



Securing Third-Party Partners for SNAP E&T Programs

POLICY BRIEF 3
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Introduction

In order to build robust Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs, States must move beyond the exclusive or primary use of their limited SNAP E&T program grants (100 percent funds) and expand the use of 50 percent reimbursement (50-50) funds. One of the most promising strategies to achieve greater use of 50-50 funds is through a third-party partnership. 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. This brief will provide State agencies and other stakeholders guidance on the steps necessary to develop these third-party partnerships.

This brief will address how to:

- Identify potential partners and reimbursable resources, including through a formal resource mapping process;
- Educate providers about SNAP E&T to help them determine if they wish to participate as third-party partners;
- Assess potential partners for program fit and capacity to meet program requirements; and
- Contract with and on-board those providers with which the State opts to formally partner.

Steps to Securing Third-Party Partners

Described below are key steps for States to take to secure SNAP E&T third-party partners. These steps may be followed in the order presented below. States may also find that combining steps or running processes simultaneously may expedite or simplify the process.

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Identify

IDENTIFY potential third-party partners through resource mapping, surveys, outreach or other activities. The goal of this step is to provide the State agency a picture of the landscape of providers with which it might partner and available reimbursable resources.

This process can be formal, such as creating a detailed Resource Map (described below), or informal, such as developing a list of potential partners using recommendations of a SNAP E&T planning team or State workforce agency, using survey or Request for Information (RFI) responses, or other means.

States should gather basic information about providers within the target area for SNAP E&T program expansion that indicates their potential for partnership. This should include high-level information on 1) who they serve (e.g., SNAP eligible within targeted area, individuals with barriers or special needs); 2) the type of services provided; 3) their organizational mission; and 4) potential reimbursable resources and opportunity to serve more SNAP participants.

Educate

EDUCATE potential providers about SNAP E&T and the requirements of partnership.

The process of securing quality third-party partners for a SNAP E&T program is a two-way street. Not only must the State agency learn more about providers with which it may potentially partner, but providers must learn more about SNAP E&T, the State agency's program vision and objectives, and the specific requirements of being a contracted E&T third-party partner.

Providers must decide if they wish to provide SNAP E&T services in partnership with the State agency. They can do this only after learning what such a partnership will entail, then assessing their own capacity to meet these obligations. State agencies should consider the following approaches to educating potential third-party partners:

- » Invite identified partners to an informational session (in-person, conference call, webinar, etc.);
- » Hold one-on-one meetings with each provider; and/or
- » Combine this step with the "identify" or "assessment" step by including an in-depth explanation of SNAP E&T/program partner requirements as part of a survey, RFI, or assessment sent out that will help providers determine if they want to participate.

Assess

ASSESS potential third-party partners to determine program fit and capacity to meet program requirements through a “Partner Assessment”. This is a process through which the universe of potential providers is narrowed down to the actual or likely providers with which a State may contract or partner to provide SNAP E&T services. It provides a deeper understanding of providers by soliciting additional information from them, such as:

- » Outcomes for those they serve that would meet the State’s SNAP E&T program goals;
- » Specific non-federal revenue sources available for reimbursement and whether these are sustainable over time;
- » Staffing capacity to be a SNAP E&T contractor (meet client tracking requirements, billing, etc.); and
- » Fiscal systems that can track non-federal funding, program outcomes, and cooperate with contract monitoring and potential audits.

A Partner Assessment is typically comprised of a series of questions that can be administered electronically. It is a best practice to begin a third-party partnership that builds on existing relationships or established providers. However, as the State expands its program to new areas or new target populations, a partner assessment that casts a wider net may be helpful in identifying providers.

States should develop a set of criteria by which to select those providers it will contract from among those it has assessed. ***Sample criteria is provided in the Appendix to this brief: Criteria for Third-Party Partners.***

Contract

CONTRACT with providers to formally become SNAP E&T third-party partners.

States will have their own specific processes for contracting external organizations to provide E&T services. In addition, States should ensure they collect all of the relevant information necessary for the annual State SNAP E&T Plan submitted to the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Some general considerations for States in contracting SNAP E&T third-party partners include:

- » Contracts can be based on Statements of Work (SOW) developed with providers that describe at a high level the specific SNAP E&T activities that contractors will provide; who and how many will be served; outcomes to be achieved; and other contractor responsibilities (e.g., data sharing and collection, invoicing).
- » A SOW can include the number of individuals a contractor/provider proposes to serve within each SNAP E&T activity, as well as projected activity enrollment, completion and entered employment numbers (which may be estimated from past results).
- » States may consider performance based contracts with language regarding the setting of performance targets and potential corrective action if the provider consistently falls short of these targets.
- » States should collect budget information that includes expenses as well as service levels for each of the proposed SNAP E&T activities it plans to offer.
- » States should ensure that supportive services ("participant reimbursements") are provided at an appropriate level to support actual participation in the proposed SNAP E&T activities and that are reasonable and directly related to participation in the activity.
- » States should ensure that proposed costs per participant are consistent and reasonable for the specific E&T activity and consistent with allowable costs, per FNS policy and regulations.

On-Board

ON-BOARD contracted third-party partners to get them up and running as smoothly as possible. After securing a contract, or in conjunction with the contracting process, States should consider completing processes through which third-party partners are given the specific information and training they need to meet their contract responsibilities.

For example, contracted partners may need training in accessing, entering and sharing participant data within State Management Information Systems (MIS) and in developing data sharing agreements that include privacy protections. They may also need training in the invoicing procedures they will need to follow. States can consult with their FNS Regional Office to ensure contracts and training cover what is appropriate and necessary to successfully operate a third-party partnership.

Two resources can be valuable to States in facilitating the on-boarding process. First, agencies can consider creating a SNAP E&T Provider Handbook that details the State SNAP E&T program's policies and procedures. Second, once a SNAP E&T third-party model has been operating for a sufficient period of time, State agencies may consider establishing peer-to-peer support between new and more mature providers to assist with on-boarding and continuous improvement.

Resource Mapping

A “Resource Map” is a formal way for States to identify potential third-party partners and their qualified funding streams – non-federal resources already being used to provide employment and training services to SNAP participants that may be eligible for reimbursement using 50-50 funds. A Resource Map can provide a “big picture” of where resources are already flowing within the State and local areas to support employment and training activities/supportive services for SNAP participants or SNAP-eligible individuals.

A Resource Map identifies the specific organizations – such as community colleges and community-based organizations – in the State or target area that have the potential to be third-party partners in SNAP E&T 50-50 programs. To find these providers, States conduct research to determine which providers meet the State’s selected criteria for third-party partners. An example of such criteria is described in an Appendix to this brief.

A comprehensive Resource Map will include the primary non-federal funding sources available within the State or local communities that could be reimbursable in a SNAP E&T 50-50 program. This part of the Map focuses on sources of funding, as opposed to specific providers that may be utilizing these funds. Including funding streams in a Resource Map is an important part of the picture for SNAP E&T planning for many reasons, including:

- » States may find that one philanthropic organization or funding stream supports many smaller service providers, providing the potential to contract directly with the State, avoiding costly or administratively burdensome processes;
- » States may uncover sources of funding that potential partners aren’t fully utilizing, giving the State the opportunity to connect providers to these sources; and
- » A resource map can provide a picture of “funding gaps” in the State, target geography, or for the target population.

Case Studies

In Practice: Hennepin and Ramsey Counties in Minnesota

Hennepin and Ramsey Counties represent the urban centers of Minneapolis-St. Paul in Minnesota, a State in which SNAP E&T is county-administered. In late 2015, in an effort to set the stage for potential expansion of the SNAP E&T 50-50 program, the Counties set about developing a SNAP E&T Resource Map for the area. The objectives were to quantify and highlight the SNAP E&T expansion opportunity as well as to begin to identify gaps in services that SNAP E&T might help address. The Map would do this by taking inventory of potential SNAP E&T reimbursable public and private spending for services for SNAP-eligible populations.

Information was gathered on 32 providers, 29 public programs (State, county and local), and 10 foundations that provide funding for services to SNAP-eligible populations. This was accomplished via a broadly-cast County Solicitation of Interest, a more targeted set of interviews, and other research. Information gathered was utilized to gauge interest in SNAP E&T partnership, analyze alignment of providers to E&T services and populations, and understand the specific size and "fit" or various funding sources.

The inventory specifically included a source-by-source assessment of the following:

- » Whether the funding source was non-federal and not used to match or leverage other federal programs;
- » The overall size of the funding source, restricted only to those non-federal funds paying for employment and training services and related supports;
- » The proportion of individuals served by the funding source enrolled in SNAP or likely SNAP-eligible;
- » The proportion of individuals served residing in the two-county area; and
- » Whether organizations had the ability to track SNAP E&T eligibility and participation, and whether they had sufficient cash flow (capacity).

The completed analysis identified nearly \$17.6 million in employment and training expenditures in the two counties targeted to individuals enrolled in or are likely eligible for SNAP benefits, and thus likely candidates for the SNAP E&T program.

In Practice: Partner Assessments in Arkansas

The State of Arkansas utilized an informal approach to identify third-party partners for its SNAP E&T program. In 2016, the Department of Human Services (DHS) committed to expanding SNAP E&T, but lacked new State resources to do so. DHS utilized a partnership with the State's Department of Workforce Services (DWS) and Goodwill to develop service coverage maps and gap identification.

DHS set about the process of identifying other providers through a Partner Assessment survey. It established criteria for potential partner selection, looking for entities that: 1) served areas of the State not well-covered; 2) had programs focused on skills training and connected to employers with good jobs; and 3) had eligible 50-50 reimbursable spending. A group of interested stakeholders were asked to attend a statewide meeting hosted by DHS focused on educating these providers about SNAP E&T, the 50-50 program, and participation requirements.

DHS then e-mailed a detailed web-based Provider Assessment to each of the attendees of the statewide meeting in order to gather detailed information about their organizations, services, capacity, and other program or organizational elements. From this Assessment, DHS identified 13 potential third-party partners, and is now assessing these organizations for a potential SNAP E&T 50-50 partnership. In addition, DHS is considering marketing and outreach strategies to pique interest in SNAP E&T in geographic areas not originally represented at the statewide convening.

APPENDIX: CRITERIA FOR THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS

Whatever process is utilized to identify potential provider partners, it should, at a minimum, provide enough information about them to allow the State to determine whether they:

1. Serve the right population

- They serve individuals on SNAP; and/or
- They serve low-income individuals that are likely qualified for SNAP; and
- They serve the specific target population/geography of focus (if applicable).

2. Provide the right (SNAP E&T eligible) services

- Job search or Job search training
- Workfare or community service
- Programs that provide work experience (e.g., on-the-job training, apprenticeship)
- Educational programs that improve basic skills or otherwise improve employability (e.g., basic skills, English Language Learning (ELL), high school equivalency)
- Programs that provide skills training (e.g., career-technical/vocational education)
- Job retention

3. Program objectives are in alignment with the goals of the State's SNAP E&T program

- They are working to help people reach self-sufficiency through employment and training strategies/supportive services;
- Their programs are “job-driven” – that is, they are responsive to employer demand so that they place ready-to-work participants in good, available jobs and/or provide skills training and credentials participants require to obtain these jobs;
- They offer or connect participants to supportive services where needed to help them have the best opportunity for program success; and
- They effectively assess participants to ensure program fit and tailor services to meet individuals’ needs and goals.



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