

GROWING AND STRENGTHENING SNAP E&T PROGRAMS



Using a Strategy Map to Guide Your SNAP E&T Program

States can achieve positive outcomes and realize the full potential of SNAP E&T by creating a deliberate strategy for operating the program.

A strategy makes a compelling argument for why your SNAP E&T program’s case management, participant reimbursements, and E&T components will lead to measurable positive outcomes for the target population in your State’s unique context.

A strategy map is a flexible tool that can help you **design** an overarching approach or one specific part of the SNAP E&T program; **communicate** within and outside the State agency about this approach; and **reflect** on the approach, how it is working, and what to improve.

Decide how to use your strategy map

This tool is designed to help you think and plan strategically. Here are three specific ways you can use a strategy map to design your SNAP E&T program.



See the big picture

A strategy map is a great way to step back and consider the big picture of your SNAP E&T program. Think of this as an exercise in telling a story. A story should be compelling and make sense from beginning to end. Using the strategy map in this way can help States ensure their programs align with the stated vision and mission by considering how the program elements fit together as a whole.

Get started

- Convene a group of leaders in your SNAP E&T program (possibly including partners).
- The strategy map has seven parts. Work through each of them together by posing reflection questions to the group.
- Summarize the key points for each part of the map. Remember, the idea is to capture the big picture, not every policy or detail about your program. Stay big picture—focus on what is most important.



Plan a change

States routinely adjust, add on to, or revise SNAP E&T programs to ensure they are efficient and effective. A strategy map can help with these incremental improvements. For example, you may wish to add a new E&T component and begin offering it in the next fiscal year, or redesign the case management approach to be more person-centered and rooted in coaching practices. You can explore these changes—big or small—by using a strategy map.

Get started

- Make sure you are clear on the program’s vision and mission, target population, and context.
- Consider the change (for example, a new component) in light of the program vision and mission, target population, and context. How does the change advance your vision and mission? How does it serve your target population?
- Consider how the change will fit with your current partners and providers. Does it fit well, or do you need new partners?
- Consider how the change will contribute to the outcomes you care about. Will the change create new outcomes worth measuring?



Align programming with a partner or provider

States are responsible for casting the vision and mission of the SNAP E&T program and ensuring that external partners and providers are aligned. For example, you may be onboarding a new provider organization or partnering with an intermediary to build a network of providers and services in the State. You can use the strategy map to encourage and facilitate this cohesion and alignment.

Get started

- Start by outlining the program’s vision and mission, target population, and context along with the important overarching outcomes of interest to your program. Encourage the partner or provider to review and reflect on these “fixed” parts of the program.
- Ask the partner or provider to consider the case management, participant reimbursements, and SNAP E&T components sections of this tool as they relate to the provider’s approach to service delivery. What do they do? How do they do it?
- Reflect on the alignment and use this tool to promote constructive dialogue between your State and the partner or provider.

Define the key parts of your strategy map

A strategy map involves defining seven key parts of your State’s SNAP E&T program and considering how these parts fit together in a compelling way to give your program a clear sense of direction. This tool offers a set of prompts that your State team (and your partners) can use to define and refine each part, a template that pulls together summaries of each part into a one-page strategy map, and a set of reflection questions to help you assess your strategy as a whole.



Why?

Vision and mission

Vision and mission statements guide the SNAP E&T program; they provide essential direction for your program. A vision statement describes in a compelling way the future reality your SNAP E&T program is working toward. A mission statement succinctly describes what your program does to work toward the vision. These statements should reflect your program's guiding principles and values.

Reflection questions

- What is the overarching goal of your SNAP E&T program?
- What is a compelling and inspiring description of the future you envision for SNAP E&T participants?
- If you had to sum it up in one succinct statement, what is the primary purpose of your program?



Who?

Target population

Defining a target population brings focus and intentionality to the design and operation of your SNAP E&T program. Each State's target population will be unique based on the different communities and demographic groups the State serves. It's important to consider the diverse needs of those you serve and how your program can adapt to meet their varied experiences. It's also important to customize the way you will recruit and engage your target population to be responsive to their circumstances, goals, and needs.

Reflection questions

- Whom does your SNAP E&T program serve?
- Who is required to participate? Who can voluntarily participate?
- Who typically engages with your program? Who does not engage?
- Are there populations you would like to reach and serve through SNAP E&T, but have not been able to?
- What strategies is your State using to reach and recruit individuals in the target population into the program? Why?
- How do you communicate the purpose and value of the program with your target population?



Where?

Context and environment

Economic, cultural, and social conditions can vary significantly within and across States. For example, the labor market in an urban area looks quite different from the labor market in rural areas; serving Tribal communities may require unique considerations and consultation with their leaders. It is important to account for how these and other contextual factors can shape your SNAP E&T program.

Reflection questions

- How would you summarize the labor market right now for SNAP E&T participants in your State? In urban areas? In rural areas? How does the labor market vary across your State?
- What aspects of your State's political or policy environment shapes your SNAP E&T program—for example, political climate, a State- versus County-administered system, or procurement policies?
- How does the geographic availability of services vary across your State? How available are services, and are they convenient for the target population to access?
- Does your State operate a mandatory program, a voluntary program, or both? What constraints and opportunities does this present?
- What is your State agency's staffing structure? Are eligibility staff integrated with or separate from case management staff, for example? Do staff serve other federal programs?



What?
How?

Case management and participant reimbursements

Case management shapes the relationship your program creates with SNAP E&T participants. It often includes elements of coaching, navigation, and connecting participants with relevant and timely supportive services. In SNAP E&T, one of these supports is participant reimbursements, which help participants successfully engage in the program and achieve their goals. Participant reimbursements include things like dependent care, transportation, educational or work supplies, and personal safety or hygiene items.

Reflection questions

- Why do you offer case management (beyond the fact that it is required)?
- What is the value of case management to SNAP E&T participants in your program?
- What do you include in case management services, at a minimum—for example, an intake assessment, individualized service plan, progress monitoring, and referral coordination?
- How do you provide case management? How do you define quality case management and determine which competencies to require?
- Why do you offer participant reimbursements and supportive services (beyond the fact that they are required)?
- What is your approach to providing participant reimbursements? Why do you do it this way?



What?
How?

SNAP E&T components

E&T components are the education and training activities that your SNAP E&T program offers to participants, including educational programs, work-based learning, supervised job search, job search training, workfare, work activity, self-employment training, and job retention services. Each component is supported by specific services designed to meet the needs of the target population within the State context and local environment.

Reflection questions

- What E&T components does your program offer?
- Why do you offer these components and not others? Why is this mix of components the right set of services to accomplish your program goals and serve the specific needs of your target population?
- What does quality programming and service delivery look like for each component you offer?
- Which components do your current participants spend their time in? Which components do they use the least? Why?
- To what extent are your E&T components:
 - Centered on participants' skills, needs, and goals?
 - Aligned with the expectations and needs of employers?
 - Creating viable opportunities for skill development, career progression, and wage growth?



Providers and partners

States can work through providers to deliver services and these organizations are often the ones participants interact with most in the SNAP E&T program. Therefore, the quality and fit of providers are major factors in your program's success. Identifying, recruiting, and partnering with the right providers for your State takes time, intentionality, and clear understanding of the State's vision and mission for the program. States may partner with intermediaries to coordinate a network of providers and services.

State SNAP agencies are also expected to consult with local workforce development boards to ensure considerations about the labor market and employers' needs are reflected in the design of the SNAP E&T program. In addition, States are required to consult with Indian Tribal Organizations to ensure the SNAP E&T program is responsive to the unique needs of Tribal citizens.

Reflection questions

- Do providers offer education, training, and job preparation services that are designed to build participants' skills and lead to employment? How so?
- Do providers use methods that are considered best practices for delivering employment and training services?
- How well do provider organizations align with your SNAP E&T program vision and mission?
 - Are your providers committed to equitable access and practices in their programs? How so?
 - To what extent do providers have an authentic connection to the communities they serve? For example, do they hire staff that reflect the communities they serve?
 - How diverse are your providers? For example, do providers represent a diversity of industries or serve a variety of different populations?
- Do your providers have proven track records of serving populations that face challenges in their road to sustainable employment?
- How does your intermediary partner promote cohesion and coordination among SNAP E&T providers in your State? Would your program benefit by enhancing or refining the role of an intermediary?
 - If there is no intermediary: How might the role of an intermediary organization add value to your SNAP E&T program? Why or why not?
- What other partnerships might you need to explore—for example, the State workforce board or Indian Tribal Organizations? How might these partnerships benefit SNAP E&T participants?



Outcomes

A clear and measurable picture of success allows your State to know whether your SNAP E&T program is fulfilling its vision and mission. Assessing progress requires the right data tailored to your target population, case management approach, participant reimbursements, and E&T components. This goes beyond federally required reporting measures. Consider which data can best tell the story of your program and how it is working.

Reflection questions

- How do you currently measure the success of your SNAP E&T program?
- How do you know you are effectively serving participants? How do you currently measure participants' satisfaction, progress, and success?
- How do you know if providers are operating programming and services as intended? How do you know if providers are achieving the outcomes you expect?
- To what extent do participants inform and shape the definition of success for your program? How might they do this?

Reflect on your strategy map

Consider what you learned

Once you have completed the strategy map exercise, consider these reflection questions to help your team take stock of what you have learned and what you will do next.

- What story do you see in the map as a whole? Is it a compelling story?
- How do the pieces line up and fit together?
- What stands out to you from this exercise?
- What do you see as your program's strengths?
- What do you think your program needs to change?
- How might you update or reflect some of these insights in your State Plan?

Plan next steps

As you work through the strategy map, you may find some gaps or misalignment in your program, or see a need to strengthen the link between your program vision and mission and how your services are designed (such as case management and SNAP E&T components). If this happens, you might consider some of the following ideas to take your next step.

- Hold listening sessions or survey participants to better understand their experiences related to these gaps and get their input on potential changes.
- Convene a working group of leaders and direct service staff to explore the need for change and design new approaches or processes.
- Organize a small-scale pilot (for example, with one provider or a handful of case managers) to try out a program change and assess how it's working before scaling it.

**Prepared by Jonathan McCay, Evan Stowe Evans,
Gretchen Rowe, Elizabeth Brown, and Mark Ezzo**

January 2025

This tool was produced by Mathematica for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). This tool does not provide official policy guidance. FNS has published other materials that provide official policy guidance for the SNAP E&T program, which are available on the FNS website.

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

Strategy Map



Vision

Mission



Target population

Context and environment



Case management and participant reimbursements

E&T components

Providers and partners



Outcomes