Stepping Up
State Developments in SNAP Employment and Training Data

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Introduction to SNAP and SNAP E&T

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is the cornerstone of the nation’s nutrition assistance safety net. It provides food to more than 47 million of the poorest Americans each year, the majority of whom are children, the elderly or people with disabilities. More than 40 percent of SNAP recipients live in households where someone is working, though the household earnings are below the poverty level. Benefits can be redeemed at retail stores across the country. State agencies administer the program according to national eligibility and benefit standards set by federal law and regulations. Benefits are 100 percent federally-financed, while administrative costs are shared between the federal and state governments.

SNAP participation for 2013 averaged 47.6 million persons per month, an increase of 68 percent since 2008. The significant increase reflects the deep impact of the 2008-09 recession, an expanded food stamp benefit in 2009, and federal and state efforts to improve program access.

### SNAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Participation (Millions)</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Costs (Billions)</td>
<td>$34.6</td>
<td>$76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average/Person/Month</td>
<td>$102</td>
<td>$133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portion of U.S. Population Participating</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons Unemployed in U.S. (Millions)</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) was created in 1985 to help families exit SNAP by becoming self-sufficient through work. Each state is required to administer a SNAP E&T program for participants who are not working or are underemployed. States receive federal funding for providing job search assistance, basic education, vocational training, job retention services, and other workforce opportunities. States must provide supportive services such as child care and transportation assistance if SNAP recipients are required to participate in SNAP E&T services at both the state and federal levels, as policymakers acknowledge the importance of job training in helping SNAP recipients move into stable employment.

Workforce Data Quality Campaign commissioned this report to identify state best practices for collecting, reporting, and linking SNAP E&T data to other information that can help identify successful pathways for participants into sustainable employment. As states capitalize on increased attention and resources for SNAP E&T, this report may provide ideas on ways to enhance their program data and accountability.

SNAP E&T was created in 1985 to help families exit SNAP by becoming self-sufficient through work.
an E&T program. States have flexibility to design their SNAP E&T programs—for example, what services to offer, which geographic regions to serve, whether the program is voluntary or mandatory, and how the state sanctions participants for noncompliance.1

Although highly flexible funding rules allow states to provide services and support to a population that is often difficult to serve through other workforce development programs, “historically the program has been significantly underutilized by most states.”2 In 2013, states placed only 633,760 participants in E&T components, serving an average of 166,238 participants per month. This is but a small fraction of the millions who must register for work to obtain food benefits.

Federal and state funding for SNAP E&T equaled $511 million in 2013, consisting of $79 million in federal grants allocated to all states, $20 million in federal grants to states that provide E&T services to all individuals who otherwise would be subject to SNAP’s three-month time-limit, and $413 million of federal-state matching funds for E&T expenditures, including additional work programs and assistance with child care and transportation costs that some recipients must incur in order to work or to participate in training. Over the 2008-2013 timeframe, SNAP E&T funding averaged $517 million per year of which 60 percent was federal. In 2013, 47 states provided matching funds.

### 2013 SNAP Employment & Training Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th># States/Territories</th>
<th>2013 Expenditures (Millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100% Federal Grant</td>
<td>Base funding for state E&amp;T admin. based on percent of work registrants and able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs).</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>$78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD)</td>
<td>Additional grants for states that guarantee certain activities aimed at ABAWD population.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal 50% Matching Grants</td>
<td>50% reimbursement for states that exceed 100% of their federal grant.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>$206.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEDERAL FUNDS TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$304.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State matching funds</td>
<td>50% reimbursement for transportation and childcare costs to ensure successful participation in E&amp;T programs.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>$206.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATIONAL FED/STATE TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$511.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Currently, the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees the SNAP E&T program, does not have national outcome measures. Although 36 states voluntarily collect and report E&T outcomes such as job entry, job retention, and average wage, states use a variety of methods and definitions in collecting these measures. Thus, state data cannot be compared at the national level.

**Federal Reporting**
The Agricultural Act of 2014, often referred to as the “Farm Bill,” requires national reporting measures and additional performance monitoring. It establishes a SNAP E&T baseline to inform policy decisions that training providers can use to continuously strengthen programs. USDA, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), is developing reporting measures for states to help identify which programs improve participants’ skills, employment, and earnings. The measures must reflect the challenges facing SNAP E&T participants, who tend to have lower education and skills than participants in other existing workforce training programs. Also, states and USDA will more regularly report on the effectiveness of E&T programs. Finally, USDA is now required to evaluate states’ employment and training programs on a regular basis.

**New Pilot Program**
The sharp rise in the SNAP caseload before, during, and after the Great Recession prompted some lawmakers to raise concerns about “dependency” on the program. An attempt to allow states to capture savings from SNAP caseload decline—and thereby introduce a strong incentive to adopt policies that would drive down their SNAP caseload—held up the Farm Bill in 2013 and into 2014. The deadlock was broken in part by a compromise to allocate $200 million for up to 10 state pilot projects and a corresponding evaluation to better understand the effectiveness of SNAP E&T programmatic strategies. The goal of these projects is:

…to raise the number of work registrants … who obtain unsubsidized employment, increase the earned income of the registrants, and reduce the reliance of the registrants on public assistance, so as to reduce the need for supplemental nutrition assistance benefits.

To qualify, states must participate in an evaluation, provide evidence that they have a robust data collection system, commit to collaborating with state workforce boards, and at least maintain their FY 2013 funding for E&T. The projects will target certain populations such as those with low skills, be in both urban and rural areas, emphasize rapid attachment to employment, and test both mandatory and voluntary E&T participation. Applicants submitted their proposals in November 2014, and grant awards are expected to be announced in March 2015.

**Pilot Project Data Collection**
The Request for Applications required pilot projects to provide a national evaluator with data on participant services and outcomes such as enrollment, completion, credential attainment, job entry, employment retention, and earnings. Additionally, the application must demonstrate that the state has or will create an adequate process to measure employment outcomes through wage records in the state data systems. Grantees also must facilitate access to data on SNAP participants’ receipt of other public assistance (including Medicaid) both during and after participation in the pilot. Finally, individual participants in a pilot program must agree to allow the state agency, FNS and the evaluation contractor to collect their outcome data for up to six years after an individual enters into the E&T pilot (even if he or she subsequently stops receiving SNAP benefits).

Several states with lesser developed systems are looking to the pilots as an opportunity to re-shape their SNAP E&T programs and build the robust data collection system that is required for program administration. Even if their applications are unsuccessful, they realize they must improve their data to meet the new SNAP E&T federal reporting requirements, the rules for which are being written currently by USDA and DOL.
**State Examples: Data Collection and Case Management Systems**

**Virginia**

Virginia’s SNAP E&T provides educational services online including basic skills training, career readiness leading to a Career Readiness Certificate, and preparatory courses for the General Educational Development (GED) certificate, as well as information on in-demand occupations and non-traditional jobs for women. Virginia supplements the SNAP E&T services at local departments of social services through several agreements with service providers at the state and local levels. Most notable are the American Job Centers, funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which provide SNAP E&T participants with their full range of services.

Since 2008, Virginia’s local SNAP E&T agencies have been using the Employment Services Program Automated System (ESPAS) to assist case management and prepare federally required quarterly reports. When people register for SNAP benefits, ESPAS automatically sends referrals of eligible individuals to SNAP E&T case managers so they can follow up. ESPAS was built in-house by information systems staff in the Department of Social Services, originally to manage data on work activities conducted under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The state is currently expanding its new case management system to incorporate eligibility determinations for all of its major public benefits programs, and is planning to phase out ESPAS. In the meantime, the ESPAS platform is available to other states.

**Minnesota**

Minnesota has just undergone a major rewrite of its Microsoft-supported web-based Workforce One (WF1) case management system which tracks employment and training services to more than 100,000 customers across its American Job Centers network. WF1 was created through a partnership of the state’s Departments of Human Services and Employment and Economic Development. Among the 17 programs that track their customers through WF1 are SNAP E&T, WIOA-funded programs, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), TANF and various youth programs. With its 125 data elements and a 170-page code book, WF1 acts as a referral system to all the various workforce programs with their respective eligibility requirements.

Searching for Model States: Report Methodology

No study exists to determine the extent to which states already meet the data requirements that are part of the SNAP E&T pilot grants. In the course of calling 12-15 states to learn about their SNAP E&T data systems, this investigator found that their system capacities range across the spectrum.

In his search for states with best practices in collecting, linking and using SNAP E&T data, the investigator contacted states with exemplary applications for Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grants from DOL, as well as states cited in previous publications as having exemplary SNAP E&T programs, such as Washington and Minnesota. He also contacted data experts who assisted a study he conducted in 2012 for the State of Utah on data best practices to align educational supply with occupational demand.

The following examples show how states have been collecting and managing SNAP E&T data in ways that could inform those that are building their systems.

Telephone interviews occasionally followed up by email questions and web-based literature covered the following:

- Variables included in state’s SNAP E&T database
- Resolution of issues regarding common data definitions and matching between SNAP E&T and other programs
- Data to verify eligibility and changing eligibility for food benefits and work registration
- Data linkages between SNAP E&T, workforce development and education programs, Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage record data, other general assistance programs, and the state longitudinal data system
- Analyses and studies using these linked data systems
Some improvements that were part of the rewrite are:

- More efficient navigation tools and functions to save case managers time
- Establishing and enhancing connections to other systems such as Minnesota Works (job bank), wage data, and a public assistance eligibility system (known as MAXIS) which allows case managers to make informed decisions about what services to offer
- Streamlining programs to avoid duplicate data entry, while still maintaining fiscal accountability
- Restructuring security to maintain integrity, while allowing the users to log in once, but access multiple profiles reflective of their permissions
- Overhauling canned reports to provide more complete and accurate information
- Adding ad hoc reporting through an enhanced advanced search
- Streamlining credential capture so providers can easily tell if they need to capture one, thus improving their performance outcome
- Adding extensive online help

Because its data collection system includes multiple programs, Minnesota has worked hard to ensure common data definitions. Thus, each service would be operationally defined the same way (e.g. job search, job training, general education) as would outcomes (e.g. employment, earnings, postsecondary credential attainment). Considerable interagency dialogue in developing the rewrite of Minnesota’s WF1 system continues to contribute to a gradual standardization of terms and definitions.

The WF1 team is using the agile project management philosophy known as “scrum” to manage ongoing maintenance changes. Scrum requires the team to measure progress daily and to demonstrate functionality to users and stakeholders monthly to gather their feedback, allowing the team to make changes on an ongoing basis.

**Washington**

Since 2005, the state of Washington has been using the e-JAS case management system to link its SNAP E&T (called Basic Food E&T or BFET) records for one individual across many employment and training sources. SNAP E&T case managers work for the program’s 65 contractors: 34 community colleges and 31 community-based organizations. At the point of participant entry, they do intake and eligibility determinations, assessment, and referral to appropriate training services. Throughout service delivery, case managers use e-JAS to keep records of all eligibility determinations and E&T interventions.

In Washington, a major challenge of the BFET program has been developing procedures to determine whether participants are eligible for BFET services – and whether contractors/providers may seek reimbursement for providing these. For a variety of reasons, many SNAP participants go on and off the program, continually changing their eligibility status for E&T services. Thus, the state and SNAP E&T contractors must frequently track participant eligibility and participation for extended periods. Giving providers access to the shared automated case management system—e-JAS in the case of Washington State—makes this ongoing process more efficient.

**Texas**

Texas operates The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST), a single point of data entry upon program intake and central repository of customer information for many of Texas’ workforce development programs, including WIOA programs, TANF, SNAP E&T and TAA. The system enables workforce center staff to enter intake information for customers just once for multiple employment and training programs and to retrieve it statewide. The system is updated nightly with new information. TWIST is a client-server based application that ensures data security by giving different case managers varying levels of access to data depending on their needs and confidentiality rules.

TWIST includes some checks on data entry to ensure quality of information in the system. For example, when case managers are entering data about participant services, system software developed by Texas filters out services for which the participant does not qualify or for which no funding is available. Thus, the system provides case managers with just those options that are available to the client at that particular time. These automatic filters help case managers keep up with frequently changing eligibility requirements and program funding levels that result from legislative and gubernatorial decisions.

Texas also operates WorkInTexas.com for job matching and many other basic employer and job seeker services. It is the system of record for Wagner-Peyser customers and since nearly all of Texas’ job seeker customers, including those in SNAP E&T, receive basic labor exchange services, they also interact with WorkInTexas.com. The TWIST and WorkInTexas.com systems communicate with one another. Texas recently started a new information technology project that begins the process of replacing...
In addition to keeping data on SNAP E&T participants’ eligibility and service delivery, states track their outcomes. Some of the most commonly tracked outcomes are whether SNAP E&T participants move on to obtain employment and what they earn. Many states are turning to Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records to determine these outcomes.

Employers submit wage records each quarter to the state as part of the UI benefits program. A UI wage record always includes year/quarter, employer identification number, employee social security number (SSN), and the total dollar amount paid by this employer to the employee during a particular year/quarter.

By looking across several quarters, researchers can determine whether an individual retained employment with the same employer. When matching SNAP E&T participant data to UI wage records, states sometimes find multiple individuals using the same SSN and sometimes the same name. In order to make sure they are matching wage records for the right SNAP E&T participant, many states (e.g. Washington, Texas, Virginia, Minnesota, Florida) have developed sophisticated algorithms to match SSNs with participant names, addresses, birth dates, age and other demographic characteristics. Washington also enhances the likelihood of proper matching by triangulating enrollment in workforce programs with driver’s license identification from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Florida
In Florida, workforce development program data is housed on the same server, which allows identical technology to be used for reporting across all programs. Information for SNAP E&T and TANF participants is gathered through One-Stop Service Tracking, which is an in-house data collection system designed by the state. Data for participants in WIOA and other workforce programs are collected through a different portal, but all of the back-end data are stored alongside the SNAP E&T information.

A useful cross-program case management feature of the Florida One-Stop Service Tracking system is that when SNAP E&T staff members enter information about participants finding employment, that data may be viewed by employees responsible for determining eligibility for SNAP benefits.
began BFET services in 2009 (provided by 12 community-based organizations and 27 community and technical colleges) and were tracked for two years, show that 71 percent became employed with a median hourly wage over $11.

**Texas**  
Texas was an early implementer of DOL’s common measures and extended them across all its job seeker programs, including SNAP E&T and purely state-funded programs. To facilitate this, Texas developed a Common Measures Performance Reporting System which merges job seeker data from WorkInTexas.com, TWIST and another smaller customer tracking system to create integrated “Period of Participation” records for each client every weekend. UI wage data is included in the reporting system to allow employment, retention and earnings tracking. This includes using data obtained through the UI Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) to follow clients who work in other states, and the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES) for clients employed by the military and federal agencies. WRIS & FEDES data are updated quarterly according to their availability. Because these other wage sources carry restrictions on their use, Texas only applies WRIS and FEDES data to DOL programs — thus, SNAP E&T program outcomes do not include results based on WRIS and FEDES.

In addition to linking with UI wage records to track employment outcomes for SNAP E&T participants, some states have connected SNAP E&T data in other ways. Linking data from multiple workforce and education programs can enable policymakers to understand how these programs work—not just individually, but in combination—to assist people with advancing along career pathways.

DOL and the U.S. Department of Education have awarded about $650 million to states for development of longitudinal data systems that can link data across programs. Many states receiving federal grants indicated that SNAP E&T data would be incorporated into their workforce longitudinal data systems. However, as of this writing most of these efforts were still in process and not enough had been done with the SNAP data to constitute a “best practice.”

**Virginia**  
Virginia has a federated state longitudinal data system (http://vlds.virginia.gov), so different programs maintain separate databases and the data is only linked at particular times or for specified purposes. Each agency owns and is responsible for the quality of its data, and they use whatever definitions facilitate the management of their programs. The upside of the federated model is that agencies like political control over their data and the ease of deciding whether or not to share the data with other agencies for research purposes. The downside is that the associated computer programming is much more time-consuming than for a warehouse system, in which data are linked across multiple programs and then kept in a single database. Virginia’s federated system has worked through these programming challenges so well that Nevada plans to buy it in lieu of inventing their own federated system.

Through Virginia’s longitudinal data system, researchers can link the SNAP E&T program to the state’s workforce development and educational programs. The state is working on adding more detail to both the SNAP and TANF data sets and adding data on child care subsidy recipients. State authorities expect to develop research projects to take advantage of this new capability, such as Return on Investment studies for TANF and other programs.

**Washington**  
Washington has chosen not to link SNAP E&T data to its preschool through workforce (P-20W) longitudinal data system, which has over six million records including participants from most workforce development programs. Instead, BFET keeps its data in the e-JAS case management system. Both e-JAS and the P-20W data system appear to allow for long-term matching of UI wage data and community college data. Linkages in e-JAS allow a comprehensive look at student achievement milestones (e.g., basic skills, credit and credential attainment) met by BFET participants at the community colleges.

When they are linking and using data, states are careful to protect the confidentiality of sensitive information.
Conclusion:
SNAP E&T Data Should Be Better Utilized

Even states that collect comprehensive data on SNAP E&T participants and annually report their employment and earnings outcomes are underutilizing this information. Occasionally, small program adjustments are made to improve program effectiveness, or data management refinements are made to improve program efficiency and compliance with federal rules. However, none of the states contacted reported major multi-year evaluations or studies using either longitudinal or cross-sectional data to ascertain which SNAP E&T program components or exposure of SNAP beneficiaries to other workforce development and education programs worked best for whom over the long run. Presumably, the 10 new pilots and corresponding evaluations that are to begin in 2015 will help fill this gap.

Programmatic breakthroughs from these pilots cannot come too soon. SNAP E&T program directors interviewed by this investigator, particularly those in states with emerging programs and data systems, indicated frustration with recidivism—that is, many clients would return to the SNAP program despite participation in E&T because they started with such poor basic skills and work habits that they were unable to qualify for training that would lead to a job paying a livable wage. Similarly, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that limited education and work histories make it especially hard for SNAP E&T participants to obtain employment. Strong data systems clearly will be needed to ascertain how the pilots are successfully helping disadvantaged populations overcome such challenges.

Florida
As with other Florida workforce programs, SNAP E&T participant SSNs are provided to the Department of Education for reporting on education and job training programs of schools and colleges. Matches between SNAP E&T participant SSNs and other data sets, including UI wage records, are engineered using security protocols. The state supplies an Annual Outcomes Report on SNAP participants describing education and employment outcomes. Comparative analyses are conducted among the workforce programs to gauge the effectiveness of employment and training services offered in the various programs. The Annual Outcomes Report publications can be viewed by visiting www.fldoe.org/fetpip.
Acknowledgements

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Finally, WDQC would like to thank our national partners:

End Notes


5 “Workforce One: Helping you help others,” occasional staff paper of the MN.IT @ DEED WF1 Team, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, pp. 1-2.

6 Modeled on e-JAS system developed by the State of Washington, City and County of San Francisco Human Services Agency received $600,000 to develop a data system designed to improve workflow processes by collecting data on CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) participants that will enable the City to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, make decisions regarding improvements to the program design, and document program results both internally and externally (to policymakers, funders and other stakeholders).

7 Email response by Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of One Stop and Program Support to email survey question posed by this study’s investigator: How are data linkages set up between SNAP E&T and participation in welfare and workforce development programs (e.g., WIOA, TAA, Wagner-Peyser, TANF, One-stop Management Information System, etc.).

8 Many states use UI wage records to track outcomes for federal programs such as the WIOA programs and Perkins career and technical education.

9 This amount can include cash-out of accrued benefits upon departure or a bonus reward; so care should be exercised in the interpretation of the dollar amount.
