



# Come Together: Using Team-Based Case Management in SNAP E&T

ISSUE BRIEF  
JULY 2023

## Introduction

Case management is a required and critical part of each Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program: State SNAP agencies must provide all E&T participants with case management services.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of case management in E&T is to guide a participant toward appropriate E&T components and activities based on the participant's needs and interests, support the participant in the E&T program, and provide resources that help the participant achieve program goals.

State SNAP agencies use a variety of case management approaches to better coordinate support for participants, helping them overcome barriers and obtain jobs. Some innovative approaches to case management were evaluated as part of the 2014 Farm Bill SNAP E&T pilot projects. One of these approaches was team-based case management, which aims to remove redundancies in a participant's communications with support organizations. In recent years, the number of State agencies using team-based case management has grown. According to a recent Food and Nutrition Service study, in 2021, 52 percent of State agencies provided specific policy or guidance to providers on the use of team-based case management (Joyce et al., 2023).<sup>2</sup>

In team-based case management, one case manager works with a team of case managers or contacts at various programs to coordinate case management services for a participant. Team-based case management can look different across State agencies; the structure of the team serving a participant and the coordination and communication among team members can vary. However, the universal goals of team-based case management are to lessen the burden on the participant to coordinate with many case managers and ensure the participant receives the information and services they need.

<sup>1</sup> The 2021 final rule on E&T opportunities in SNAP included case management as part of the definition of a program: "All E&T programs must consist of both case management and at least one E&T component" (7 C.F.R. Parts 271 and 273).

<sup>2</sup> The report uses the term "teaming or care coordination" to refer to team-based case management. The study was conducted prior to the establishment of the case management requirement in SNAP E&T.



This guide will do the following:

- Describe team-based case management and how and when it may be beneficial in SNAP E&T.
- Provide a checklist and resources for State agencies as they consider this approach.
- Summarize how three State agencies used this approach during the E&T pilots.

## Benefits of Team-Based Case Management

Many SNAP E&T participants are engaged in several other programs or support systems concurrently. Navigating each of these systems is formidable on its own but can become extremely difficult when combined with the personal challenges many E&T participants face, such as housing emergencies. Team-based case management can benefit SNAP E&T participants, partnering organizations, and the State SNAP agency by facilitating better coordination and streamlined services. Other benefits of team-based case management are the following:

- Case management approaches that bring together a team of providers and help participants navigate different support systems have positive effects on employment, educational attainment, participation in workforce development activities, and a reduction in reported challenges such as transportation and stable housing (Bolan et al., 2017).
- Team-based case management can be helpful for participants who face significant barriers and may need more intensive case management.
- Employing a team-based case management approach can benefit providers because it can reduce duplicative work across organizations and increase providers' understanding of participants' needs and abilities, enabling providers to better serve participants.
- A shared case management system is a key facilitator to team-based case management. A shared system enables team members to remain up to date on a participant's case between regularly scheduled meetings and discussions. A shared system can also help participants by reducing the number of times they are asked to share the same information.
- State agencies can benefit from stronger provider partnerships that result from the team-based approach. Pilots that used a team-based approach found it enabled providers working with similar populations to share resources and experiences, often for the first time; this coordination fundamentally changed the way these providers communicated and served participants (Rowe, 2021b).

## Key Players and Activities

While some State SNAP agencies provide SNAP E&T case management in-house, most partner with other providers to deliver case management services. In 2021, almost 75 percent of State SNAP agencies reported that community-based organizations provided case management in their State; approximately half of State SNAP agencies reported that Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act agencies or community colleges provided case management (Joyce et al., 2023).<sup>3</sup> The State SNAP agency must ensure its E&T program meets Federal requirements and conforms to State expectations, and it must oversee any contracts with providers. For example, the State SNAP agency may require providers to conduct weekly or monthly case management meetings with participants or provide certain types of case management services.

Team-based case management can include the following provider activities:

- Collaboration or communication on conducting assessments
- Support services that aim to reduce individual barriers
- Development of individual service or employment plans
- Periodic “check-in” discussions
- Counseling and coaching services
- Progress monitoring
- Coordination with other service providers

In an ideal team-based case management approach, direct, regular participant interaction filters through one main team member, such as a case manager. The case manager meets regularly with the rest of the team to discuss the participant’s needs and progress. The team can discuss cases in regular meetings. Team members can also update a shared database with the latest interactions instead of, or in addition to, regular meetings. Under this model, the case manager is the primary person contacting the participant on a regular basis. Not designating a primary point of contact for the participant requires the participant to interact with several case management team members. To minimize the burden on the participant and ensure that team-based case management is an asset, teams must explicitly define and articulate the roles of each team member, including who will and will not contact the participant.

The team providing case management can consist of people in several roles. Typical roles of team members may include case managers, employment navigators, academic counselors, or life skills training providers. More importantly, the team must reflect the different organizations or agencies a participant engages with. For example, if a participant receives housing services, SNAP E&T, and substance abuse services, a representative from each of the three providers must be part of the case management team. Other, more specialized staff may also be included on a team, and team-based case management can be combined with other approaches to case management, such as coaching. Specialized staff can include individuals with expertise in guiding and treating people with housing

---

<sup>3</sup> The study was conducted prior to the establishment of the case management requirement in SNAP E&T.

instability, criminal records, mental health disorders, or substance use disorders, among others.<sup>4</sup> Case management teams can plan to include these specialized staff who can meet with the core team (often case managers, employment specialists, and career counselors) as needed.

### Use of Coaching in Team-Based Case Management

A case management team can use several approaches to manage participant cases successfully. One example is coaching, which involves the use of techniques such as motivational interviewing to give participants the lead on assessing their needs and setting their goals. According to a recent study, 74 percent of State SNAP agencies reported providing policy or guidance on employment coaching to providers, 56 percent on motivational interviewing, and 37 percent on trauma-informed case management (Joyce et al., 2023).

Coaching is nondirective. A case manager uses active listening to enable the participant to name their own challenges, strengths, and plans, which empowers the participant to achieve their goals. Coaching can also help the participant break down bigger goals into smaller, actionable steps. This approach can be used in a team-based setting by one or multiple providers in their interactions with a participant. For example, an academic counselor can use motivational interviewing during interactions with a participant to understand their goals for educational attainment, while a case manager can use the same technique to empower the participant to set career goals. While the focus of the conversation with each provider might differ, the delivery of the communication would be aligned, and the team members would communicate and coordinate to help the participant achieve their goals.

### Checklist for Implementing a Team-Based Approach to Case Management

State SNAP agencies should consider the following when adopting a team-based approach to case management.

- ☐ Educate potential partners about the basics of a team-based approach to case management.
- ☐ Decide whether the State SNAP agency will contract with a chosen provider to formally become a SNAP E&T third-party partner or instead develop a memorandum of understanding with the organization.
- ☐ Establish a team structure in collaboration with the partners and designate one point of contact who will lead meetings and manage the agenda.
- ☐ Set regular meetings for the partners to discuss participant cases. Consider a monthly or biweekly cadence.
- ☐ Agree on a team communication plan to convey participant updates, needs, and milestones. Designate one individual to serve as the primary point of contact for the participant.
- ☐ Establish a database to share participant case management information across organizations. At a minimum, the database should ensure participant data are secure and protected and provide access to all staff involved in case management across the various organizations in the State's team-based case management model. To be effective, staff need to be able to input information into the database and read others' notes in realtime.
- ☐ Provide partners with training and guidance, including a glossary of important but less familiar terms.
- ☐ Prepare a plan for staff turnover and staff shortages.

<sup>4</sup> SNAP E&T funds cannot be used for substance abuse treatment.

## State Spotlights

Kentucky, Vermont, and Washington used team-based case management in their E&T pilot projects.<sup>5</sup> It should be acknowledged that the pilot environment specifically permitted some approaches that are not allowed under normal SNAP E&T program operations. However, many of the key takeaways remain relevant for State SNAP agencies as they design case management for their E&T programs and for other decision-makers considering the future directions of case management in SNAP E&T.<sup>6</sup>

### Kentucky



The Kentucky Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) operated a pilot known as Paths 2 Promise (P2P) in eight counties in Eastern Kentucky. The pilot was a voluntary SNAP E&T program and offered team-based case management, extensive support services, adult basic education, occupational skills training, work-based learning opportunities, coaching in training or employment settings, and job search and placement assistance. DCBS contracted with the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP) as the principal partner organization and two service providers: Kentucky Adult Education and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. EKCEP, a local workforce development agency, also partnered with other organizations and managed all relationships. P2P providers also coordinated with the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Blind Services Division to obtain services for the subset of participants with disabilities.

#### Key Takeaways

- Teaming up across multiple agencies to provide case management enabled providers to harness the power of all the services partner organizations offered.
- Participants sometimes stop communicating with specific providers, so the team-based approach enabled the full team to remain engaged with those participants, even if individual organizations may not have communicated with the participant recently.
- Reinforcing the application of policies through guidance and training was vital for consistent implementation.
- The team-based approach to case management was designed to be seamless for the participant, with no gaps in service: the participant could express a need to any provider, and the team would arrange services, even if the agency the participant contacted did not provide that service or specialize in that discipline.
- Before participants were enrolled in the program, DCBS brought all partner organizations together to provide input on the development of a handbook that described team-based case management; all involved staff used this handbook.
- Team members had access to a shared customer relationship management system in which they could list barriers. The database enabled the team to work together to provide services and mitigate barriers as they emerged.
- For team-based case management to work successfully, team members had to become comfortable working as one team with staff from other organizations.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/expanding-opportunities-and-reducing-barriers-work-final-summary-report-evaluation-usdas>.

<sup>6</sup> These snapshots were developed based on conversations with Kentucky, Vermont, and Washington State SNAP agencies during the summer and early fall of 2022 and findings from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) evaluation of the SNAP E&T 2014 Farm Bill Pilots.



The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) operated a statewide pilot called Jobs for Independence (JFI). Vermont AHS worked with five key partners to create regional teams to coordinate and deliver services for JFI: the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Vermont Department of Labor, Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation, Community College of Vermont, and Vermont's Community Action Agencies. The pilot offered counseling services through a team-based approach, support services, and referral to employment services.

### Key Takeaways

- The team-based approach made it easier for participants to navigate different services and reach various providers. It was most helpful for participants with high barriers to employment.
- Participants engaged with a case management provider that assembled a case management team based on the participant's needs (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, adult education). Teams also sometimes included doctors and therapists.<sup>7</sup>
- Case management generally focused on longer term counseling, stabilization, employment planning, and connecting participants to other support services.
- The program did not assign one primary case management contact to each participant. Instead, the participant typically met with an EAP counselor first, and then the team lead became the person the participant reached out to first or most often. Some staff believed that assigning one primary case manager to lead the team could have improved service delivery, coordination, and participant engagement and made it easier to organize team meetings.
- One challenge with the team-based approach was difficulty maintaining consistent coordination with high levels of staff turnover. To mitigate this challenge, AHS staff traveled to each region to hold meetings, train providers, and help reconnect staff.
- Vermont implemented a case management system all partners could access. However, it took about a year to get all partners accustomed to using this system.
- While case management in JFI was initially provided in person, after the pilot, Vermont pivoted to a virtual orientation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants watched a video with step-by-step directions, and the case management team received a notification when a participant completed the orientation video. A virtual orientation offered a lower barrier to entry for participants, and participants completed orientation at higher rates than pre-pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> These team roles cannot be funded with E&T funding.



Washington Department of Social and Health Services implemented a pilot called Resources to Initiate Successful Employment (RISE) in four counties. The RISE pilot focused on a subset of participants with significant barriers to employment. The program included comprehensive team-based case management, extensive wraparound and support services, a mandatory 6-week life skills course called Strategies for Success (SfS), and work-based learning opportunities, in addition to services offered under Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) (i.e., job search assistance and job placement). Case management teams typically included case managers, employment navigators, and SfS instructors.

### Key Takeaways

- The team improved upon its communication process over time. For the first few months of the pilot, the team tracked participant progress in MS Excel. The static, noncollaborative nature of MS Excel became a challenge as enrollment grew. The MS Excel document was replaced with the Electronic Jobs Automated System (EJAS)—a centralized case management database. Team members could add notes about participant progress (e.g., classes attended, barriers encountered) in the database. Through EJAS, instructors used barrier progress notes to gain a better understanding of what participants had already overcome and what barriers remained. Database use helped reduce the need for instructors to ask participants the same questions case managers had already asked.
- Navigators had a detailed understanding of the available work-based learning opportunities and relayed those to case managers, who knew their participants well and could evaluate the opportunities according to participant interests, goals, and likelihood of success. Navigators were up to date on the life skills training participants received, which helped them identify appropriate work-based learning opportunities. Navigators also built a rapport with participants by occasionally participating in SfS classes.
- The RISE pilot allowed services that were not typically provided in BFET, such as enhanced participant reimbursement services (e.g., support services). For example, RISE funded a child support officer from the Alternative Solutions program team. If participants owed arrears in child support, and it was identified as a barrier, case managers referred participants to the child support officer, who provided resources to help participants prepare for employment and determine how their wages would be affected. The officer attended quarterly meetings, and case managers had direct access to the officer to connect participants when needed.
- Starting team-based case management with a small group of participants and gradually increasing the numbers helped address initial hiccups before teams became overwhelmed.
- While providing case management to those with significant barriers to employment can require more intensive time and resources, the improved coordination innate to the teams-based case management approach of the RISE pilot was instrumental in determining what supports were lacking for these participants and addressing their needs.



## Resource List

Bolan, M., Demirel, S., & Keenan, P. (2017). *Housing and Employment Navigator program evaluation*. Marc Bolan Consulting. <https://www.marcbolanconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WIF-Naviagtor-FULL-REPORT-6-29-17.pdf>

This report presents an evaluation of the Housing and Employment Navigator model for homeless families interested in career development and employment services implemented by the Washington State Workforce Innovation Fund using funding from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The model relied on the role of a navigator to help families “navigate” different support systems and brought together a team of support providers to ensure coordinated service efforts.

Joyce, K., Reid, N., Kharsa, M., Berman, J., Levin, M., Paprocki, A., & Sarver, M. (2023). *Survey of SNAP E&T Case Management*. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. GS-10F-0050L/12319819F0128. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap-et/survey-program-case-management>

This report presents a comprehensive review of State SNAP E&T program approaches to case management. The report also highlights promising practices and lessons learned that can be used to support States as they work to provide case management services aligned with their participants’ needs, available resources, and program priorities.

Kaz, D. (2016). *Securing third-party partners for SNAP E&T programs*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/snap/S2SBrief3\\_SecuringThirdPartyPartners.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/snap/S2SBrief3_SecuringThirdPartyPartners.pdf)

This policy brief explains how to identify potential partners and reimbursable resources, including through a formal resource mapping process, and educate providers about SNAP E&T to help them determine if they wish to participate as third-party partners. The brief also discusses how to assess potential partners for program fit and capacity to meet program requirements and how to contract with and onboard the providers selected for formal partnerships.

Laird, E., & Holcomb, P. (2011). *Effective case management: Key elements and practices from the field*. DOL Employment and Training Administration. [https://www.mathematica.org/~media/%20publications/PDFs/labor/case\\_management\\_brief.pdf](https://www.mathematica.org/~media/%20publications/PDFs/labor/case_management_brief.pdf)

This issue brief, published by DOL, provides examples of effective case management practices. The brief highlights potential tools States can use, shares several examples of innovative practices from the field, and includes an annotated list of additional resources.



Mabli, J., Rowe, G., Hartnack, J., Monzella, K., Shiferaw, L., Defnet, A., Schochet, P., Raketic, M., & Dotter, D. (2022). *Expanding opportunities & reducing barriers to work: Vermont final report*. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. AG 3198-B-15-0002. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET\\_Interim-Report\\_Vermont.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET_Interim-Report_Vermont.pdf)

USDA published this evaluation of the Vermont pilot, which discusses the pilot's background, objectives, and implementation, including the team-based approach to case management. Of note is the description of the integrated data system the team members used for case management.

Milaney, K. (2012). The 6 dimensions of promising practice for case managed supports to end homelessness: Part 2: The 6 dimensions of quality. *Professional Case Management*, 17(1), 4–12. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21986969/>

This paper presents six dimensions of promising case management practices, specifically targeted toward staff involved in moving individuals from homelessness to permanent housing. The six dimensions include (1) collaboration and cooperation; (2) right matching of services; (3) contextual case management; (4) the right kind of engagement; (5) coordinated and well-managed system; and (6) evaluation for success.

Paprocki, A., Mack, M., & Rangnekar, M. (2022). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) best practices study 2016-2020: Final report*. Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/best-practices-et-program-2016-2020>

This report, published by USDA, is the second in a series of reviews of effective E&T program components and practices. The review covers literature published from 2016 to 2020 and contains specific recommendations for building effective SNAP E&T programs, including recommendations related to developing successful workforce system partnerships and identifying the right mix of services to meet the needs of participants. Appendix A presents an annotated bibliography of all 105 studies and papers selected for the review.

Rowe, G. (2021a). *Diversity of case management approaches in the SNAP E&T pilots*. Mathematica Policy Research. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET\\_Issue-Brief\\_Case-Management.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET_Issue-Brief_Case-Management.pdf)

This brief, published by USDA, summarizes the approaches to case management across the 10 E&T pilot sites. The pilot sites were asked to explore “intensive” case management approaches. The brief presents an overview of the team-based approaches used in Kentucky, Vermont, and Washington.

Rowe, G. (2021b). *Implementing the SNAP E&T pilots: Challenges encountered and lessons learned*. Mathematica Policy Research. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET\\_Issue-Brief\\_Lessons-Learned.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET_Issue-Brief_Lessons-Learned.pdf)

This brief, published by USDA, shares implementation challenges and lessons learned across the 10 E&T pilot sites. The brief covers the planning and early implementation periods, which spanned from March 2015 to July 2017. Specifically, the brief notes the pilots brought together partner organizations that in the past had not had an opportunity to collaborate to share their resources and experiences.

Rowe, G., Mabli, J., Hartnack, J., Monzella, K., Shiferaw, L., Schochet, P., Raketic, M., & Dotter, D. (2022). *Expanding opportunities & reducing barriers to work: Kentucky final report*. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. AG 3198-B-15-0002. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET\\_Interim-Report\\_Kentucky.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET_Interim-Report_Kentucky.pdf)

This evaluation of Kentucky's pilot discusses the State's approach to team-based case management in detail. The report also describes who was involved with this team-based approach.

Rowe, G., Mabli, J., Lyskawa, J., Hartnack, J., Monzella, K., Shiferaw, Defnet, A., Schochet, P., Raketic, M., & Dotter, D. (2022). *Expanding opportunities & reducing barriers to work: Washington final report*. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. AG 3198-B-15-0002. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET\\_Interim-Report\\_Washington.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-ET_Interim-Report_Washington.pdf)

The evaluation report of Washington's pilot briefly mentions the State's use of a team-based case management approach, noting the benefits of the approach for participants.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *Evaluation of SNAP Employment and Training pilots: Fiscal year 2018 annual report to Congress*. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-E-and-T-Report-Congress-FY2018.pdf>

This report summarizes the pilot projects conducted by eight States. Three States described in the report used team-based case management: Kentucky, Vermont, and Washington.



**Prepared by Miles Patrie, Kathy Wroblewska, and Hilary Wagner**

**July 2023**

Produced by Westat Insight for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). This document does not provide official policy guidance. FNS has published other materials on these topics that are available on the FNS website.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.