



United States Department of Agriculture



# Why Now is the Time for States To Build Their SNAP E&T Programs

POLICY BRIEF 1  
APRIL 2016

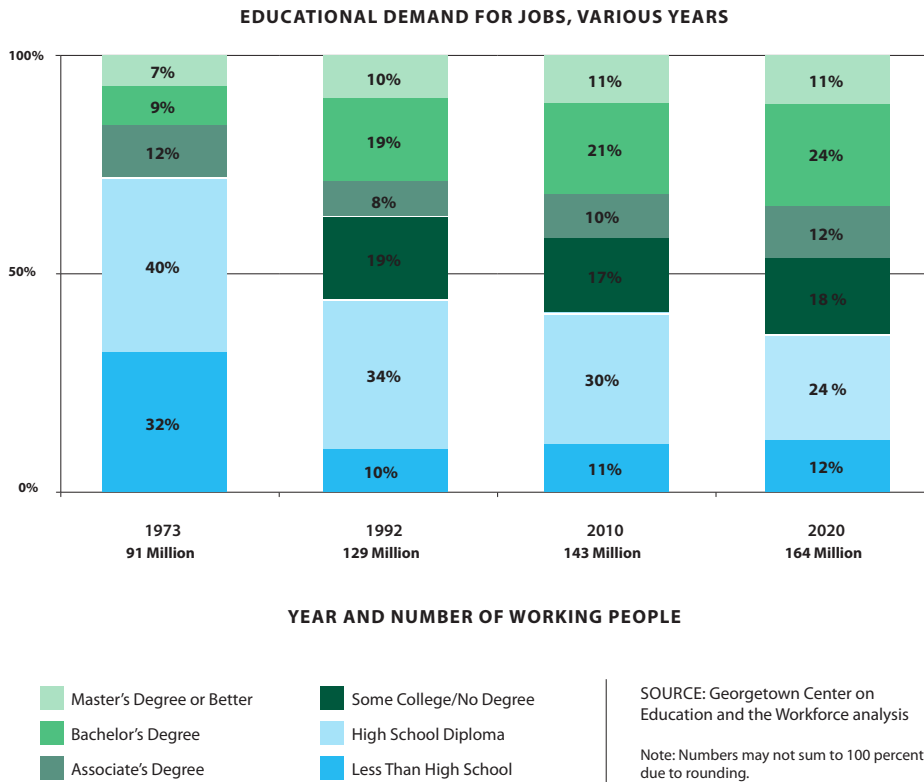
## The Immediate Opportunity of SNAP E&T

The need of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to secure the education and training required to transition to economic self-sufficiency is growing increasingly urgent. The vast majority of jobs in the future will require at least some education beyond high school (**Figure 1**), yet many SNAP participants have not reached this level of educational attainment. Without the skills to meet rapidly changing labor market demand, the chances of these SNAP participants getting a good job and reducing their need for SNAP are extremely low. In fact, longer-term participants are more likely to have less than a high school diploma as compared to their higher-educated peers (**Figure 2**).

The SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) program, a skills and job training program for SNAP participants administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), is a key resource States and their partners can utilize to help SNAP participants meet this urgent need for skills and better jobs. SNAP E&T has historically been under-utilized, but a renewed focus on the program amid greater urgency for job training for SNAP participants has created new momentum for States seeking to build bigger, better, and stronger E&T programs.

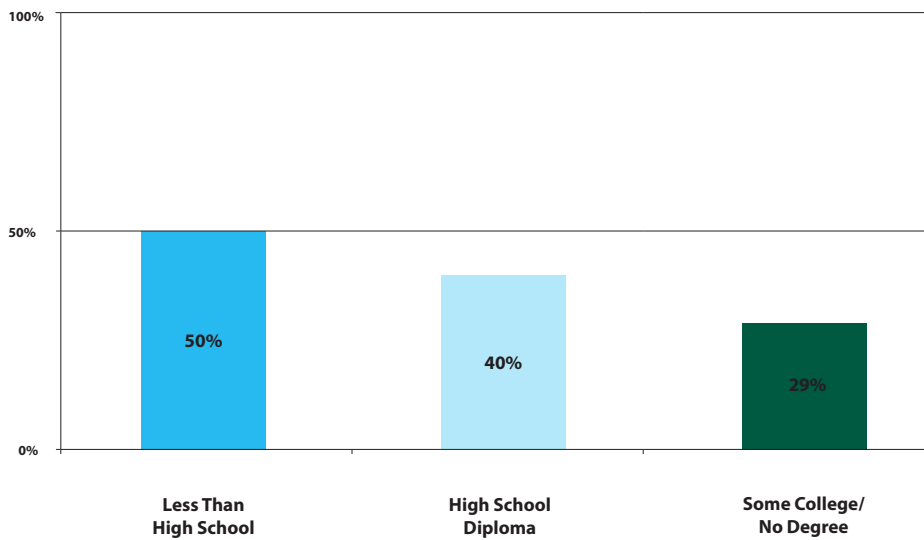
There is no more opportune, or critical, time for States to build robust, job-driven SNAP E&T programs. "Job-driven" means that programs are responsive to employer demand so that they place ready-to-work participants in good, available jobs or provide skills training and credentials participants require to obtain these jobs. SNAP E&T is increasingly recognized as a critical part of each State's skilled workforce strategy. USDA and other policy makers herald SNAP E&T as an important part of the national conversation about the need to invest in building a skilled workforce<sup>1</sup> while addressing the nation's growing economic inequality.

**FIGURE 1: SKILLS INCREASINGLY CRITICAL IN THE LABOR MARKET**



The vast majority of jobs in the future will require at least some education beyond high school, yet many SNAP participants have not reached this level of educational attainment. Without the skills to meet rapidly changing labor market demand, the chances of these SNAP participants getting a good job and reducing their need for SNAP are extremely low.

**FIGURE 2: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVELS OF LONG-TERM<sup>2</sup> SNAP RECIPIENTS**



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 and U.S. Census Bureau Analysis of Survey of Income and Program Participation Data, 2004

The commitment of USDA to SNAP E&T is evidenced at the highest levels of the Department, where both Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and FNS Undersecretary Concannon have made expansion of effective, employment-focused programs a priority. USDA/FNS recently invested considerable resources into bolstering the SNAP E&T program and making sure SNAP participants are preparing for good jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency. The Agency staffed new positions in the National and Regional Offices with deep workforce development experience, and most recently, launched a new technical assistance project, *SNAP to Skills*, designed specifically to provide States additional support in developing and implementing E&T programs that move more SNAP participants into good jobs. The growing urgency of the need for SNAP E&T services coupled with the increased availability of resources and expertise to help States expand their programs together create a “perfect storm” of conditions that should prompt States and their partners to jumpstart their SNAP E&T efforts.

## WHAT IS SNAP E&T?

There are multiple resources produced by FNS and others that describe the SNAP E&T program in great detail, including what services can be offered, who may be served, program types, and funding streams.<sup>3</sup>

SNAP E&T can help SNAP participants gain skills, training, or work experience to increase their ability to obtain regular employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency. States are required to operate SNAP E&T programs, and are currently provided about \$300 million annually by USDA to administer them. **Figure 3**, on the next page, is a simplified depiction of how the SNAP E&T program works.

SNAP E&T offers funding to States to provide a package of employment and training services to SNAP participants, which States set forth in their annual SNAP E&T Plans. States have considerable flexibility to determine which

SNAP participants to serve (including whether participation will be voluntary or mandatory), which specific services – or components – to offer, and who will provide the services (the State, or community colleges, community-based organizations (CBOs) and/or American Job Centers engaged by the State).

As shown, depending on the funding stream utilized, SNAP E&T can cover a variety of program costs, including administrative costs, direct program costs as well as certain supportive services for participants. Expansive SNAP E&T programs make use of a “third-party reimbursement” model. In this model, training services are provided by colleges, community-based organizations, and other organizations and their investment of non-federal funds in these services may be reimbursed by USDA using 50-50 funds, as described in Fig. 3.

**FIGURE 3: HOW SNAP E&T WORKS**

FEDERAL SNAP E&T FUNDING		
<p><b>E&amp;T PROGRAM GRANT (100 PERCENT) FUNDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formula-based grants to States to plan, implement, and operate SNAP E&amp;T services</li> <li>• Total funding available in FFY 2016: \$90 million</li> <li>• All States receive 100 percent funding. Some States do not spend their full allocations; remaining dollars may be reallocated to other States</li> </ul>	<p><b>50 PERCENT REIMBURSEMENT (50-50) FUNDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reimbursement grants (50 cents per dollar obligated) for SNAP E&amp;T program costs exceeding those covered by 100 percent funds or for supportive services provided to participants</li> <li>• Funds eligible for reimbursement can include state or local funds OR non-federal funds put up by “third-party” providers contracted by States to offer E&amp;T services</li> <li>• States may request 50-50 funds from FNS</li> </ul>	<p><b>ABAWD<sup>4</sup> (“PLEDGE STATE”) GRANT FUNDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For States pledging to offer qualifying E&amp;T services to ABAWDs at risk of losing SNAP eligibility due to time limits</li> <li>• States may request to be a “pledge” State and thus, receive these funds</li> <li>• Currently capped at \$20M annually for all pledge States, allocated based on size of ABAWD population</li> </ul>

**SNAP E&T SERVICES**

- SNAP E&T is a package of services that includes participant assessment, employment and training activities, and supportive services
- States must describe services in an annual SNAP E&T Plan that is submitted to USDA
- SNAP E&T services are offered by States or State partners (Colleges, CBOs, American Job Centers contracted/engaged by State)



**SNAP E&T FUNDS CAN PAY FOR:**

<p><b>100 PERCENT OR 50-50 FUNDS</b></p> <p><b>ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State staffing and overall planning, implementation, and operations</li> <li>• Partner provider administrative expenses</li> </ul> <p><b>DIRECT PROGRAM EXPENSES</b> (<i>other than</i> participant reimbursements)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition and fees</li> <li>• Case management/career navigation</li> <li>• Job development</li> </ul>	<p><b>50-50 FUNDS ONLY</b></p> <p><b>PARTICIPANT EXPENSES</b> <i>reasonably necessary and directly related</i> to program participation (supportive services), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Dependent care</li> <li>• Equipment and supplies related to training</li> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Uniforms</li> <li>• Licensing fees</li> </ul>
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## Jumpstarting Your State's SNAP E&T Program

The good news for stakeholders is that building a successful SNAP E&T program is much more achievable than it may seem at first. By taking advantage of the program's flexibility and employing some key strategies at the outset, States and stakeholders can "work smarter, not harder" to get their SNAP E&T programs going. States should:

- **Be smart about utilizing SNAP E&T 100 percent funds.** States should be making full and effective use of their 100 percent funds. There is currently \$90 million in 100 percent funds available for all States, and while some States are not spending their allocations, in the long-term States are inevitably limiting their E&T programs by relying solely on 100 percent funds. SNAP E&T programs can truly expand when the services they offer are supported with a healthy mix of 100 percent and 50-50 funds and when State agencies have the capacity they need to plan, develop, operate and monitor these expanded programs – in essence, to provide the backbone on which the program is built. To do this, States should consider utilizing at least a portion of their 100 percent funds to build their own capacity (e.g., support for staffing collaborative planning efforts, development/adaptation of participant tracking and invoicing systems, participant outreach efforts, on-boarding providers, etc.) and seeding new providers ("start-up" funds). States already utilizing most or all of their 100 percent funds for services should consider supporting these services with 50-50 funds instead.
- **Build on what's already working.** In most States, SNAP E&T funds are administered by State SNAP agencies. These agencies typically do not have expertise in employment and training, but they don't have to. Building a SNAP E&T program does not require States to design new programs to invest in, but rather to identify and invest in employment and training programs that have established relationships with employers and are successfully helping SNAP participants find work and gain skills. These programs are likely already utilizing non-federal dollars to support these services, which can serve as the basis for reimbursement in 50-50 SNAP E&T programs (third-party reimbursement). Moreover, leaders from these programs are well-positioned to help States with their SNAP E&T planning efforts. Finally, States may already have systems and processes in place for other programs (e.g. TANF) that can be adapted for use in their SNAP E&T programs.
- **Map out available resources.** While State agencies don't need to be experts in workforce development, they do need to know where to invest their SNAP E&T dollars, whether 50-50 funds or 100 percent funds, to the greatest effect. Involving leaders from community colleges, workforce agencies, industry partnerships, nonprofits and philanthropy will help States identify program services that are working and serving SNAP participants (and/or SNAP eligible individuals) as well as the non-federal dollars these systems and providers may be spending that are eligible for reimbursement. A good use of limited 100 percent funds is for States to invest in developing a "map" of the providers and resources in their States, or within the geography being considered for an initial SNAP E&T "pilot". A good resource map describes allowable SNAP E&T services already being provided, the organizations that are providing these services, the amounts and sources of funding they are utilizing, the populations being served, and any potential gaps in services that a SNAP E&T program might help fill.
- **Consider starting small.** Planning for a large, statewide SNAP E&T program is often a long-term strategy and, if scaled too quickly, can spread initially available resources too thin. There can be great value to States in getting a small SNAP E&T pilot operating on the ground to focus the capacity and resources they have at their

disposal to find out what works well and what doesn't, as well as what tools, resources and systems need to be put in place, adapted or improved in order to eventually expand. This means that States can move ahead without working out all of the potential kinks in advance (many of which are unforeseeable anyway until a program is operating). Simply put, SNAP E&T programs can be made more manageable and quicker to launch by starting with a limited geography and/or a limited number of partners.

## WHAT IS THE SNAP to SKILLS PROJECT?

**SNAP to Skills (S2S)** is a technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service that is designed to provide States the tools and resources they need to build more effective and job-driven SNAP E&T programs.<sup>5</sup>

Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) was selected by FNS to develop and operate S2S due to its wealth of experience developing high-quality workforce development programs and providing technical assistance to States on developing and operating SNAP E&T programs at the strategic, administrative and programmatic levels.

**The work of *SNAP to Skills* will include the following:**

- **Providing direct and intensive technical assistance to 10 States to develop, improve and expand their SNAP E&T programs (in particular their 50-50 SNAP E&T programs).**
- **Developing a suite of tools and resources for States to utilize to facilitate the development of their SNAP E&T programs.**

- **Publishing a series of policy briefs that will serve to inform States and other stakeholders about innovations, policies and best practices that will further their SNAP E&T programs' success.**
- **Developing a platform that allows FNS, States and other SNAP E&T stakeholders to communicate, share information, resources, challenges and successes, access relevant research and knowledge, and create networks.**
- **Developing and offering learning opportunities for States and other SNAP E&T stakeholders.**

The success of *SNAP to Skills* at helping States to achieve meaningful advancement toward robust and successful SNAP E&T programs will depend on the commitment of States of both the time and energy to partner with the project team to advance States' program goals.

## END NOTES

1. *Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity*. The White House, July 2014. See [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills\\_reports.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills_reports.pdf)
2. Received SNAP benefits for at least 37 months of past 48 months
3. A host of resources are made available by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services (see generally, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/employment-and-training-et-resources-states>), including: *A Toolkit to Help States Create, Implement and Manage Dynamic E&T Programs* (2013) available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ET\\_Toolkit\\_2013.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ET_Toolkit_2013.pdf) and *Employment and Training Handbook* (revised May 2003) available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/handbook-2003.pdf>. See also the National Skills Coalition's *Training Policy in Brief: SNAP Employment and Training Program* (11/2014), available at [http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/tpib/file/NSC\\_Training\\_SNAP\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/tpib/file/NSC_Training_SNAP_2014.pdf)
4. An ABAWD is a person between the ages of 18 and 49 who has no dependents. ABAWD stands for Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents. ABAWDs are required by statute to work at least 80 hours per month, participate in qualifying education and training activities at least 80 hours per month, or comply with a workfare program in order to receive SNAP benefits for longer than 3 months in a 36-month period. For more information on serving ABAWDs subject to the time limit, see the FNS Guide to Serving ABAWDs Subject to Time-limited Participation, available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Guide\\_to\\_Serving\\_ABAWDs\\_Subject\\_to\\_Time\\_Limit.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Guide_to_Serving_ABAWDs_Subject_to_Time_Limit.pdf)
5. *USDA to Establish First-Ever SNAP Employment & Training Center of Excellence*. USDA/FNS Press Release, October 29, 2015. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2015/030215>

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