

SNAP Employment & Training

Moving Low-Skill SNAP Recipients toward Self-Sufficiency

October 2011

What is SNAP E&T?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) program was instituted in 1985 to help families exit SNAP by become self-sufficient through work. Each state is required to offer a SNAP E&T program, which may include such services as job search assistance, work experience, and job training. Well-designed SNAP E&T programs support occupational training and postsecondary education to enable SNAP recipients to acquire the skills necessary to find jobs, increase earnings, and ultimately exit SNAP.

Why does SNAP E&T matter?

SNAP E&T is one of the only federal programs designed solely to provide targeted employment and training resources to help extremely low-skilled, low-income adults achieve economic self-sufficiency. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, nearly 2.6 million individuals participated in SNAP E&T, including nearly 1.5 million who used the program to pursue a secondary diploma or GED, while the number of individuals using the program to pursue postsecondary credentials more than doubled between FY 2009 and FY 2010.

Skills are the key to economic success, particularly in today's economy—two in three jobs created in the next decade are expected to require at least some postsecondary education or training.¹ Yet in FY 2010, four out of five SNAP households did not include anyone with education beyond high school, while an estimated one-third of households did not even include a high school graduate.² A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that limited education and work histories make it hard for SNAP E&T participants to obtain employment.³ Federal policy should be focused now more than ever on helping SNAP participants prepare for sustainable career paths in in-demand industries.

Other federal training programs are likely ill-equipped to address the employment and training needs of SNAP recipients if SNAP E&T is eliminated. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) can support training services for low-income adults; however, because the WIA system is required

¹ <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/ExecutiveSummary-web.pdf>

² Estimates based on available data; because of the relatively high rate of households with incomplete or missing data, estimates should be viewed with caution: <http://hostm142.mathematica-mpr.com/fns/2009/tech%20doc%202009.pdf>.

³ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03388.pdf>



to provide services to all jobseekers, regardless of income levels, fewer than half of adults exiting WIA in 2009 qualified as low-income, down from more than 70 percent in 2001.⁴ In addition, funding for WIA has decreased by more than a third since 2001—including more than a 10 percent cut under the FY 2011 continuing resolution⁵—while participation in the program increased by 167 percent in just two years, meaning the system has little capacity to absorb new participants.⁶

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program may also be used to support education and training for low-income custodial parents. However, states used only 2 percent of federal TANF funds to pay for education and training services in FY 2009, and at least thirteen states did not invest a single dollar of federal TANF funds in training, indicating that many states would be unable to accommodate the education and training requirements of SNAP recipients.

Even if WIA or TANF had capacity to absorb more than 2 million displaced SNAP E&T participants, the programs would likely be unable to immediately accommodate the unique needs of these individuals; the GAO found that many SNAP E&T recipients lack the basic skills—including reading and computer literacy—necessary to take advantage of training services available through other programs.⁷ SNAP E&T must be maintained to ensure that these individuals can obtain the skills they need to get a job, move toward economic self-sufficiency, and ultimately exit SNAP.

How are states using SNAP E&T?

A number of states have recently adopted innovative strategies to increase the effectiveness of SNAP E&T programs. Historically, SNAP E&T was intended solely to support individuals subject to time limits on the receipt of benefits under SNAP, and often focused on activities such as job search or work experience.⁸ But skyrocketing unemployment, coupled with increasing skill demands in the labor market, has meant that job search and other “light touch” interventions may not be enough to address the employment needs of very low-skill individuals.

A growing number of states have begun to recognize the importance of using SNAP E&T programs to connect recipients with meaningful education and training opportunities, enabling participants to obtain industry-recognized degrees and credentials with real value in the labor market:

⁴ http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/pdf/PY_2009_WIASRD_Data_Book.pdf

⁵ [P.L. 112-10](#)

⁶ Based on comparison between Adult program participation reported in during the first quarters of FY 2009 and FY 2011; http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/Archive_Reports.cfm

⁷ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03388.pdf>

⁸ GAO found that three-fourths of E&T participant activities in FY 2001 were job search and work experience.



- In Washington, sixteen community colleges participate in the state's Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) program, serving nearly 11,000 SNAP recipients since 2005. At South Seattle Community College – the largest community college BFET program – completion rates for short- and long-term training participants exceeded 75 percent in 2008–2009, while the overall employment placement for BFET participants was 70 percent.
- In Connecticut, Capital Community College has served 930 students under SNAP E&T just since 2009, including graduating more than 300 certified nurse aides over that time period.
- 83 percent of graduates of Maine's Competitive Skills Scholarship Program – which supports training targeted at high-demand industries within the state – were employed as of June 2011. Full-time workers earned an average hourly wage of more than \$16, an increase of 51 percent over average wages before program entry.
- Iowa's Kirkwood Community College serves SNAP recipients through its Gap Tuition Assistance Program, which helps working adults obtain occupational training and credentials. More than 400 students have participated in the Gap program since 2007, with an overall employment rate of 90 percent.

Is SNAP E&T a good investment?

Given current fiscal constraints, Congress is facing difficult choices and it is more important than ever that federal resources be carefully targeted. With only limited federal investment, SNAP E&T successfully leverages state, philanthropic, and private funds – including more than \$200 million in 2009 – to provide flexible funding that supports local decision making. Communities are investing in innovative training strategies and supportive services that are demonstrating strong employment outcomes for low-skilled, low-income individuals.

SNAP E&T provides participants with the skills and credentials they need to find well-paying jobs and reduce their dependence on SNAP benefits. Congress should reject any efforts to eliminate authorization or funding for this critical program, and instead focus on ensuring that SNAP E&T can effectively serve the broadest possible range of SNAP recipients.