



## Effective Recruitment Strategies for SNAP E&T Programs: Lessons from the SNAP E&T Pilots

# Brief

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded pilot grants to 10 States (grantees)—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—to test innovative strategies for providing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T). Most grantees and providers were not accustomed to recruiting individuals to participate in SNAP E&T programs; instead, they were used to serving whoever voluntarily came through their doors. For the pilots, staff needed to enroll many more people than they typically served, which required extensive outreach and recruitment. Over a two-year period, grantees and providers enrolled nearly 45,000 individuals into the SNAP E&T program through the pilot. Each pilot used different approaches for reaching these individuals, and each found successes and faced challenges. This brief presents the lessons learned from these recruitment efforts.

Many SNAP E&T programs struggle to attract SNAP participants to their programs. Even in States that administer mandatory SNAP E&T programs, it can be difficult to engage mandatory participants. Currently, many States rely on referrals from SNAP certification interviews, word of mouth from current or former SNAP E&T participants, or reverse referrals from contracted providers (providers identify which of their clients are SNAP recipients and confirm SNAP E&T eligibility with the State SNAP agency). All of these can be great recruitment tools, but they generally are not enough to fill all available program slots, and each has its drawbacks. For example, in most States, SNAP eligibility staff are not familiar enough with E&T program offerings to adequately and effectively message them to SNAP participants. Also, it can take time to generate positive word of mouth in the community, and one or two bad experiences can negatively affect engagement among those in the community without sufficient information to counter it. Finally, relying on reverse referrals misses an opportunity to reach a much larger pool of potential participants, particularly if providers serve a small or specific population. These referrals also do not directly target able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) who may need services to maintain their SNAP benefits. More and more, State agencies are realizing that to draw people into their programs and to better target services to SNAP participants, they need to actively market the program, explain the value of it, and recruit people to join.

Although many States do not have much experience with outreach and recruitment, they can learn about effective strategies implemented by the States that participated in the SNAP E&T pilot evaluation. Each pilot enrolled between 3,000 to 7,000 individuals into SNAP E&T during a one- to two-year period. Grantees and providers faced numerous challenges in meeting these recruitment goals, but most were able to learn from them and pivot to find outreach and recruitment strategies that worked for their programs. This brief describes several lessons the grantees and providers learned from these intensive requirement efforts.

### Recruitment lessons

**Engaging people in SNAP E&T requires planning and active recruitment processes.** Because of the robust services offered through the pilots, many grantees initially thought they would not need to do much recruitment. Several did not develop detailed plans for outreach and recruitment before the pilots began. As a result, many faced low enrollment in the pilot, often because of disjointed or inconsistent outreach and recruitment efforts across the pilot areas. Most grantees realized they had to add resources to their recruitment efforts or change their approaches to meet their enrollment goals. Generally, they developed outreach plans, materials, and messaging for providers to use.

“I was working in the mines and everyone knows all the mines around here are shutdown. There wasn’t much work. In a month and a half I got my GED, which I was proud of; it was something I always wanted. I want to get certified in carpentry and really make something out of myself. [The program] is putting a lot of people to work and giving a lot of people an opportunity for an education that normally maybe wouldn’t pursue it. I always gave my family what they needed, but it feels good to be able to give them what they want. I wouldn’t be able to do that without this program.”

*-Excerpt from a success story video in Kentucky’s pilot*

Some grantees decided not to coordinate recruitment or provide a systematic approach for outreach; instead, they let each provider develop an approach and materials that best fit its population. Although providers know their communities best, they did not always reach SNAP participants directly, and in communities with multiple providers, there was often overlap in the recruitment efforts. This was inefficient, and these efforts did not reach all potential participants—some were contacted multiple times, while others were never contacted. To address these issues across multiple providers, a few grantees ultimately created more standardized approaches to help ensure they were reaching SNAP participants across the entire pilot area. For example, they assigned each provider a unique list of SNAP participants to contact or created systems in which providers could see who had already been contacted.

Some grantees also created uniform messaging to help clarify what the program could offer and ensure all staff across organizations framed the program in the same way. Several grantees developed the overall messages and materials but allowed providers to tailor them slightly to fit their specific areas. For example, in Kentucky and Illinois (flyer shown), the materials had a consistent message and graphics, but providers were able to customize provider names, contact information, or services provided.

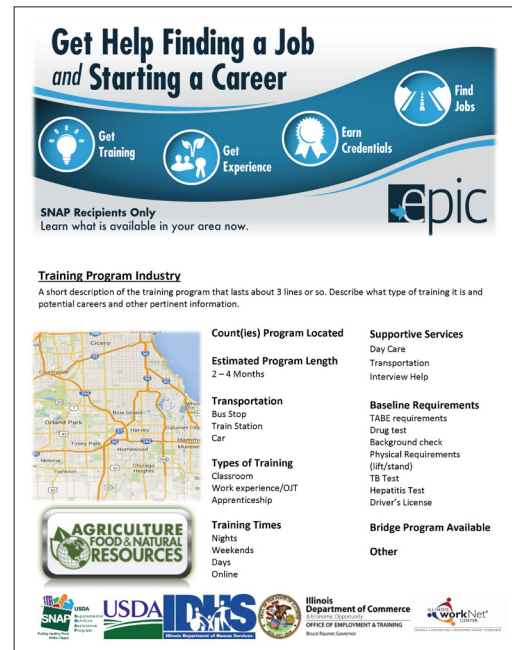
**Outreach materials can help inform and excite potential participants.**

Even when States conduct direct outreach through calling or visiting individuals in person, providing outreach materials reminds them of the information discussed and can draw additional people into the program. For materials to be effective, programs should consider the characteristics of the population served when designing the messaging. For example, for reaching individuals who had not completed high school, limiting language to a 5th- or 6th-grade level was important. Several pilots served populations with limited English proficiency who required materials in multiple languages. In addition, individuals living in urban versus rural areas may have different needs, barriers, or opportunities that require tailoring the message accordingly. For example, materials that describe assistance with public transportation may not be applicable to many of those living in rural communities, and the availability of specific types of training or employment might be more limited in these areas than in urban communities.

It is also important to develop messages that speak to and motivate the target population. The messages need to be clear and concise and highlight the value of what is being offered. The messages should include simple action items and next steps. When crafting the content of the messages, talking with potential participants is useful. State SNAP agencies and E&T providers often are not certain why people do not participate in the program, and in some cases, they might not have explored

**Example flyer from Illinois’s pilot**

*(Information in black could be customized by provider)*

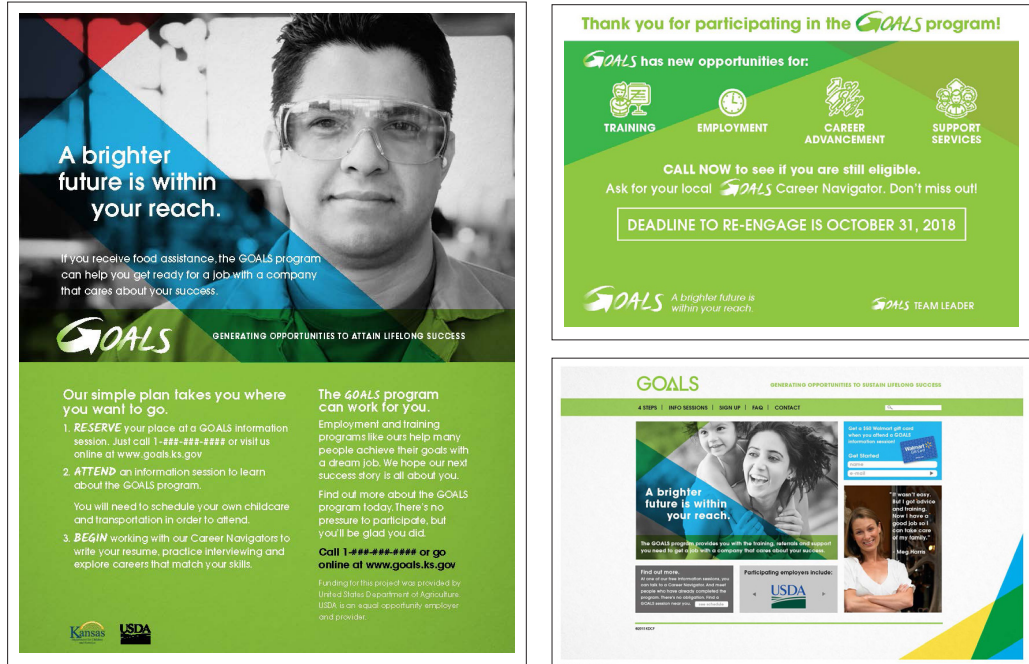


“It helped me get a job, which I have now. I got certifications... They helped me with my resume and just introduced me to new people. What was most appealing about the program, I was already a certified nurse assistance and they had other programs to advance me...I decided to take the phlebotomy program that would help me get to the RN [registered nurse] program. So it’s just, more knowledge for the field I’m in. Totally life changing, then I’m changing someone else’s life, helping them and taking care of them. As well as taking care of my family, and I’m so glad that I’m in this program.”

*-Excerpt from a success story video in Mississippi’s pilot*

what attracted the people who did participate. Collecting data and using evidence to inform development of materials can ensure that materials speak directly to potential participants. For the pilots, Kansas hired a professional marketing firm during the planning period to develop a detailed outreach plan and materials. The firm spent months conducting focus groups and interviews with staff and SNAP participants to test messaging and prototype materials. It then distributed the outreach plan and related materials (some examples are shown) to all pilot staff and reinforced the messaging and approach during frequent meetings.

### Example recruitment materials from Kansas’s pilot



**A one-size approach for recruitment does not fit all.** Everyone communicates and absorbs information in different ways, so finding the best way to communicate with the target population is important. There is no single, right way to market programs. Pilot staff recognized at the outset that a one-size-fits-all approach for outreach and recruitment did not work well, so most used a variety of approaches.

Most grantees created a list of SNAP participants potentially eligible for the pilot and circulated it to providers, who then made telephone calls and sent letters or emails to individuals on the list. However, staff often found that the contact information included in these lists (taken from the SNAP caseload files) was out of date by the time staff started their outreach efforts. Although these lists were a good starting point, staff in all pilots realized they needed to do more.

The grantees and providers implemented an array of strategies that helped enroll more SNAP participants into the pilot. Strategies included:

- Developing videos that introduced the programs and highlighted participants’ experiences and success stories. Kentucky and Mississippi developed these types of videos, which played in various locations, including local SNAP offices and providers offices. Most were also available on agency or provider Facebook pages and YouTube.<sup>1</sup> (Excerpts from videos developed by the Kentucky and Mississippi pilots are shown throughout.)

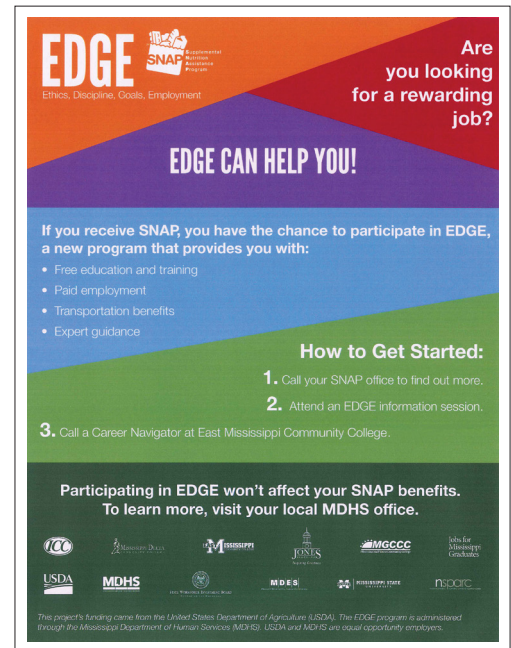


“I didn’t think I was capable of doing anything. I started hearing about the program...the day that I decided to [enroll], I was looking at my daughter and it was no longer about me. It was about her. Starting with the GED, I seen how people come together to support me, and I had never had that. I remember this feeling for the first time in my life, I believed in me. It was because of this program. I couldn’t have done it without it. I tell people all the time, this program really saved my life, because I don’t know where I would be today without it.”

*-Excerpt from a success story video in Kentucky’s pilot*

- Posting flyers throughout the community at locations where the target population was likely to visit, such as food banks, community centers, health centers, churches, and other public assistance agency lobbies (including housing, child care, and Medicaid). (Example materials from the pilots are shown throughout the brief.)
- Meeting people in the community where they were. California and Delaware’s models focused heavily on conducting home visits or meeting people at locations across the community, such as libraries, SNAP offices, coffee shops, or community centers. In Delaware, staff viewed the pilot as “a mobile program,” and some staff were rarely in an office. They all could work from anywhere (staff all had laptops, Wi-Fi, and cellphones).
- Stationing staff at local events or conducted outreach where other public assistance was provided. Staff in some pilots attended local resource fairs, back-to-school events, or community events (like carnivals or parades) and set up a table or handed out flyers to those attending. In Kentucky, several of the Community Action Agencies that provided SNAP E&T services also provided heating assistance in the fall. They often had long lines, and staff would use that as an opportunity to talk to those in line about SNAP E&T and enroll them in the program, if interested.
- Implementing targeted marketing campaigns. Some pilots created messages that played on the radio. Some also developed ads that were posted on buses or billboards. Some grantees and providers developed websites or added webpages about the pilot to their existing organizational websites. Some pilot staff also used Facebook or other social media platforms to discuss the benefits of the pilot and how people could enroll.

### Example recruitment materials from Mississippi’s pilot



Most grantees and providers agreed that coordinating with local SNAP offices should be a priority. Although relying on eligibility staff to conduct all recruitment has not been effective for most States, engaging the local offices should be part of the overall strategy. Some pilots did not include the local offices at all in the recruiting efforts for the pilot because they did not want to burden eligibility staff or did not envision relying on SNAP agency staff for recruiting. However, most grantees and providers agreed that not including local offices in the process was a missed opportunity. Pilot staff used or suggested several strategies for engaging the SNAP offices in the recruitment process, including:

- Providing eligibility staff with information and materials that they can share directly with SNAP participants who are interested in learning more about SNAP E&T services.

“We didn’t feel like we were going to be here much longer because we didn’t feel like there was anything here. This really turned things around. They offered help in paying for tuition, books, gas, they provided money for travel expenses. The way everything unfolded has been really awesome.”

*-Excerpt from a success story video in Kentucky’s pilot*

- Providing SNAP eligibility staff with contact information for someone at the E&T program to make direct referrals or to call if they have questions about the program.
- Allowing SNAP E&T program staff to be on site in local offices. The Delaware, Mississippi, and Illinois pilots found success in having a table in the lobby or an office in the building where staff were stationed every day or at specific times each week. This allowed SNAP E&T staff to talk with people while they waited for appointments and enabled eligibility staff to refer those who were interested in E&T to someone on site after the eligibility appointment was complete. Staff pointed out that having E&T staff available on a consistent schedule is important, or the referrals will break down. Ideally, E&T staff could be on site every day so eligibility staff do not need to remember schedules and all SNAP participants have the opportunity to meet with E&T staff after their eligibility appointment.

**Case manager or eligibility staff might not be the most successful in selling the program.**

The messenger can be just as important as the message itself. Grantees and providers recognized that decisions about who conducted the outreach efforts mattered. Several grantees and providers discussed the importance of ensuring that staff assigned to this role had the necessary interest and skill sets to perform effectively. Some staff did not excel in this role—they were not comfortable being out in the community conducting outreach or cold-calling SNAP participants to try to sell the program.

In most pilots, E&T case managers also conducted recruiting, but this was not always a good fit. Grantees and providers found that staff hired to be case managers were often more comfortable working one-on-one with people and not interested in conducting outreach. In addition, case managers pointed out that they did not always have the capacity to take on multiple roles. In some cases, case managers struggled to balance their workload, and some felt they were not serving those in the pilot as well as they could have because their recruitment responsibilities meant they did not have enough time to spend with clients. In at least one pilot, case managers were vocal that their recruitment duties contributed to job dissatisfaction and turnover. Across most pilots, staff suggested that hiring staff with a customer service or sales background to conduct recruitment would alleviate these issues.

Splitting the recruitment and case management roles can also lead to more job satisfaction and higher recruitment levels. In Delaware and Washington, grantees and providers changed their recruitment models to address these concerns. They identified staff that excelled at recruitment and liked those tasks and made them dedicated recruiters. Other staff who enjoyed working directly with participants in the program focused solely on case management.

**Example recruitment materials from California’s pilot**

In addition, although eligibility staff must screen and refer SNAP participants to E&T programs, relying primarily on them to recruit for SNAP E&T is not a best practice. Eligibility staff have limited time during interviews to fully explain SNAP E&T and generally do not have the knowledge or training needed to be the best ambassadors for it. In addition, eligibility staff can be confused about who can, should, or must participate in SNAP E&T programs and frequently believe E&T is only for ABAWDs to meet work requirements. So they may not target the program widely enough and might discuss it as a requirement instead of an opportunity. Therefore, it is important for State Agencies to frame the messaging for SNAP E&T and encourage E&T staff to follow up after the certification interview to describe the program's benefits.

## Conclusion

Although many States and providers have not traditionally focused on recruiting for their SNAP E&T programs, some recognize the importance of outreach for accessing those most in need of employment and training-related services. The pilots, which required intensive recruitment, provide several lessons that can help States interested in expanding recruitment. The pilots demonstrate that just offering robust services, such as occupational skills training, subsidized employment, intensive case management, and large support services payments, was not enough to drive people to their doors. All of the pilots needed to develop structured outreach approaches and plans, develop materials, and reach people where they were. Developing messages that directly speak to and motivate the target population and finding the right people to sell the message are key to successful recruitment efforts.

---

**For more information:** Detailed final findings are available in the full report “Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Final Summary Report” at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>. Reports summarizing final findings from the 10 individual pilot reports also are available.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kentucky videos located at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EHd\\_wQ0GRs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EHd_wQ0GRs); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6BFmh7wPYU>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYvRWusKi0w>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU77Lg\\_jRDU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU77Lg_jRDU); [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD\\_3XiZjiFU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD_3XiZjiFU); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWJvf2coN1k>. Mississippi video located at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kma8m0\\_P-Tw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kma8m0_P-Tw)

### About the study

In the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded 10 SNAP E&T pilots to test a range of innovative strategies to help SNAP participants find employment that increases their incomes and reduces their need for public assistance benefits. To encourage a diversity of approaches, each grantee identified focus populations, selected partners and service providers, and determined which services and activities best met their populations' needs. The legislation that authorized the pilots also included funding for a randomized controlled trial evaluation to assess the impacts of the pilots, which was awarded to Mathematica.

The recruitment lessons identified in this brief are based on analyses of qualitative data collected through telephone calls and in-person interviews with pilot staff from State agencies, partners, and providers, and focus groups conducted with individuals participating in the pilot.

Prepared by Gretchen Rowe

May 2022



The findings and conclusions in this brief are those of the author and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.

Produced by Mathematica for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Additional examples of SNAP E&T Pilot recruitment materials

Example flyer from Delaware’s pilot



**Delaware WONDER**  
Work Opportunity Networks to Develop Employment Readiness

Small Wonder •••••  
Big Talent

**Are you a new SNAP Recipient?**  
**Earn up to \$18.00 per hour!**  
To speak with an Outreach Specialist about  
**FREE Job Training and Placement Services**

Funding for this project was provided by United States Department of Agriculture  
USDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider

Work  
Opportunity  
Networks to  
Develop  
Employment  
Readiness

**DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**  
Division of Social Services

Example flyer from Washington’s pilot

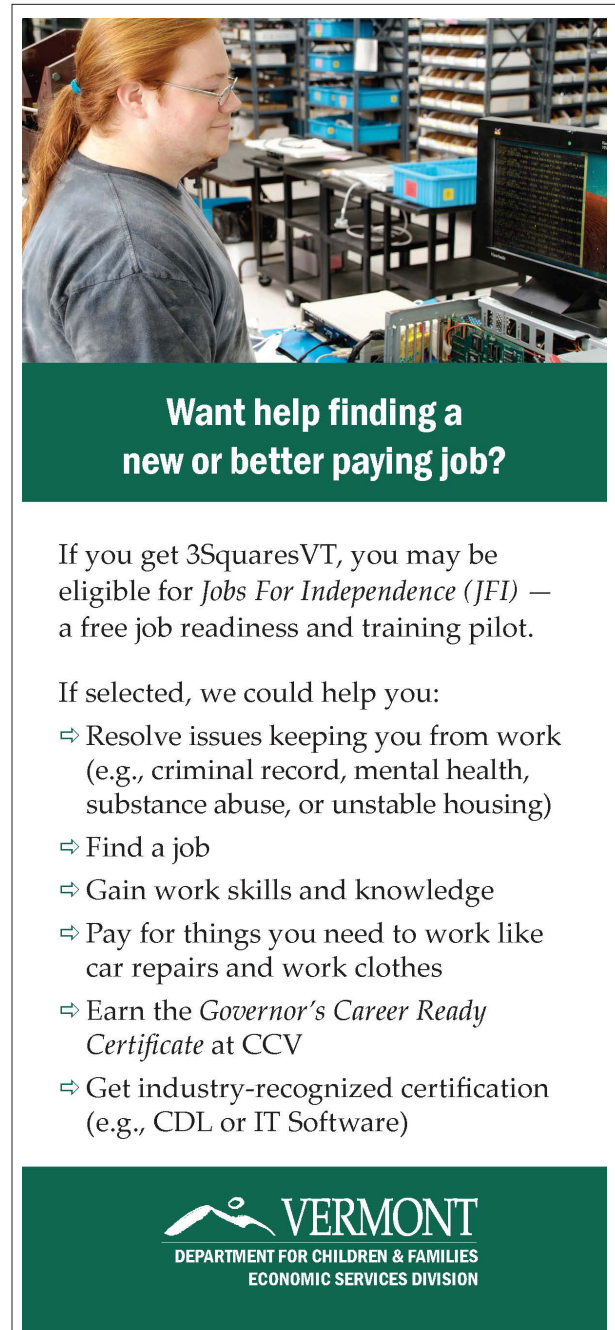


**RISE**  
Resources to Initiate Successful Employment

**Let us help you achieve success!**

RISE offers assistance in obtaining employment at a livable wage; through services providing case management, job experience, and employment and training assistance.

Example flyer from Vermont’s pilot



**Want help finding a new or better paying job?**

If you get 3SquaresVT, you may be eligible for *Jobs For Independence (JFI)* — a free job readiness and training pilot.

If selected, we could help you:

- ⇒ Resolve issues keeping you from work (e.g., criminal record, mental health, substance abuse, or unstable housing)
- ⇒ Find a job
- ⇒ Gain work skills and knowledge
- ⇒ Pay for things you need to work like car repairs and work clothes
- ⇒ Earn the *Governor’s Career Ready Certificate* at CCV
- ⇒ Get industry-recognized certification (e.g., CDL or IT Software)

**VERMONT**  
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES  
ECONOMIC SERVICES DIVISION

Additional examples of SNAP E&T Pilot recruitment materials

Example flyer from Illinois's pilot

Example flyer from Georgia's pilot

**SNAP BACK INTO THE WORKFORCE!!**

*If you are ready to change the Blueprint of your life? Then it's time to get involved in the SNAP Works Program!*

- ✓ **Short Term Education**
- ✓ **Job Coaching**
- ✓ **Job skills training**
- ✓ **Job Search and more!**

**Contact your local county SNAP Works Case Manager today!**  
 Case Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

The SNAP Works Program is participating in a national study of Food Stamp Employment & Training (E&T) Programs in the following counties: Bulloch, Chatham, Charlton, Clayton, DeKalb, Douglas, Glynn, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale. Participants will have the opportunity to enroll in the study. Participants are placed into a lottery where they will have a 50/50 chance of getting into enhanced E&T Services. Please contact your SNAP Works Case Manager for more details. Note: This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

**Get the Skills to Start a Career** ✓

The EPIC program can help you learn new skills and create a training plan to meet your career goals. You can earn a credential in a field that has jobs in your area. This may include work opportunities with local employers. You can also get ongoing counseling to prepare you for a new career.

This program is only for SNAP recipients in these counties:

- ✓ County Example 1
- ✓ County Example 2
- ✓ County Example 3
- ✓ County Example 4

**Get started with an information session.**  
**Learn more:**  
[www.ilepic.com](http://www.ilepic.com)

**DON'T WAIT!**  
 Spaces are limited

Scan the QR code for more details

There are jobs available in these fields **RIGHT NOW:**

- AGRICULTURE FOOD & NATURAL RESOURCES
- ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION
- FINANCE
- HEALTH/SCIENCE
- INFORMATION @TECHNOLOGY
- MANUFACTURING

Funding for research provided by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider. EPIC is part of a study to learn better ways to help SNAP recipients get paid careers. The names listed from this study will report how SNAP and employment services are provided in the future. 12/2015