FAQs \[PDF | 320 KB\]](#)

[Power of a Strong Brand: SNAP Brand and Logo Guidelines \[PDF | 732 KB\]](#)

healthy food and \$2.5 billion total in new economic activity would be generated nationwide.

Why does increasing participation in SNAP make sense for your community?

1. SNAP Generates Economic Activity

SNAP brings Federal dollars into communities in the form of benefits which are redeemed by SNAP participants at local stores. These benefits ripple throughout the economies of the community, State, and Nation. For example:

- Every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates a total of \$9.20 in community spending.²
- Every additional dollar's worth of SNAP benefits generates 17 to 47 cents of new spending on food.³
- On average, \$1 billion of retail food demand by SNAP recipients generates 3,300 farm jobs.⁴

In fiscal year 2009, the average monthly SNAP benefit per household was approximately \$272.⁵ These benefits, funded by Federal dollars, create business when they are redeemed at your local food retailers. Eighty-six percent of benefits, totaling \$25 billion, were redeemed at the nation's 35,000 supermarkets. The remaining benefits, totaling \$3.6 billion, contribute to the viability of 121,000 other firms which include grocery stores, convenience stores, combination stores, farmer's markets, and other retail food stores; plus wholesalers and meal services.⁶

SNAP benefits are positively and significantly related to household food expenditures.⁷ Although estimates of the impact vary, studies have shown that a \$1 increase in the value of SNAP benefits of a typical recipient household leads to additional food expenditures of between 17 and 47 cents.⁸ SNAP recipients spend more dollars on food at local retailers in communities than eligible nonparticipants.

SNAP benefits can be used at authorized farmers markets that sell local produce. This provides additional customers for local farmers and provides SNAP recipients access to healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables that might otherwise be unavailable to them.

2. SNAP Supports Work And Helps Low-Income People Make The Transition To Self-Sufficiency

More than 29 percent of SNAP households had earnings in 2008 and 40 percent of all SNAP participants lived in a household with earnings.⁹ Employees whose nutrition needs are met at home may be healthier and thus may take fewer sick days for themselves or their children. Employees may stay longer with companies that care about them by sharing information about SNAP benefits and its importance as a work support.

SNAP helps families become financially stable and make the transition to self-sufficiency, getting them through the tough times. Half of all new participants will leave the program within nine months.¹⁰

SNAP benefits are a work support. SNAP benefits help those leaving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and transitioning to work by supplementing their food budgets so that they can stay independent and work toward self-sufficiency.¹¹ Since SNAP benefits decrease only by 24 to 36 cents for every additional dollar of earnings, SNAP recipients have incentives to work since they will be better off working rather than receiving SNAP benefits alone.¹²

3. SNAP Helps Low-Income Families Make Healthy Food Choices And Put More Nutritious Food On The Table

Dietary patterns among low-income people, as well as those of the general public, indicate an excessive consumption of calories, unhealthy fats and sugars, while fruit, vegetable and whole grain intakes are modest.¹³ These poor eating habits

contribute to making overweight and obesity a national health problem. In addition to the toll on personal health, this "epidemic" of obesity has economic implications as well. Obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the United States reached \$75 billion in 2003. Taxpayers financed about half of these costs through Medicare and Medicaid.¹⁴

However, research shows that low-income households participating in SNAP have access to more food energy, protein, and a broad array of essential vitamins and minerals in their home food supply compared to eligible nonparticipants.¹⁵ Nationwide, if there were a 5 percentage point increase in the SNAP participation rate, an additional 1.9 million low-income people would reap the nutrition benefits of SNAP. SNAP also helps participants manage their food resources more wisely through SNAP nutrition education. States may exercise the option to provide targeted nutrition education activities or social marketing campaigns designed to help persons eligible for SNAP make healthier food choices and pursue active lifestyles.

Because SNAP benefits are available to most low-income households with few resources, regardless of age, disability status, or family structure, SNAP households are a diverse group. Nine percent of SNAP recipients are aged 60 or older.¹⁶ For the elderly, a particularly vulnerable and underserved population, participation in SNAP and other food assistance programs can help improve nutritional status and well-being and increase independence. Nearly half of SNAP participants are children.¹⁷ Children who are well-nourished may have better attendance at school and, once there, may be more focused on learning.

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About This Toolkit

Why was this toolkit developed?

We all have a common goal: to improve the ability of low-income people to access nutritious food by participating in SNAP. The information and materials in this toolkit will help you share information about SNAP benefits with those who are eligible but not participating. They will also help you let potential partners, government officials, and the public know how SNAP participation helps the local economy and addresses the national health problem of obesity.

What is SNAP outreach?

SNAP outreach is providing information or assistance to someone who might be eligible for SNAP. The goals of SNAP outreach are to help people make an informed decision about whether to apply for the program, and ultimately to increase participation by eligible individuals and families.

How do I use the toolkit?

The materials in this toolkit show a number of outreach possibilities and offer your organization the flexibility to pick and choose pieces that work for your specific needs. Throughout the toolkit there are tip sheets that you can duplicate for yourself and your colleagues. Do not worry if your organization has limited resources and staff. You do not have to conduct every one of these activities or invest a lot of time in each one. Do what works best for you and your community.

Target Populations

Findings show that, in addition to the general low-income audience, there are distinct groups that are significantly underrepresented in accessing SNAP benefits. The national outreach campaign is focused on reaching:

- **GENERAL LOW-INCOME** Eligible, nonparticipating individuals and families;
- **WORKING POOR** Employed individuals and families who may not understand that even though they work, they still might qualify;
- **NEWLY UNEMPLOYED** Recently unemployed individuals who

Did You Know?

- The name SNAP highlights USDA FNS' focus on nutrition and putting healthy food within reach for low-income households.
- Nutrition education is available to help SNAP applicants and participants learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices.
- Children automatically qualify for free school breakfast and lunch when they receive SNAP benefits. Some participants may qualify for WIC benefits, as well.
- Program benefits are issued on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, similar to debit cards, and can be used in authorized retail stores and farmers markets nationwide.
- As of June 17, 2009, food stamp coupons are no longer accepted at any grocery, convenience store, or farmers market.
- SNAP is good for

may be in a financial crisis for the first time in their lives, and unaware of resources and assistance available to them;

- **ELDERLY** People 60 years old or older who may have misunderstandings about the process and potential benefits; and
- **LEGAL IMMIGRANTS*** Immigrants may misunderstand eligibility requirements related to citizenship. **Recent immigrants who are in various stages of their U.S. citizenship process could benefit from this educational effort. You may want to connect with local SNAP eligibility workers in your community to identify other distinct groups to target. Some FNS outreach materials are available in 35 languages and can be downloaded from the FNS Web site. Refer to the [Resources](#) section of this toolkit.*

How do I get started with outreach?

The best way to begin is to ask other organizations in your community if they are currently conducting a SNAP outreach project or if they have a resource guide, task force, or advisory group. Your local SNAP office is a good starting point for such a discussion. That office can share State and local information and may also have informational materials to add to your effort. By working together, you will be able to further your goals and avoid duplication.

As you start your project, be sure to keep local SNAP offices informed of your activities. Explore ways of working together to reduce application barriers — the best outreach efforts will not work if people run into barriers at the SNAP office. Extended office hours, childcare areas in waiting rooms, and shorter applications are some examples of how SNAP offices can increase accessibility. Potential roadblocks such as crowded offices, long waiting lines, or repeated visits to the SNAP office may counter your efforts to educate potential applicants about SNAP and prepare them for certification interviews.

Are funds available to help pay for my outreach project?

One potential way to pay for part of your outreach project is to contact your State SNAP agency about an optional State outreach plan. Outreach is an allowable administrative cost for SNAP. State SNAP agencies can receive 50 percent reimbursement from the Federal Government for necessary, reasonable, and allowable outreach expenditures. Your State agency has the option of contracting outreach activities to community and faith-based organizations under a State outreach plan. If a State chooses to do this, State contracting rules apply.

Before contacting your State agency, prepare your business case as to why outreach activities should be contracted to your organization. Be ready to provide your State agency with the following information, at a minimum:

- Background information about your organization
- Target group(s) for the outreach project
- Need in your community for the project
- Services that you will provide
- Funding you will contribute, if any
- Donated time

To learn more about SNAP outreach activities that can be contracted by States, review the [FNS guidance to States](#). This guidance includes examples of allowable and non-allowable outreach activities and the fiscal policies for State plans. Also outlined in the guidance are the provisions under which waivers are granted to States to use private, third-party donations as their share of the cost.

Can I provide nutrition education too?

Almost all States have optional nutrition education plans in place. If you are interested in offering nutrition education to your clients, a good first step is to make your interest known to State SNAP officials and the nutrition education cooperators who are participating in the nutrition education plan for your State. For a list of nutrition education cooperators, go to the [SNAP Nutrition Connection Web site](#).

communities. Research shows that every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates up to \$9.20 — nearly twice as much — in total community spending.

Learn More About SNAP Nutrition Education

States often provide nutrition education to SNAP participants through contracts with the Cooperative Extension System, State Nutrition Networks, public health departments, and other organizations.

SNAP Nutrition Connection, a project of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and the National Agricultural Library, maintains a list of State SNAP Nutrition Education providers. You can request a print copy by phone at 301-504-5719, or e-mail FSNC@nal.usda.gov. You can also contact your State or local SNAP offices for information on SNAP Nutrition Education activities in your area.

What outreach is happening on a national level and how do we fit in?

USDA has a nationwide effort to educate and inform eligible nonparticipants — with special emphasis on working poor, elderly, newly unemployed and immigrants — about SNAP. The primary goals of the campaign are to increase enrollment in SNAP and to reinforce its role as a nutrition assistance program. The objectives of the education effort were developed with advice and input from many local SNAP offices and partners. These objectives are to:

- Expand awareness of SNAP as a nutrition assistance and work support program;
- Inform eligible, unenrolled people about where and how they can apply; and
- Ensure that people who are eligible to enroll have reasonable access and can participate with dignity and respect.

This effort, designed to raise awareness of and change beliefs about SNAP, includes promotion of a national toll-free information line (1-800-221-5689) through a variety of paid radio advertisements in English and Spanish. These advertisements run on stations in major population centers, and in areas with particularly large numbers of eligible but unenrolled populations. Using fiscal year 2003 as a baseline for evaluation, markets carrying radio ads with the SNAP national hotline number averaged a 326 percent increase in requests for information packets over the course of a seven year campaign period. The percentage of people who called the national hotline in 2010 and then requested to receive a packet was an average of 54 percent. Moreover, according to the latest available data, 82 percent of people referenced the radio ads as their referral source during 2009. (Calls could not be tracked in the areas where the ads offer a local toll-free number rather than a national one.)

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions about this toolkit, or about how to conduct outreach to increase local enrollment in SNAP, please e-mail us at fspoutreach@fns.usda.gov or refer to the FNS Web site, www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/default.htm.

You may also wish to tap the [SNAP Outreach Coalition](#), a Web-based network of national antihunger advocacy groups and partner organizations, for helpful insight about ways to reach SNAP target audiences. Details about this group can be found in the [Resource Library](#).

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Nutrition Education Providers In Your Community

Many communities have a wealth of information available to help your organization promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP. Focusing on nutrition can help your organization get the attention of individuals who might not be inclined to pick up SNAP informational materials. This gives your organization an opportunity to explain SNAP as a nutrition assistance program to potential applicants as well as employers, community leaders, and others, who might still associate SNAP with welfare programs. Learn more about [SNAP nutrition education](#) providers in your community and what role each organization can play to increase SNAP participation.

What is the goal of SNAP Nutrition Education?

The goal of SNAP Nutrition Education is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within their limited budget and choose active lifestyles, as the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and the USDA Food Guidance System (MyPlate) recommend.

Why should my organization consider collaborating with SNAP Nutrition Education providers?

Outreach and SNAP Nutrition Education can work together to communicate messages about how SNAP can help needy families obtain healthy foods. The possibility of better nutrition can help generate interest in SNAP among potentially eligible persons as well as community workers serving that population. SNAP Nutrition Education providers have conducted needs assessments to identify which nutrition messages to promote and strategies for communicating these messages to SNAP-eligible population. They

also have access to nutrition education materials that are consistent with national nutrition initiatives. By working together, outreach and nutrition education can communicate accurate, unified, and reinforcing messages that have a more powerful reach.

FNS has developed a series of [nutrition education and promotion materials](#) that are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These materials were developed primarily for SNAP Nutrition Education participants. However, they can be used in other nutrition education settings with similar target audiences such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

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SNAP Name Change

In the summer of 2008, the U.S. Congress passed the Food, Conservation and Energy Act (also known as the Farm Bill) mandating a new national name for the Food Stamp Program (FSP). The Farm Bill renamed the FSP as "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (SNAP), but States were not mandated by Congress to use the new name. Visit this chart for a [list of current State names](#).

Are States required to use the new name?

No. States administering the program are not required to change the name to SNAP. Nevertheless, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) does encourage the use of the new national name. Over time, FNS, other Federal agencies, and States will no longer refer to the FSP. Therefore, it is important to educate consumers about the name change.

Who administers SNAP?

The same State agencies that administered the FSP administer SNAP.

When Congress renamed the program, did they make any changes to the rules?

Yes, the 2008 Farm Bill made improvements to SNAP in the following ways:

- **An increase in the** minimum benefit and standard deduction;
- **The elimination of the cap** on dependent care deduction (child care and care for elderly or disabled household members); and
- **The exclusion of education and retirement accounts** from countable resources.

What are the key reasons for the name change?

- **SNAP name focuses on nutrition.** The program helps low-income people eat a more nutritious diet by supplementing their food budget. Households receiving SNAP benefits can use extra food dollars to buy healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk products.
- **SNAP name reflects a more modern program.** Today, electronic benefit transfer (EBT) is the sole means of benefit issuance. There are no more stamps or coupons. This has not only helped to reduce program stigma, but it has cut down on fraud and costs associated with printing, storing, and distributing coupons.
- **SNAP name reduces stigma associated with "food stamps."** Historically, some participants felt embarrassed to apply for benefits or use their coupons at grocery stores. The new name helps reduce stigma by stressing the importance of nutrition. The EBT card also reduces the appearance that the user is different from any other shopper.

Why should my State use the SNAP name?

The following are several reasons why your organization should encourage your State agency to change the name to SNAP:

- **It promotes healthy eating.** Changing the name is an opportunity to promote messages about healthy eating to those you serve. The SNAP name focuses on the importance of

nutrition.

- **It reflects the program's current format.** The new name reflects a change to the program and its current format for issuing benefits, which is an EBT card, not stamps or coupons.
- **It reduces program stigma.** The new name can reduce the stigma associated with the FSP. The new name helps your State promote the nutrition benefits of the program, new policies that make it easier to access, and the use of EBT cards.
- **It helps avoid confusion.** FNS is working hard to transition the name change from FSP to SNAP. Keeping the State's program name consistent with the Federal name makes it clear that this is not a different program. Caregivers living in other States and new or transferring applicants will have an easier time locating the local SNAP office. By making your program's brand consistent with the national SNAP brand, you are ultimately raising awareness about your program and encouraging more eligible individuals and families to apply.
- **It allows you and your State to take advantage of nationally developed materials and outreach activities.** FNS has developed a range of outreach and nutrition education materials with the SNAP name that local offices and partners can use. The change includes a new logo and tagline. By using the new name, your State will not need to divert limited resources to cover the costs to develop new materials. FNS also buys paid radio advertising to promote SNAP in various markets across the country each year. Because the SNAP name is used in the spots, if your State agency uses the SNAP name, it can take advantage of this advertising and gain an opportunity to promote the program.
- **People like the name SNAP.** During consumer focus groups, the majority of participants responded positively to the new name. Respondents said that SNAP explains the purpose of the program and emphasizes how this nutrition benefit helps individuals and families.

To learn more about the importance of a strong SNAP brand, brand guidelines, key messaging, and information on where to obtain logo files, visit the [SNAP Brand Guidelines](#) in the Resource Library.

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Communication Tools

FNS has created free materials that are available to community partners and States, should you wish to brand your program with the SNAP name, or co-brand your program with elements of the SNAP brand.

- **Visual with tagline.** To request an electronic version of the SNAP logo and tagline, please email SNAPHQ-web@fns.usda.gov with the subject line SNAP Logo Request. Carefully follow logo guidelines. The logo comes in multiple formats, in color, and in black and white. In your email request, please specify:
 - the logo format you want (e.g., high resolution, low resolution, or .eps file)
 - what color logo you want (e.g., black and white or color)
 - desired logo language (e.g., English or Spanish)
 - how you plan to use the logo.
- **Core message platform.** You may want to use one or more of the official SNAP messages. By using the same messaging language as FNS, you are helping to build a consistent, well-recognized brand across the country.
- **Public service announcements (PSAs).** FNS has updated the television and radio public service announcements in English and Spanish to include the SNAP name and tagline. For detailed guidance on how to pitch PSAs to television and radio outlets, refer to the PSA chapter of the Community Outreach Toolkit.
- **Spanish Radio Novelas.** For low-income, eligible Spanish-speaking audiences, FNS developed a radio novela series that includes ten 2-minute episodes that promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP and provide information about who are eligible and how they can apply.

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