

Aligned by Design: WIOA and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides new opportunities for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) programs to partner with other workforce development programs to meet the needs of SNAP participants. This paper outlines some key areas for collaboration under WIOA.

SNAP E&T OVERVIEW

SNAP E&T programs provide employment and training services, such as job search, adult education, vocational training, and work experience to SNAP participants. In addition to receiving federal formula grants, states are also eligible for federal “50-50 reimbursement grants” that can reimburse states for up to 50 percent of certain non-federal SNAP E&T program costs and supportive services necessary for individuals to participate in SNAP E&T. SNAP E&T programs can partner with third-party providers such as community colleges and community-based organizations to expand SNAP participants’ access to education, training, and support services and to leverage resources for 50-50 reimbursement grants.

STATE PLANNING PROCESS

Under WIOA, states must develop either a “unified plan” that includes operational plans for the core programs¹ funded under WIOA, or an expanded “combined plan” that includes operational plans for the core WIOA programs and one or more additional federal programs, such as SNAP E&T. Both plan types must include a strategic plan, and there is an opportunity to outline SNAP E&T’s role in the state’s workforce system in this section, regardless of the type of plan submitted. SNAP E&T representatives, including program administrators and provider organizations, should engage in the planning process to help identify opportunities for collaboration between SNAP E&T, the American Job Center (AJC) one-stop delivery system, and education and training providers.

ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS (ABAWDS)

Able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) aged 18-49 can receive only three months of SNAP benefits in a 36-month period unless they work or participate in an employment and training program for at least 20 hours a week, or participate in a workfare program. During the Great Recession, many states were able to waive this three-month time limit for ABAWDs due to high unemployment. With unemployment rates declining, however, many states will lose the ability to waive the ABAWD time limit in the coming year. States without waivers or those that anticipate losing them should use the WIOA planning process to identify strategies for connecting ABAWDs to 20 hours of quality employment and job training activities so they can maintain food assistance benefits and connect to broader skill-building opportunities.

ONE-STOP PARTNERING AND PRIORITY OF SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Under WIOA, SNAP E&T can be a partner in the AJC one-stop delivery system. Such partnerships offer the potential to enhance collaboration between SNAP E&T and other workforce programs. For example, SNAP E&T programs can work with AJCs to market and make referrals to SNAP E&T programs, conduct skills assessments, and help SNAP participants access the full range of services available through the AJC system.

WIOA includes enhanced “priority of service” requirements to ensure that public benefits recipients and other hard-to-serve

¹WIOA includes six core programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula grants under Title I; adult education state grants under Title II; Wagner-Peyser Employment Services under Title III; and vocational rehabilitation state grants under Title IV.



populations receive priority for WIOA career and training services through the AJC system. SNAP E&T programs should work with workforce boards to ensure that state and local priority of service advances SNAP participants' access to WIOA career and training services.

CAREER PATHWAYS

WIOA requires states and local areas to develop career pathways – a combination of education, training, career counseling, and support services that align with the skill needs of industries. Career pathways enable an individual to attain a secondary school diploma (or its recognized equivalent) and a postsecondary credential. Typically, multiple agencies and organizations partner to provide the combination of services that make up a career pathway. To ensure that SNAP E&T programs are effectively integrated in career pathways models, SNAP E&T representatives should help develop and implement such models. SNAP E&T and WIOA funds can be leveraged where appropriate to provide supportive services (such as child care assistance and transportation) that can help SNAP participants participate in education and training offered through a career pathway.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS THAT FOCUS ON SKILL-BUILDING

SNAP E&T can help participants build skills that lead to family-supporting jobs by partnering with community colleges, community-based organizations, and other education and training providers. Through these partnerships, SNAP E&T can leverage the education and training expertise of existing organizations, as well as their existing relationships with employers. WIOA planning provides an opportunity for SNAP E&T to identify such partners and build on efforts to create skill-building strategies for SNAP and other low-income individuals, such as career pathways.

WIOA emphasizes the creation and use of industry or sector partnerships, which bring together multiple employers within a local industry, education and training providers, and other stakeholders to develop short- and long-term workforce strategies in those industries. SNAP E&T providers should be included in local sector partnerships in order to engage employers and ensure that SNAP E&T participants can access skilled job opportunities.

By working together in these and other ways, SNAP E&T programs and other WIOA partners can create a more efficient and effective education and training system that improves education and employment outcomes for low-income individuals and responds to the needs of state and local labor markets.



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National Skills Coalition is a broad-based coalition of employers, unions, education and training providers, and public officials working toward a vision of an America that grows its economy by investing in its people so that every worker and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper.

Go to www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wioa-implementation to access resources that can support effective WIOA implementation.