



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Rapid Cycle Evaluation: District of Columbia

Final Report

November 2024

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Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food benefits to eligible individuals with low incomes. For some, it also provides employment and training (E&T) services to improve participants' economic self-sufficiency. This report describes the Food and Nutrition Services' use of rapid cycle evaluation to test new, low-cost, small-scale interventions in SNAP E&T operations in DC.

The DC Department of Human Services (DHS) administers a voluntary SNAP E&T program for SNAP participants who are age 16 or older. DHS oversees the program, which includes seven in-house Vocational Development Specialists (VDSs) and 20 community-based organizations.

Intervention

The DHS team (including DHS and two service providers—America Works and Union Kitchen) sought to improve case management and communication with participants to prolong engagement in SNAP E&T. The DC intervention included three components: (1) creating a participant-driven, goal-based assessment, (2) providing enhanced case management through training, and (3) sending reminders for appointments and text messages that use motivational messaging and behavioral nudges. The evaluation also included an implementation study that assessed the intervention's design and administration, the challenges encountered and solutions to address them, and participants' experiences.

Outcomes

Relative to those who participated before the intervention, individuals participating during the intervention were twice as likely to receive a participant reimbursement and less likely to miss a case management appointment. However, they were also less likely to participate in a component for at least two months, suggesting a reduction in engagement after the goal-based assessment and enhanced case management models were implemented.

Factors that facilitated or hindered implementation

The DC team generally found the goal-based assessment and texting platform useful tools; however, some staff did not fully understand, embrace, or implement the tools. Additionally, after the intervention was designed, DHS rolled out several initiatives that may have affected the intervention implementation.

Lessons learned

Several lessons learned from the intervention will be helpful when considering scaling or replicating the efforts in DC. Some aspects of the intervention demonstrated that enhanced case management for SNAP E&T participants was effective and worth considering for future use. Most staff also agreed that texting was a helpful way to communicate with participants.

There were several aspects that could be improved. The use of the assessment and the timing of when to identify participants for texts were implemented inconsistently across VDSs and case managers. Staff felt they had not been consulted in the design process and that they did not receive sufficient training. Given the small group of staff conducting the work, all or a larger group of representatives could have been included in the planning to ensure staff felt heard and engaged in the development of the content. Expanding training and oversight would also ensure consistent and accurate implementation.

I. Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of the nation’s nutrition safety net and provides food benefits to eligible individuals with low incomes who are experiencing economic hardship. In addition to providing food assistance, SNAP provides work supports through employment and training (E&T) programs that help SNAP participants gain skills, training, or work experience to increase their ability to obtain regular employment. State agencies are required to operate an E&T program and have considerable flexibility to determine the services they offer and populations they serve. SNAP participants use these programs to meet work requirements, if applicable, and retain their benefits.

One of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service’s (FNS) strategic goals and priorities is to ensure the quality of the services and activities offered through SNAP E&T programs. Over

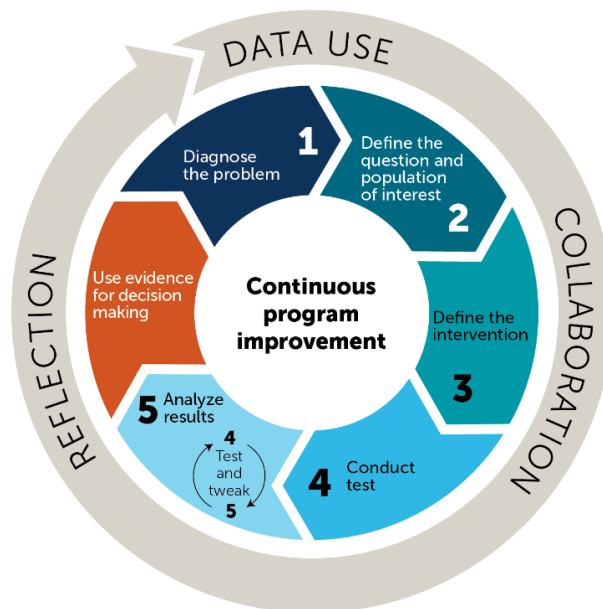
Study objectives

1. Describe how RCEs can be used to improve SNAP E&T operations, service delivery, and program outcomes
2. Design and implement RCEs to obtain impact estimates of small-scale changes on SNAP E&T outcomes for each intervention
3. Conduct an implementation evaluation of the small-scale changes and RCEs in each intervention
4. Assess the scalability of the small-scale changes to SNAP E&T operations and service delivery to other local, State, or national policies and programs
5. Determine and document the costs associated with implementing and maintaining the small-scale changes ▲

the last 10 years, FNS has invested considerable resources and provided technical assistance to help States build capacity, create more robust services, and increase engagement in their programs. A typical State, however, has limited time and resources to make substantial changes to its business process, service delivery approach, or service options given their existing responsibilities of Federal compliance operations, running the program, monitoring providers, and growing the program.

FNS contracted with Mathematica to provide States the opportunity to test low-cost, small-scale interventions in SNAP E&T operations or service delivery using rapid cycle evaluation (RCE). RCE is a powerful method for improving programs’ efficiency and effectiveness. It follows a series of steps to identify challenges and define and test potential solutions (Exhibit I.1).

Exhibit I.1. Rapid cycle evaluation



FNS selected the District of Columbia (DC) and five States to operate interventions, with the aim of improving SNAP E&T programs and identifying how to strengthen the technical assistance provided to

States. From 2021 to 2024, Mathematica collaborated with the intervention sites to identify the major challenges their SNAP E&T programs faced, which generally involved recruitment and outreach or SNAP participant engagement and receipt of services, and to create and test solutions to them.

RCE addressed five main study objectives (see Study objectives box). This report describes the RCE process, intervention design and implementation, and findings from the small-scale changes DC made to its SNAP E&T program.¹

II. DC SNAP E&T Program

The DC Department of Human Services (DHS) administers a voluntary SNAP E&T program across the district. The program serves SNAP participants who are age 16 or older and do not receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. A DHS program director and supervisor oversee the program, which includes services provided in-house by seven dedicated Vocational Development Specialists (VDSs) and those provided by 20 community-based organizations.

Most of DC's SNAP E&T participants are identified through reverse referral by one of the 20 community providers. Through reverse referrals, the providers identify individuals through their normal recruitment efforts. If the individual is a SNAP participant, the provider contacts DHS to confirm SNAP eligibility and make a referral to serve them through SNAP E&T. These providers offer assessments, case management, participant reimbursements (such as assistance with transportation, child care, and employment or training supplies) and a variety of components such as job search training, work readiness training, educational and vocational training, and job retention services.



DC SNAP E&T program

- **Area served:** District-wide
- **Target population:** SNAP participants 16 years and older not receiving TANF
- **Number served by E&T:** Over 1,500 (FY 2023, across DHS and all E&T providers)
- **Providers:** DHS (in-house services) and 20 community organizations
- **Referral type:** Primarily reverse referrals with some direct referral

Some SNAP participants are referred to E&T through a direct referral, where during SNAP certification and recertification interviews DHS eligibility workers ask participants if they are interested in SNAP E&T. Those who are interested and assessed to be work-ready (meaning they can move into employment quickly) receive employment services, case management, and participant reimbursement through DHS. DHS refers those who are not job ready or want additional education or training to a community provider, but DHS staff may still remain in contact to provide support, as needed.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the program provided services to over 1,500 people. About 15 percent of those were directly served by the VDSs at DHS and the remaining participants were served by one of the community providers. The DC SNAP E&T program has capacity to expand through both in-house and community providers. They estimate that they could serve about 2,200 participants per year without needing

¹ Reports for the other sites in the project are available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>.

additional staff or resources. However, they have not reached that goal since moving from a mandatory to a voluntary program about eight years ago. The pandemic further reduced participation in the program and it has not rebounded significantly since the emergency ended. DC continues to have a waiver of time limits for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs).²

III. Overview of Intervention

A. Intervention development

Beginning in May 2021, Mathematica began working with DC DHS leadership and supervisors, VDSs (at various points), and three community providers³ to identify the challenges they face in their program and to develop potential solutions to test. We used the Learn, Innovate, and Improve (LI²) framework to guide the DC team through this process (Exhibit III.1). It was a collaborative, co-creative partnership between Mathematica and the DC team.

The Learn phase took place in DC between May and October 2021 and helped assess the E&T program’s needs, the problems it wanted to solve, and the underlying causes. This involved a series of brainstorming sessions and interactive activities that relied on human-centered design principles. Some activities included rose-bud-thorn (having individuals name aspects of the program that were positive, areas for growth, and challenges), affinity clustering (sorting named aspects into categories), problem tree analysis (helping teams understand the causes and effects of challenges), and bullseyes (providing a tool for prioritizing challenges). Through this process, the DC team determined that their main challenges were 1) those in the SNAP E&T program are

Exhibit III.1. Learn, Innovate, and Improve (LI²) model



² ABAWDs are ages 18 to 52, able to work, and do not have any dependents. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 temporarily increased the age limit from 49 to 52 in October 2023 and to 54 again on October 1, 2024; these changes end on October 1, 2030. ABAWDs must meet both the general work requirement and an additional work requirement to receive SNAP benefits for more than three months in three years if the time limit is not waived.

³ A group of about five to six DHS staff were involved in planning for most of the period, but some staff moved to new positions or left the agency over time. All SNAP E&T providers in DC were provided information about and invited to participate in the intervention; three providers chose to participate. The providers that were involved in conversations during the planning period included America Works, Union Kitchen, and the Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA). MORCA dropped out of the intervention toward the end of the planning period due to staffing issues and their program model not fitting well with the ultimate intervention design.

not fully engaging, staying in the program, or moving into training, and 2) participants need career planning tools and resources that can be easily accessed.

The Innovate phase began in November 2021. Mathematica worked with the DC team to identify potential solutions to the primary challenges identified in the Learn phase, develop a detailed description of the changes needed to address engagement challenges, and generate a list of possible solutions. Proposed solutions were evaluated based on their estimated impact and the effort required to implement them. The DC team then selected options to explore for the intervention, including enhanced case management, an updated assessment form, and behaviorally informed text messages. Once these decisions were made, Mathematica and the DC team co-designed the intervention and evaluation. The evaluation included an analysis of outcomes before and after the intervention was implemented and, for text message reminders, a randomized controlled trial (RCT), as well as an implementation study that assessed the intervention’s design, operations, staff and participants’ experiences, and replicability.

In the Improve phase, the proposed intervention was tested to identify any necessary changes. In August 2023, the DC team conducted a road test to assess if sharing data files, uploading data to the texting platform, and sending text messages was working as planned. It generally worked, but small changes to the texting platform—changing the order of the variables for the upload file to match the data file staff were capturing—and staff guidance documents were made before the intervention began. DHS trained staff on the new processes in September 2023 and launched the intervention in October 2023. It continued through March 2024.

B. Intervention overview

The DC team identified addressing the lack of participants’ continued and deep engagement with the E&T program as their highest priority. The challenges primarily centered around the need to strengthen case management across DHS and providers, motivate and support participants’ long-term planning while addressing immediate needs, and improve messaging and outreach to

Behavioral nudge concepts

- Reminders and exposure: Reminding participants to attend their appointment and opening a line of communication with their case manager
- Hassel factors: Raising awareness of program supports and reducing barriers to engaging with case manager
- Endowment progress: Notifying participants of continued support and emphasizing engagement with case manager
- Present bias: Notifying participants of continued support and highlighting long term planning

Intervention groups

1. **Pre-intervention comparison group:** Received standard case management in the period prior to the start of the intervention. An assessment was conducted but there were no career plans or specific goal setting approaches used for case management. No behavioral nudges were used with text messaging. (82 individuals)
2. **Intervention group:** All SNAP E&T participants at DHS and the two providers who were in the program after the intervention began received the goal-based assessment and enhanced case management model. (158 individuals)

Among the intervention group, those newly entering the program were randomly assigned to one of two groups:

- **Text messaging treatment group:** Received reminder and behaviorally informed text messages. (44 individuals)
- **Text messaging control group:** Did not receive text messages. (41 individuals) ▲

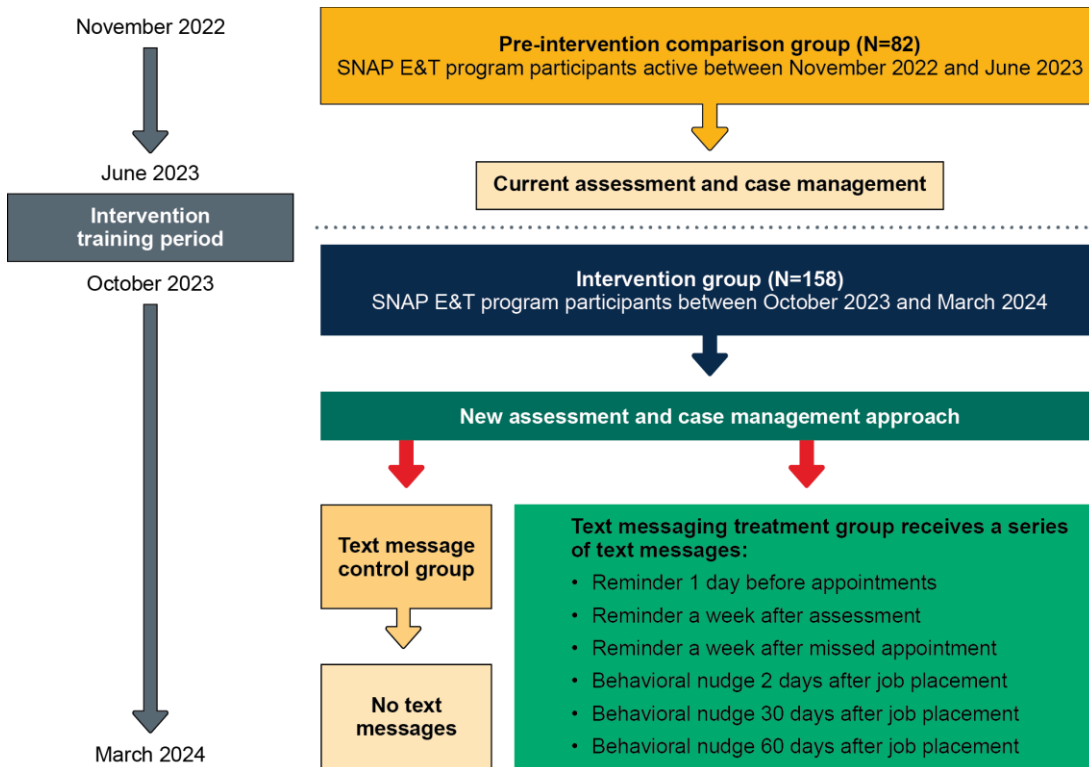
increase engagement in program activities and milestones. In response to these challenges, the primary goals of the intervention were (1) to assess whether changes to the case management model could sustain engagement in E&T and support finding employment; and (2) to determine if behavioral nudges could improve engagement in E&T activities (such as attending meetings and education or training classes).

The intervention focused on three efforts:

1. Creating a participant-driven, goal-based assessment.
2. Enhancing case management through staff training.
3. Sending participants reminders for appointments and text messages that use motivational messaging and behavioral nudges after their assessments and job placement.

The intervention group included all SNAP E&T participants who were served by DHS, America Works, and Union Kitchen’s programs between October 2023 to March 2024. The pre-intervention comparison group included participants at these locations from November 2022 through June 2023 (Exhibit III.2).

Exhibit III.2. Intervention flow diagram



Note: Red arrows indicate points of random assignment

Goal-based assessment and enhanced case management model. For the intervention, the DC team developed a participant-driven, goal-based assessment (Appendix A) that would help with goal setting. All

members of the treatment group received this assessment. VDSs and case managers at the providers incorporated the assessment into the initial paperwork for new SNAP E&T participants, which individuals completed either on their own or with a case manager. For participants already enrolled in the program when the intervention began, staff were asked to conduct the assessment at the first weekly check-in meeting during the intervention period (if the participant was not already employed or receiving retention services). VDSs and case managers used the tool as an initial assessment but would then talk with participants about goals for addressing any issues they were encountering. At future meetings, staff could then talk to the participant about what circumstances had changed (such as losing childcare or no longer having stable housing) and progress towards goals (such as completing a GED or a job readiness workshop) that would move the participant to a different level in the assessment (up or down). To facilitate enhanced case management, the VDSs and case managers received training to help improve matching between participants and employers. Case managers learned tips and techniques to have better conversations with participants about the factors that are most important to them in selecting a job. Often case managers and participants focus heavily on the wage that a job pays and the type of work, but once the participant gets the job it may not be a good fit for them. For example, it could take several hours and multiple buses to get to the job; they have afterschool child care responsibilities but there is no flexibility in the hours they need to work; or there is no opportunity for promotion or job growth over time. The training supported VDSs and case managers in asking different and deeper questions about interests and needs in a job that could help guide participants to the types of employers that meet their needs. Engaging in these types of conversations also created the opportunity for VDSs and case managers to identify the need for participants to obtain more education, skills, or training for the type of job that would best fit their needs. When possible, VDSs and case managers were to refer participants to additional activities to build their skills before moving into employment.

Text messaging. In addition to receiving the assessment and enhanced case management, some individuals in the intervention group received behaviorally informed text messages. DHS used a texting platform to automatically send a variety of text messages to 44 SNAP participants. The number and type of text messages received were based on each person's individual progression through the program and circumstances. DHS sent five types of text messages using reminder, hassle factors, endowed progress, and present bias concepts (see box and Appendix B). The texts were sent to remind participants about appointments in advance, after an assessment, and after a missed appointment or class, as well as at three points after a job placement (Appendix B). The timing of messages was:

- one day prior to appointments
- 2 days after job placement
- 30 days after job placement
- 60 days after job placement
- 5-7 days after assessments and/or missed appointments.

Participants could text back through the platform and VDSs and case managers could use the platform to respond. The SNAP E&T program supervisor and the program manager at DHS were also able to access the platform to monitor the traffic and ensure participants were receiving responses in a timely manner.

C. Evaluation design

Pre-post design. Mathematica conducted a pre-post analysis to assess how switching to the goal-based assessment and case management model affected engagement in SNAP E&T. This analysis compared outcomes between the intervention group (SNAP E&T participants who received the goal-based assessment and case management model) and those who were enrolled in SNAP E&T during the year prior and therefore did not receive the enhanced case management model (the comparison group).

Because individuals were not randomly assigned to the pre-intervention and intervention groups, differences in outcomes between the groups using this design may be biased if there are cross-group differences in the characteristics that are also related to the outcomes of interest. Findings could also be biased if there were changes over time in any factors other than the implementation of the intervention, which could lead to differences in outcomes before and after the intervention was implemented. As shown in Technical Supplement Table A.2, based on a small set of characteristics available in administrative data, individuals in the pre-intervention group were generally similar to those in the intervention group, though intervention group members were more likely to be ABAWDs.

Experimental design. Mathematica conducted an RCT to estimate the impact of behaviorally informed text messaging outreach among a subset of intervention group members. DC DHS randomly assigned newly enrolled individuals for whom they had access to timely information on individual's progression through the program, which was used to inform the timing of the text messaging outreach sent to treatment group members. Individuals in this subset of the intervention group made up 85 of the 158 intervention group members and were randomly assigned to a treatment group that received text message reminders or a control group that did not.

Research questions. Together, the pre-post and experimental designs answer the following research questions:

- Are the new assessment and case management approaches more effective in increasing SNAP E&T engagement than pre-intervention practices? Do they increase the likelihood of individuals identifying and obtaining participant reimbursements?
- To what extent is there a change in the percentages of SNAP participants who are engaged in job retention programs? (This may assess if participants continue to be engaged in SNAP E&T once employed.)
- Are reminders and behaviorally informed text messages more effective in increasing SNAP E&T engagement and improving attendance of appointments than current practices?
- Which type of reminder message or message content is most effective in increasing SNAP E&T engagement with a case manager?

The evaluation also included an implementation study that assessed the intervention's design and administration, the challenges encountered and solutions to address them, and SNAP participants' experience with the intervention.

Mathematica collected and analyzed several types of data to support the evaluation:

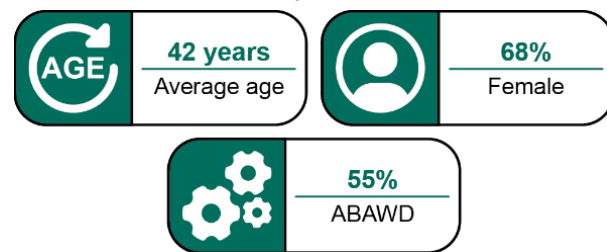
- **SNAP E&T outcome data and intervention tracking data** describe the demographic characteristics of individuals at the time of enrollment into SNAP E&T. These data also describe outcomes including receipt of participant reimbursements, enrollment in job retention components, and whether individuals were enrolled in a SNAP E&T component for at least one month. Intervention tracking data describes the deployment and receipt of text reminders sent by DHS.
- **Implementation data** describe staff and SNAP participant experiences with the interventions, lessons learned, and factors that facilitated or hindered successful implementation. Mathematica collected implementation data through staff interviews, SNAP participant focus groups, and SNAP participant in-depth interviews.

Additional detail on the data collected and evaluation methodology is available in the Technical Supplement to the SNAP E&T RCE final reports.

D. Characteristics of individuals in the analysis

Exhibit III.3 shows the key characteristics of the 300 individuals included in the analysis. Most individuals were women (68 percent). Their average age was 42, with 68 percent between 25 and 49 years old. Fifty-five percent were ABAWDs, although the time limit was waived for this group.

Exhibit III.3. Baseline characteristics of individuals in the analysis



Source: SNAP E&T data.

Note: See Technical Supplement for additional characteristics. ABAWD = able-bodied adults without dependents.

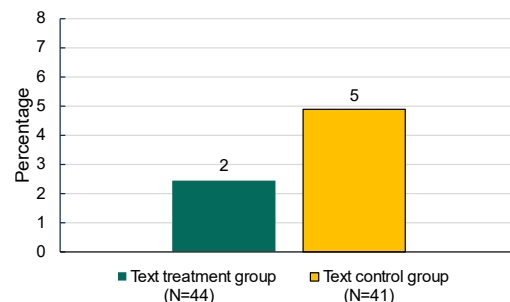
IV. Findings

A. Impact evaluation

Those in the text message treatment group were less likely to miss a case management appointment during the observation period (2 versus 5 percent; Exhibit IV.1 and Appendix Table C.3). This impact is promising, representing a 60 percent decrease in the rate of missed appointments, despite not being statistically significant due to a low number of individuals randomly assigned.

Overall, those individuals in the intervention group, who received the goal-based assessment and enhanced case management, were twice as likely to receive a participant reimbursement than those in the pre-intervention group (25 versus 12 percent; Exhibit IV.2 and Appendix Table C.1). The majority of reimbursements were for transportation

Exhibit IV.1. Percentage of individuals in the intervention group who missed a case management appointment



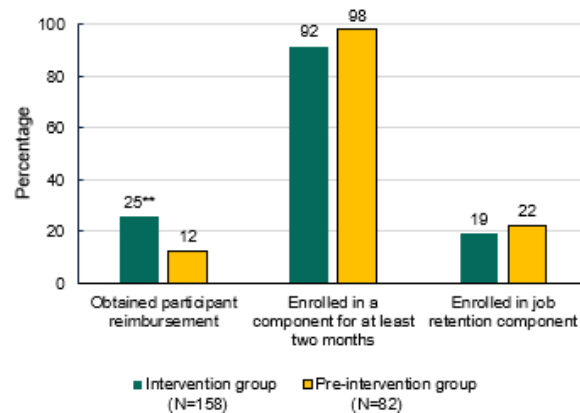
Source: SNAP E&T outcome data.

Impacts not statistically significant from zero at the 0.10 level.

assistance in both the pre-intervention and the intervention group. This finding is likely related to fewer individuals missing appointments due to text messaging. Participant reimbursements are generally distributed during meetings with a VDS or case manager, so if fewer appointments were missed it is likely that more reimbursements were provided.

Individuals in the intervention group were 7 percentage points less likely than those in the pre-intervention group to participate in a component for at least two months (92 versus 98 percent; Exhibit IV.2), though this difference was not statistically significant.⁴ The percentages of people who enrolled in a job retention component were generally similar across groups (19 versus 22 percent, not statistically significant).

Exhibit IV.2. SNAP E&T engagement before and after the intervention



Source: SNAP E&T outcome data.

** Difference relative to the pre-intervention group that did not receive enhanced case management and assessment significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test.

B. Implementation evaluation

The implementation evaluation of the intervention assessed the intervention’s design and administration, the challenges encountered and solutions to address them, and SNAP participants’ experiences.

1. Factors that facilitated or hindered successful implementation

After the intervention was designed, there were several initiatives rolled out at DHS that may have affected the implementation of the intervention. DHS staff discussed three efforts that coincided with the intervention and some staff suggested these reduced the potential effectiveness of the intervention.

1. When the intervention planning began, DHS was using an assessment that they did not feel was human centered (it was long and the wording of questions could sound critical or unsympathetic). Staff also did not have a separate career plan template for goal setting and the assessment was not a helpful tool for this. During this time, though, others at DHS were starting to develop an agency-wide intake assessment for TANF and other workforce programs. The agency rolled out this new electronic assessment in late 2022 to all programs at DHS; VDSs also were expected to use it for SNAP E&T. This

⁴ Because individuals in the intervention group were more likely than those in the pre-intervention group to be ABAWDs (77 percent versus 61 percent; Technical Supplement Table A.2), we re-estimated the analysis by ABAWD status. In the absence of time limits, ABAWD status serves as a proxy for individuals that are potentially more job ready because they do not have dependents and are not disabled. For all outcomes, however, differences between the intervention and pre-intervention comparison group were larger for individuals who were not ABAWDs compared to those who were, though the findings were generally similar for both groups (Appendix Table C.2). Thus, the reduction in the percentage of individuals who participated in a component for at least two months does not reflect the intervention group having a greater percentage of ABAWDs.

was a one-time assessment with no goal setting, but it was a comprehensive assessment that had skip logic to reduce the length and it used more human-centered language. VDSs suggested that the comprehensive assessment overlapped in many places with the intervention's goal-based assessment. However, staff pointed out that unlike the comprehensive assessment, the intervention assessment had more nuanced and participant-centered questions; was a tool that customers could see and be a part of; and lent itself to goal setting and continuing conversations throughout the time participants were in the program.

2. VDSs received cell phones to use with SNAP E&T participants, so some had begun using texting as a way to communicate with participants. The typical texting communications were not structured and did not use behavioral nudges, but they were another way to check in about quick issues or locate people. Also, each VDS had their own phone, so there was no ability for supervisors to oversee communication or manage the communication when a staff member was on vacation or extended leave.
3. The SNAP E&T program was developing and rolling out a management information system (MIS) specifically for E&T for several years. It was launched in 2022, but the program has continually added features and variables and made needed changes to the MIS. Although this did not directly affect the elements of the intervention, it was a competing priority for staff during the intervention period, with many DHS staff highlighting the work involved with each change or new feature.

Assessment and case management. DHS leadership and case managers at the providers were enthusiastic about the ease of using the participant-driven, goal-based assessment. They thought the layout and wording of the questions aided conversations with individuals in the intervention. Case managers at the providers discussed wanting to incorporate the goal-based assessment into their case management approach after the intervention as it encouraged ongoing communication about goals and issues with SNAP E&T participants; before the intervention, the assessment was a one-time snapshot of a participant's circumstances and this information was not revisited. The assessment for the intervention was reviewed during each case management appointment and allowed for personal information to be collected over a period of time resulting in a dynamic understanding of evolving life circumstances and professional goals.

Despite many of the staff liking the assessment, not all staff fully understood, embraced, or implemented it. Some staff did not understand how the assessment folded into the existing case management flow with SNAP E&T participants. This challenge was primarily among the VDSs. They shared that at times it was unclear if they should use the assessment



"...what's the mission when you're dealing with a person for a limited amount of time...for years past, well, we've got basically some of the same data. Hey, look, all we need is like 20 or 30 minutes of your time. Okay? We'll go ahead and take care of you and be able to process you out. Now it's like, Oh, we'll take you around an hour, hour and a half...sometimes depending on what their situation is, what their lifestyle is, they're not as motivated. You try to address that, but you're trying to get all this documentation together, it can be a burden."

– VDS staff member

when speaking with existing participants who had completed the previous assessment when first joining the program. For individuals who were farther along in the SNAP E&T program, VDSs felt that adding the assessment was not relevant and was better suited for new SNAP E&T participants. Some of the VDSs also felt the assessment and goal setting was redundant with what they were already doing. Although the goal-based assessment was intended to be revisited during case management appointments, VDSs suggested that most of the information (although asked in different ways) was captured in the current assessment they conduct at intake with new participants. As a result, they viewed the goal-based assessment as duplicative and not adding value. It increased the time participants needed to spend on intake and staff needed to complete the documentation and data entry. Some staff shared that they did not use the assessment consistently throughout the intervention or in the way that was expected.

Text messaging. The use of a texting platform also had mixed results from staff. Overall, staff thought the platform was easy to use for texting, and DHS leadership liked the ability to monitor and manage the communication. Although a texting platform was new for DHS, the case managers at America Works and Union Kitchen use these types of platforms for communicating with SNAP E&T participants and did not report issues responding to text messages.

The uploading process for DHS staff was initially challenging. DHS staff uploaded the data file with data every two days—adding new participants and dates for the events that trigger a text message, such as an appointment reminder. This process was difficult for staff to navigate initially and it took several weeks for them to solidify the process and consistently collect and upload data on schedule. Staff shared that there was a learning curve for them to understand both the technology but also the internal processes for the intervention. In addition to some of the technological struggles, some of the VDSs pointed out that they were used to communicating with individuals in the SNAP E&T program on their own work cell phones, and logging into the system was “one more thing” to remember. The VDS supervisor needed to remind some staff a few times to use the platform and respond to participants for them to get in the habit of checking for texts and responding.

2. SNAP participant experience

SNAP participants who shared their experiences in the intervention through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus groups offered a range of views and thoughts.

Most of the IDI and focus group participants did not recall receiving any text messages related to the intervention or had difficulty recalling the content of the messages. A few IDI members recalled receiving text messages, but after further discussion they realized it was about SNAP or SNAP E&T, but not related to the intervention.



“I know I get - I would get text messages about SNAP. But I couldn't say that it was about SNAP E&T specifically.”

– In-depth interview respondent

A few IDI members were able to remember getting the text messages, and they found them to be straightforward and useful. They described them as helpful in keeping SNAP E&T participants on top of upcoming milestones with their busy schedules. They also pointed out that they are likely to see time sensitive information from a text, because they are usually on their phones. In addition, focus group and

IDI members said the number and frequency of text messages received was the right amount and they understood the content.

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"I think the text message was better for me personally just because I get a lot of emails and then I might not notice them. So, she was sending me stuff. The first case worker. I was like, oh man, I missed that. That was, you know, I wish I would have saw that."

– In-depth interview respondent

Although most participants did not recall the messages, many said that using text messages to remind them of appointments, provide program opportunities, and for day-to-day communication would be a beneficial and welcomed method for communication. Some suggested that a combination of text and email messages would be their preferred method of communication, due to the convenience and brevity of messages. One focus group member shared: "I prefer [text and

emails], you know, because if you text me or email it, I can always go back and reread it. Like a phone call, a lot of people don't answer their phones and people rarely check their voice messages." A small subset of respondents preferred email over text as they are checking their inbox more frequently while they are actively job searching.

All of the focus group and IDI members participated in the DC SNAP E&T program and were asked about their thoughts on their experiences with the program. The findings were mixed. Some respondents appreciated the support received through DC's E&T program and recognized it as a stepping stone towards achieving employment related goals. Several participants recalled receiving quality case management, access to services and resources that advanced their professional trajectory, and clear and defined steps to completing the program. As a result, they saw value in SNAP E&T services and would recommend the program. Other participants

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"I'm learning from [SNAP E&T], I'm getting knowledge from it and I can still receive my benefits and then after this cohort, you can still sign up [for] another cohort and still do like it's not a limit to it...you can keep your benefits and keep it moving so you can keep yourself learning and building on your resume, that's what I really like about it and it's for free."

– In-depth interview respondent

thought that although the program offered an array of services, there were limitations. Common issues discussed included that the SNAP E&T information online was outdated and not useful for selecting a provider, and staff often had limited capacity that led to a lack of or no communication. One focus group member stated they did not recommend the program because they felt the program resources were not helpful and suggested: "Make sure you weed out the outdated information. Stop recycling it because it's like a lot of people, they're already discouraged." This indicates that if people think they can get something that is not actually available to them, it is not helpful in encouraging them to participate.

V. Lessons Learned

The goal of the evaluation was to determine whether an enhanced case management and text messaging approach was effective in prolonging engagement in SNAP E&T services. In this section, we highlight

aspects of the intervention that worked well and could be built upon, discuss changes that the DC team could make for future case management and text approaches, and point to resources needed to continue or scale up this type of intervention.

A. What worked and can be built upon?

Several aspects of the intervention demonstrated that enhanced case management for SNAP E&T participants was effective and worth considering for future use. DHS leadership indicated that they liked the participant-driven, goal-based assessment and would like to use it moving forward. VDSs and case managers agreed that the format and the framing of the questions worked well, but the VDSs were clear that if they used the assessment from the intervention, it should replace the current assessment they use and not be used in tandem. DHS leadership agreed that there needed to be a more streamlined process for conducting assessments to remove redundancies. Overall, staff felt the goal-based assessment helped to standardize the case management process and to better document the discussions with SNAP E&T participants across staff. The ongoing conversations around goals and steps to address any barriers provided opportunities to identify additional services or participant reimbursements that were needed.

Most staff agreed that texting was a helpful way to communicate with some participants who preferred to communicate electronically or who were not able to respond or talk during office hours. They suggested that this approach should continue, but staff were mixed about what technology to use. The VDSs would prefer to use their cell phones for texting so they do not need to log into and access another system. They also felt having two phone numbers (one from the texting platform and one from their own phone) was confusing for participants. They would suggest using a single number consistently. DHS leadership found the texting platform to be more flexible, as it accommodated sending both automated and mass texts in addition to one-on-one texting, and provided better monitoring and oversight to ensure texts were returned and issues were fully addressed.

B. Changes needed for replicating the intervention and expanding its scale

The intervention overall demonstrated the potential usefulness of offering enhanced case management and text message approaches to increase participant engagement. However, there were several aspects of the intervention that could or should be improved for more effective scaling. Conducting the assessment and identifying participants who should receive texts were implemented inconsistently across VDSs and case managers. There were two primary reasons for this. First, several staff did not feel like they were consulted enough about the intervention design and were not bought-in to the idea of it. During the planning, some, but not all, of the VDSs and case managers were included at various points and asked to share their experiences, thoughts, and opinions. Given the small group of staff conducting the work, all or a larger group of representatives could have been included in the planning at more frequent junctures to ensure staff felt heard and engaged in the development of the content. Second, some staff reported that the amount of training and level of detail for conducting the assessment and follow-up, and how that fit into the larger case management model, was not sufficient. Staff agreed that in general the training was not efficient and did not provide enough “hands on” or interactive components. One VDS described it as: “It was really just like, here's the assessment and talking about what it is and on your own figuring out that piece of it.” Most agreed that they would have liked an in-person training where they walked through the process in detail. They also suggested more opportunities for follow-up training could have helped.

During discussions with staff near the end of the intervention, one VDS noted that they had only recently started using the goal-based assessment with participants because they were in a different role when the intervention began and did not receive formal training when they joined the VDSs. Expanding the training and oversight during the intervention should be included in the future to ensure consistent and accurate implementation.

C. Resources needed to continue the changes made through the intervention

DHS did not anticipate that expanding or continuing the intervention would require additional resources, except for the texting platform, if the agency chose to continue using it. The cost would be about \$9,000 to \$12,000 per year for ongoing use. DHS indicated, however, that they may consider developing texting capabilities in house with the ability to connect the texting platform to their data systems for easier automation and uploading of contact lists. They anticipated they would be able to cover ongoing costs through additional SNAP E&T administrative funds.

Appendix A.

Assessment

		Need help	Ready to explore	Making progress	Confident and good to go		
Deciding on a career	Career Awareness	I don't know what career I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know what career I want.
	Career Opportunities	I don't know where to go to find "good jobs" that interest me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know where to find "good jobs" that interest me.
	Career Decision	I don't know which careers are in demand in our region.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know which careers are in demand in our region.
	Wages and salary		I don't know what I need to earn to meet my current expenses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
		I don't know what I should expect to be paid in my career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know what I am likely to be paid in my career.
Preparing for a career	Credentials	The career I want may require a license, diploma, or certificate but I don't know.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have a license, diploma, or certificate for the job I want.
		I am not sure how to pick a high quality school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know how to pick a high quality school.
Getting the job	High school diploma/GED	I don't have a high school diploma or GED.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have a high school diploma or GED.
		Job search	I don't have a resume, cover letter, or experience applying to jobs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Job interviewing	Interviewing for a job makes me uncomfortable and I'm not sure how to get better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am comfortable interviewing for a job.
Growing your career	Starting a job	I'm not sure how to succeed or what to expect starting a new job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I feel confident starting a new job.
		I don't have what I need to start work (proper attire, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have what I need to start work (proper attire, etc.).
		I don't have the skills I need to be successful in my workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have the skills I need to be successful in my workplace.

			Need help	Ready to explore	Making progress	Confident and good to go	
		I don't understand what is expected from me at my new job.	○	○	○	○	I understand what is expected from me at my new job.
	Career growth	I don't have a plan for advancing my career.	○	○	○	○	I have a plan for advancing my career.
Tech.	Access to Technology	I don't have access to a computer or internet	○	○	○	○	I have access to a computer and/or internet.
		I don't feel comfortable or know how to use a computer.	○	○	○	○	I feel confident using a computer.
	Housing	I don't have housing.	○	○	○	○	I have stable and safe housing.
Supports	Childcare	I have no child care.	○	○	○	○	I have reliable childcare and a backup plan.
	Transportation	I have no transportation.	○	○	○	○	I have reliable transportation and a backup plan.
	Personal well-being	My personal well-being or mental health needs attention.	○	○	○	○	I'm doing well and fully able to work.

Appendix B.

Text Message Content

Table B.1. Text Message Content

Message	Behavioral nudge	Timing
Hi [NAME] this is [NAME] from [ORG.]. Your next case management appointment is at [XX:XX] on [DAY].	Reminders and exposure	1 day prior to appointment
Hi [NAME], we know you recently began a new job. Did you know you are now eligible for transportation assistance and other benefits to help you keep your job?	Hassle factors	2 days after job placement
Hi [NAME], congratulations on your new job. This is the first step toward a better career. Your case manager is here to help you keep your job and move forward in your career.	Endowed progress	30 days after job placement
[Name], now that you're settled in your job, it is time to start thinking about your future. We can still help you in your next level of growth, to work on skills to help you move up and earn more.	Present bias	60 days after job placement
Hi [NAME], this is [NAME] from [ORG.]. Did you know SNAP E&T can provide you with transportation, childcare, and other support to help make it easier to make it to meetings with your case manager?	Hassle factors	5-7 days after assessment and after any missed appointment

Appendix C.

Supplemental tables

Table C.1. Impacts of goal-based assessment and enhanced case management approach

Outcome	Intervention group	Pre-intervention group	Difference
Obtained participant reimbursement (%)	25.44	12.20	13.25**
Enrolled in a job retention component (%)	19.02	21.95	-2.93
Enrolled in a component for two months or more (%)	91.63	98.44	-6.81
Number of observations	158	82	

Source: SNAP E&T outcome data.

***/**/* Difference between pre- and post- intervention group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed.

Table C.2. Impacts of goal-based assessment and enhanced case management approach, by ABAWD status

Outcome	ABAWD			Non-ABAWD		
	Intervention group	Pre-intervention group	Difference	Intervention group	Pre-intervention group	Difference
Obtained participant reimbursement (%)	21.89	14.00	7.89	31.76	9.38	22.39**
Enrolled in a job retention component (%)	25.18	22.00	3.18^	5.20	21.88	-16.68**
Enrolled in a component for two months or more (%)	90.26	97.22	-6.96	90.16	100.00	-9.84
Number of observations	122	50		36	32	

Source: SNAP E&T outcome data.

***/**/* Difference between treatment and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

^^^/^^/^^ Difference across subgroups significantly different at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

ABAWD=able-bodied adults without dependents.

Table C.3. Impacts of behaviorally informed text messaging

Outcome	Text treatment group	Text control group	Difference
Any missed appointments (%)	2.45	4.88	-2.43
Obtained participant reimbursement (%)	39.66	46.34	-6.68
Enrolled in a job retention component (%)	15.58	21.95	-6.37
Number of observations	44	41	

Source: SNAP E&T outcome data.

***/**/* Difference between treatment and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

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