

USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T): Rapid Cycle Evaluation of Seven Interventions (Summary)

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 16 nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with the mission to increase food security and reduce hunger—in partnership with cooperating organizations—by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

In addition to providing nutrition assistance to eligible low-income households, SNAP provides employment and training activities and services to help participants improve their economic self-sufficiency and to meet applicable work requirements.¹ All 53 SNAP State agencies are required to operate SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) and have considerable flexibility in the design of their programs. One of FNS's priorities is to strengthen SNAP E&T by helping SNAP agencies serve more SNAP participants with high-quality services.

The Rapid Cycle Evaluation project provided interested States the opportunity to test small scale operational changes for improving program operations and delivery. Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Rhode Island participated in developing and rigorously evaluating site-specific interventions.

Key Findings Across Interventions

- All interventions incorporated text messaging to increase program enrollment, remind SNAP E&T participants about appointments or facilitate referrals to services.
- Although enrollment in SNAP E&T remained very low, use of text messages appeared to increase enrollment in some interventions.
- Participant-driven assessments can help case managers better match SNAP participants with services and SNAP E&T providers offering program activities and services that meet their goals.
- The seven interventions provided numerous lessons for future initiatives for improving enrollment and engagement in SNAP E&T.

Methods

Each intervention site partnered with the study contractor and collaboratively developed their intervention using the learn, innovate and improve model (LI²). The **learn phase** assessed organization needs and the problem areas. In the **innovate phase**, sites developed a list of potential solutions. During the **improve phase**, interventions were tested to identify any necessary changes to the functionality of the technical and operational elements.

Table 1 lists the sites, intervention goals and approaches implemented (treatment).

Interventions launched between September 2023 and February 2024 and all data collection activities were completed by July 2024. The implementation evaluation included semi-structured interviews with program administrators and key staff; participant focus groups and in-depth interviews; and, in four sites, participant surveys. For the impact evaluation, participants were randomly assigned to the control (usual practice) or treatment (received intervention) groups and administrative data was analyzed to measure impacts.

¹ SNAP has two sets of work requirements: 1) the general work requirements and 2) the able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) work requirement and time limit. Individuals 16-59 years who do not meet Federal exemptions are required to comply with general work requirements. Individuals 18 to 54 year old without dependents must meet general work requirements unless exempted and an additional work requirement for ABAWDs (unless excepted) to get SNAP benefits for more than 3 months in 3 years (time limit). See [SNAP Work Requirements](#).

Table 1: Intervention Goals and Approaches Used

Site	Goal(s)	Approach
Colorado	Increase SNAP E&T enrollment	Text messages and emails; Postcards
Connecticut	Improve and standardize case management in community colleges	Text messages; New assessment
District of Columbia	Improve case management; Prolong SNAP E&T engagement	Text messages; New assessment
Massachusetts	Increase SNAP E&T enrollment	Text messages
Minnesota-Hennepin County	Directly enroll ABAWDs ²	Text messages
Minnesota-Rural Counties	Increase SNAP E&T enrollment	Text messages
Rhode Island	Increase SNAP E&T enrollment; Improve referrals to providers	Text messages; Enhanced assessment

SNAP E&T = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training

ABAWDs = Able-bodied adults without dependents

Overall findings are summarized below. The seven site-specific reports present detailed findings. Three practitioner briefs present cross-site takeaways on text messaging, participant assessments, and barriers to participation.

Findings

All interventions incorporated text messaging to increase program enrollment, remind SNAP E&T participants about appointments, or facilitate referrals to services.

Behavioral nudges were incorporated into text messages. For example, messages used the endowment effect to raise SNAP participant's awareness that by participating in SNAP they were eligible for free education and training and once enrolled in SNAP E&T they could access support services such as payment for transportation.

Although enrollment in SNAP E&T remained very low in both treatment and control groups, use of text messages appeared to increase enrollment in some interventions.

In Colorado, individuals who received text messages were 20 percent more likely to enroll in SNAP E&T than those who did not (0.6 percent versus 0.5 percent). Receiving a

² Direct enrollment occurs when SNAP applicants are informed about SNAP E&T program during the application process and individuals call E&T staff to enroll as opposed to SNAP participants being referred to the program by SNAP E&T providers (reverse referral).

combination of text messages and email was more effective (0.8 percent versus 0.5 percent). In Rhode Island and rural counties in Minnesota, individuals who received text messages were twice as likely to enroll as those who were not texted, 0.9 percent versus 0.4 percent and 0.28 percent versus 0.15 percent, respectively. Individuals who received text messages in Massachusetts were three times as likely to enroll (0.03 percent versus 0.01 percent), and messages that increased program awareness were more effective in increasing enrollment than messages that reminded participants of their eligibility for SNAP E&T (0.04 percent versus 0.01 percent).

Participant-driven assessments can help case managers better match SNAP participants with services and SNAP E&T providers offering program activities and services that meet their goals.

SNAP participants in Rhode Island who completed a participant-centered³ assessment were more likely to enroll in SNAP E&T than those who completed a standard assessment (14 percent versus 5 percent). The combination of a participant-driven, goal-based assessment with enhanced case management doubled the participants who received participant reimbursements in District of Columbia.

The seven interventions provided numerous lessons for future initiatives for improving enrollment and participation in SNAP E&T.

These include: (1) targeting outreach campaigns to likely participants; (2) tailoring messages to participant needs; (3) socializing SNAP participants to receiving text and email messages from the program and SNAP E&T; (4) employing multiple methods of communication e.g. text and emails; (5) understanding the technological capability of messaging platforms e.g. whether personalized messages can be sent and providing staff training on effective use; (6) providing timely responses to participant inquires after an outreach campaign; (7) training case managers on using participant

³ A participant-driven assessment focuses on the individual's strengths, motivations, and goals. A standard assessment identifies the individuals needs and barriers, but the case manager, not the participant, primarily identifies where changes should occur.

-driven assessments; and (8) employing participant-driven assessments to connect participants to appropriate trainings and providers and for identifying and addressing participant barriers to participation.

For More Information:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training Rapid Cycle Evaluation: Final Reports for Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Minnesota: Hennepin County, Minnesota: Rural counties and Rhode Island. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. 47QRAA18D00BQ, Order No. 12319821F0015, Princeton, NJ: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Anna Vaudin. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.