



Building an Employer-Driven SNAP E&T Program by Utilizing Labor Market Information

POLICY BRIEF 5
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Introduction

The flexibility within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) affords States a broad range of program design options. Since the goal of SNAP E&T is to help SNAP participants gain the skills and credentials they need to obtain good jobs leading to economic self-sufficiency, State SNAP agencies should partner with workforce development system stakeholders and use Labor Market Information (LMI) to identify and support employer-driven training programs that provide the greatest opportunities for quality employment.

Successful workforce development programs have a dual-customer focus. Not only do they serve individuals in need of skills training and employment, but they also serve employers in need of qualified workers to expand their businesses. **Employer-driven** training programs embody this dual-customer focus by preparing and training individuals for occupations that are in demand by local and regional employers. Designed to be responsive to employer needs, and ideally developed in partnership with employers, these programs provide skills training to meet the demands of occupations and sectors of the local economy experiencing growth and/or skills shortages.

SNAP E&T programs that focus on meeting the needs of employers are best positioned to help participants gain the skills necessary to secure good, available jobs in the local economy. **Good jobs** are those that are not only in demand, but are also stable, offer a sufficient number of hours, pay living wages, and provide the potential for advancement.¹ In contrast, programs that are not employer driven may fail to lead to employment or may result only in unstable and low-paying jobs in saturated or high turnover occupations and industries.

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Key Features of Employer-Driven Programs

- Aligned with the needs and hiring trends of the local economy and employers
- Designed in coordination with local industry to train to the needs of specific employers or groups of employers
- Lead to industry-recognized degrees, credentials, certificates and/or licenses that address local skills shortages or employment trends

Labor Market Information and Employer Input for Building Employer-Driven SNAP E&T Programs

Employer-driven training programs should be built on a solid foundation of current **labor market information (LMI)** and include **employer input and involvement** in program design and operations. LMI is quantitative and qualitative “data and predictions related to the supply of and demand for workers; the wages and training associated with specific occupations and industries; and unemployment levels, often broken down by education level and geographic locations, industry or specific occupation.”²

The Federal Government supports the development of LMI to help workforce programs and other stakeholders make informed decisions about education and training offerings, job search opportunities, hiring, and public or private workforce investments. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) within the U.S. Department of Labor is the Federal Agency responsible for measuring employment, wages, work conditions, and price changes in the economy.

Every State also has an **LMI program** in its employment security or labor agency. BLS has agreements with States specifying the work required of their LMI programs and the federal funding to support that work. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandates greater utilization of LMI by States to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce development system. For example, local workforce boards are directed to develop training programs and choose provider training programs that align with the local labor market and to use LMI for regional planning purposes.

Local industries and employers contribute to the development of LMI in their States by supplying data and information on their short- and long-term skills and hiring needs. Employer-driven training programs may involve industries and employers in other ways. For example, they may partner with specific local industries and employers to design training programs or develop specific industry-recognized credentials to help participants secure, retain or advance in jobs with these industries or employers. Employers may also be engaged as partners in the delivery of training, such as by providing work-based learning opportunities.

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Key LMI Questions to Ensure Programs are Employer-Driven and Lead to Good Jobs

The ultimate objective of SNAP E&T is to help SNAP participants advance to economic self-sufficiency; therefore, it should include employer-driven training programs targeting in-demand occupations that provide “good” jobs, as defined in the introduction, as well as partner with the industries and employers that need to fill these jobs. LMI and employer input can help achieve this goal, especially for those who start with lower levels of skills and work experience. LMI can be used to answer some fundamental questions about the occupations being targeted by a training program to help ensure the program is employer-driven and will lead participants to good jobs. The following diagram illustrates a few key questions to ask about your program. Answering “Yes” to as many questions below as possible is a strong indicator that your program is employer driven and informed by LMI.



Is the Job In-Demand?

- Is the job in a growing occupation/industry within the State or locality being served?
- Is the job or occupation/industry experiencing a skills shortage?
- Is the job within an occupation/industry with a significant number of current and/or projected job openings?
- Is the job within an occupation/industry facing a future loss of workers due to retirement (creating more openings)?



Is the Job a “Good” Job?

- Does the job offer at least a living-wage for the local area at the entry level?
- Does the job offer pathways for advancement to a middle wage for the local area?
- Is the job relatively stable? Does it offer adequate and predictable hours, and provide benefits?



Is the Job Accessible to a Lower-Skill Participant?

- Does the job require less than a Bachelor’s degree?
- Does the typical worker in the job - at least at the entry-level - have less than a Bachelor’s degree?
- Are there sufficient and quality training opportunities to prepare participants for the job?

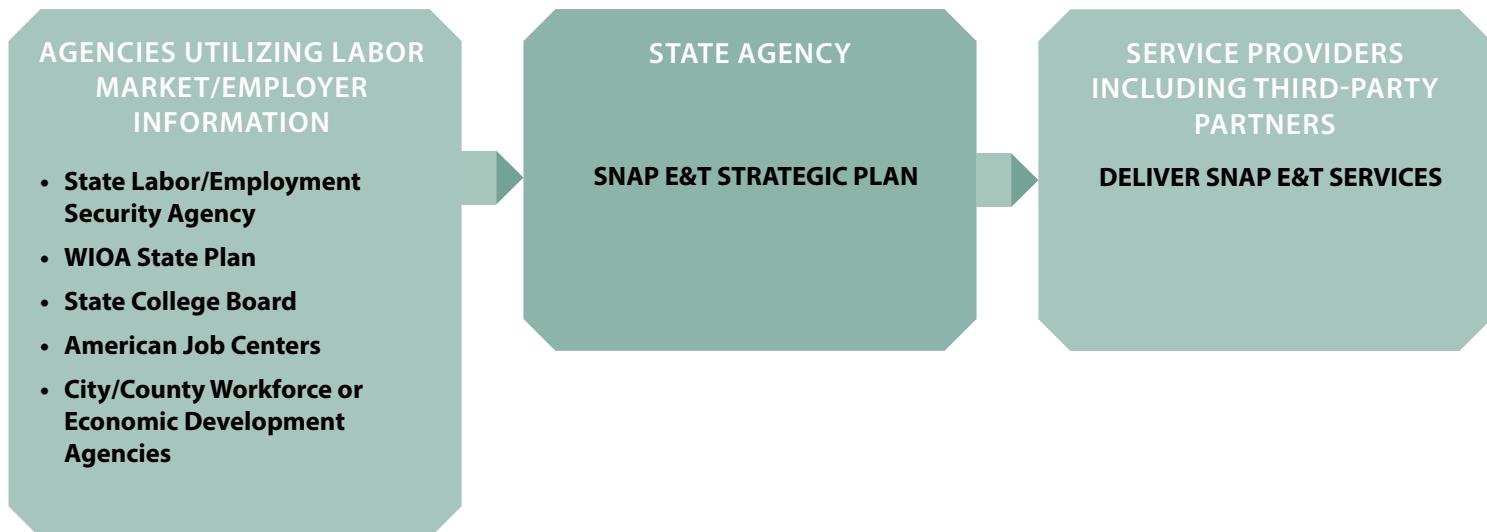
How SNAP E&T Programs Can Integrate Labor Market Information and Employer Input

While employer-driven SNAP E&T programs should incorporate both LMI and employer input in program design, **State SNAP agencies do not need to be directly responsible for developing LMI or engaging employers.** Rather, agencies should partner with State employment security or labor agencies that regularly generate and use LMI and employer input to develop their programs and initiatives, including those pursuant to WIOA.

State agencies can ask potential **third-party partners** to demonstrate that their programs are based on solid LMI and employer input and that they utilize these elements to help participants secure good jobs. The State agency should develop a process for selecting third-party partners who meet these criteria. By working with their counterpart agencies and third-party partners who use LMI and employer input, State agencies will not only save time and effort but will also contribute to a more coordinated and unified workforce system in their States. Employers may feel taxed and confused by multiple requests for data and partnership from a variety of stakeholders within workforce systems (State labor agencies and American Job Centers, community colleges, community-based organizations), and State agencies can refrain from making yet additional requests of employers by working through partners.

Charts 1 and 2, below, illustrate how a State agency can work through partners to ensure that LMI and other employer input is integrated into the State's SNAP E&T program. These two approaches can work in tandem.

Chart 1: Working with Other State Agencies



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As illustrated in Chart 1, State agencies can approach key partner agencies that have already developed LMI and other employer input to inform their current employment and training initiatives and programs. These partners can assist State agencies develop their SNAP E&T Strategic Plans, ensuring that these Plans integrate existing LMI, consistent with the State's overall workforce plan under WIOA. In this way, State agencies direct SNAP E&T investments — including via third-party partnerships — to services that support the employer-driven labor market priorities of the State and/or locality. For example, the State agency can solicit SNAP E&T partners operating training programs that focus on priority labor market sectors or employers in their area that provide good jobs.

Chart 2: Working with Third-Party Partners



In addition, SNAP agencies can utilize an approach in which they rely on potential SNAP E&T third-party partners — such as those listed in the first box in Chart 2 — to demonstrate how their training programs are employer-driven, utilizing LMI as well as employer input and partnerships that will lead participants to good jobs. This can be done through the partner identification and assessment process, detailed in *SNAP to Skills'* earlier brief, ***Securing Third-Party Partners for SNAP E&T Programs***. In this case, the prospective partner will already have the LMI and employer input required, or will need to develop it in support of its application for SNAP E&T partnership with the State.

Beyond these approaches, a State agency should also consider ways for it and its third-party partners to become more informed about current LMI. Staff at State employment security or labor agencies may be available to provide training to State agency staff and the third-party partners on what LMI data, tools and resources are available and how LMI can be integrated into training programs. These staff might also be requested to present data on current employment trends within the State or geographies within the State, or even to create customized reports on specific industries and occupations that may be considered as targets for training programs under development.³

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END NOTES

1. Joyce, K., Gould-Werth, A., Derr, M., Sanchez-Eppler, E., Clowney, C., and Roberts, L. "Using data to connect TANF clients to good jobs: An opportunity to foster WIOA partnerships." OPRE Report #2015-109. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2015. Page 2. Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/final_using_data_to_connect_tanf_clients_122115_complete.pdf
2. Id., p. 1
3. Id., p. 15-16



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