

# SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach and Access Toolkit



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Food Research and Action Center

## **ABOUT FRAC**

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition. Sign up for FRAC's Weekly News Digest at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>How to Use This Toolkit</b> .....	7
<b>Funding for SNAP/Food Stamps Application Assistance and Other Outreach Activities</b> .....	9
SNAP/Food Stamps Administrative Funding .....	9
FNS SNAP/Food Stamps Participation Grants .....	10
FNS SNAP/Food Stamps Competitive Outreach Grants .....	10
Federal SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Reimbursements/Match .....	10
Federal SNAP/Food Stamps Bonuses .....	11
Temporary Federal Funding: ARRA TANF Emergency Funds .....	11
Pilot Funding: Partnership Fund for Program Integrity Innovation .....	12
Community Development Block Grant Funds .....	12
Other Community Resources .....	13
<b>Building Blocks for Successful Application Assistance and Outreach</b> .....	15
What Are Key Elements of Outreach? .....	15
Collaborations to Make Outreach and Application Assistance More Effective .....	16
Identifying Barriers and Targeting Strategies .....	18
Data Matching: Finding People Who Are Likely Eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps .....	19
Cultural Competency as a Key to Outreach .....	20
Prescreening to Focus Assistance and Encourage People to Apply .....	21
Promotional Materials for SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach .....	22
Websites and SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach .....	23
Training Volunteers and Community Partners .....	24
Helplines to Support Outreach and Provide Application Assistance .....	25
Media Strategies for SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach .....	26
<b>Strategies for States to Increase Access to SNAP/Food Stamps, Maximize Benefits, and Decrease Administrative Workload</b> .....	29
SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options that Streamline the Eligibility Process and Reduce Client Burdens and Office Workloads .....	29
Maximize SNAP/Food Stamps Benefit Amounts by Extending LIHEAP Benefits to SNAP/Food Stamps Recipients .....	31
SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options to Reach Low-Income Working Families and the Newly Jobless .....	32
SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options Helpful to Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities .....	34
<b>Making the Case for Expanding Participation in SNAP/Food Stamps</b> .....	37
Data Resources Regarding Food Insecurity .....	37
Data Resources Regarding State and County Participation Rates .....	37
Other State-by-State Data .....	37
Talking Points .....	39
<b>Appendix</b> .....	41



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# Introduction

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This toolkit is a guide to policy and outreach initiatives that strengthen the ability of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or SNAP/Food Stamps<sup>1</sup>) to respond to heightened need for food assistance and economic stimulus in the current economic environment. In both the short term and longer term, these policy and outreach initiatives offer ways for SNAP/Food Stamps to better serve low-income people, alleviate strains on state and county administrative systems, and boost national, state and local economies on a path to a sustained recovery. We encourage state and local officials, anti-hunger advocates, community-based organizers, direct service providers, funders, business and labor leaders and others to use the toolkit's strategies to maximize the substantial resources that SNAP/Food Stamps can bring to their communities.

The declining wages for millions of households even before the recession, sharpened by widespread unemployment and underemployment since the recession began, have led to an unprecedented need for SNAP/Food Stamps. In 2008, even before economic conditions worsened, the government reported that 49.1 million Americans lived in households that faced a constant struggle against hunger. In the last quarter of 2009, 18.5 percent of Americans surveyed by Gallup reported that there had been times in the prior 12 months when they did not have enough money to buy food that they or their family needed, an indicator FRAC refers to as "food hardship." In January 2010 approximately one in six workers was unemployed or underemployed.

Many of those experiencing "food hardship" have never before applied for public benefits. Their new plight has sparked headlines across the country, such as "Food Stamp use at new high in Utah," (by Julia Lyon, Salt Lake Tribune, 1/8/10: [http://www.sltrib.com/food/cj\\_14151793](http://www.sltrib.com/food/cj_14151793)) and South Carolina's "Never been poor, until now," (by Charles Sowell, Journal Watchdog, 1/24/10: <http://www.journalwatchdog.com/city/478-never-been-poor-until-now>)

SNAP/Food Stamps is the first line of defense against hunger. Benefits are provided to needy households through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards for purchase of food at grocery retailers. Each SNAP/Food Stamps benefit dollar is 100 percent federally-funded and according to USDA economists its use generates approximately \$1.84 in economic activity. The monthly benefit for the average household in November 2009 was \$291.55.

Nonetheless, in 2007, more than 13 million people who were eligible for and needed SNAP/Food Stamps did not receive benefits – that is one of out every three eligible people. With the recession pushing millions more people into financial need, the number eligible for but not receiving SNAP/Food Stamps has likely grown.

At the same time that unemployment has created greater need for food assistance, higher unemployment has meant lower tax revenues, creating large budget deficits in many states. Furloughs and lay offs often have decimated staff. Public assistance offices are struggling with limited resources with which to manage SNAP/Food Stamps caseload increases. Fortunately, the federal government provides nearly half of the dollars for states to administer SNAP/Food Stamps, and, for the period FY 2009 through FY 2010, the federal government is providing states with an extra (no-match required) \$795 million to help them administer SNAP/Food Stamps.

Making best use of federal administrative supports, making best use of state and local staff, finding efficiencies in SNAP/Food Stamps administration, and fostering strong agency-community partnerships

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<sup>1</sup> Effective October 2008, the federal government changed the official name of the program from the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP"). Many among the public and the media still use "food stamps" to refer to the program. State names for the program vary from SNAP to Food Stamps to 3SquaresVermont to Food Share to others. We will use "SNAP/Food Stamps" in this toolkit.

can help position states to serve all eligible households. States can increase access and at the same time reduce administrative workloads by streamlining the application process, relaxing outdated and cumbersome eligibility requirements, and minimizing the verifications required of clients.

SNAP/Food Stamps outreach can provide critical support to the newly vulnerable population affected by the crisis *and* to resource-strapped SNAP/Food Stamps offices. Traditionally outreach has been perceived merely as marketing and leafleting. In an environment of increasing caseloads and limited administrative capacity, the concept of mere marketing can be off-putting to some SNAP/Food Stamps administrators. Fortunately, SNAP/Food Stamps outreach has come to encompass much more than the outdated stereotype of outreach. USDA has clarified that SNAP/Food Stamp outreach also includes prescreening, application assistance and document gathering activities in conjunction with initial applications and recertifications. Many states have found that outreach/application assistance done well takes some burdens off eligibility workers and helps state agencies better respond to increased demand for assistance.

How? Outreach workers can educate people about SNAP/Food Stamps, the program eligibility guidelines, and, perhaps most importantly, what to expect as part of the application process. Prescreening activities can help identify likely eligible households. Disseminating accurate information about SNAP/Food Stamps rules and procedures can help households make informed decisions whether to apply for benefits. Once trained to provide application assistance, outreach workers can deliver clean, complete applications that are easier for SNAP/Food Stamps offices to process. In addition, outreach workers who collect necessary documentation as part of their application assistance can ensure that necessary proofs reach the SNAP/Food Stamps office. The outreach workers can help keep clients connected with SNAP/Food Stamps by performing similar tasks when it is time for those clients to recertify for benefits. Submission of completed applications accompanied with needed documentation can reduce processing times, improve client satisfaction, and help often understaffed SNAP/Food Stamps offices handle the higher volume of customers.

This toolkit provides resources to help make the case for strengthening SNAP/Food Stamps at the community level, information about smart policy choices to increase program access and reduce administrative burdens, and the building blocks for successful outreach and application assistance.

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## How to Use This Toolkit

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This toolkit provides a broad range of resources and information on strategies for strengthening access to SNAP/Food Stamps. For those interested in SNAP/Food Stamps outreach, the toolkit supplies information on funding resources for SNAP/Food Stamps outreach, on the core elements of outreach (in “Building Blocks for SNAP/Food Stamps Application Assistance and Outreach”), and on the many innovative and successful strategies groups use to reach SNAP/Food Stamps eligible people (in “Making a Difference: Effective SNAP/Food Stamps Strategies Tailored to Groups and Locations”).

For those interested in policy changes that can improve the ability of SNAP/Food Stamps to respond to need for assistance in both the short and the longer term, this toolkit provides information on a collection of policy choices that strengthen access to SNAP/Food Stamps, decrease administrative workloads, and maximize benefits for those in need.

For everyone interested in strengthening SNAP/Food Stamps, the section on “Making the Case for Expanding Participation in SNAP/Food Stamps” gives an introduction to various data resources available to assess hunger, access to SNAP/Food Stamps, and quality of customer services. That section also includes talking points on why the SNAP/Food Stamps policy and outreach options discussed in this toolkit are effective ways to support economic recovery, streamline administrative caseloads, and make progress towards the President’s goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015.

Throughout the toolkit, we provide examples of strategies and then links to further resources about them. If you have difficulty with any of the links, please email Ellen Vollinger at [evollinger@frac.org](mailto:evollinger@frac.org).



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## Funding for SNAP/Food Stamps Application Assistance and Other Outreach Activities

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A variety of funding sources can help support SNAP/Food Stamps application assistance and outreach and result in a smoother enrollment process. These range from 100 percent federally-funded grants, to administrative match and outreach reimbursement funding streams that split costs between the federal and state levels. The state share of funds, moreover, can come from private sources. All of these resources can help states and their partners increase capacity for better serving those eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps.

### SNAP/Food Stamps Administrative Funding

Ensuring that states have adequate capacity to process applications accurately and in a timely manner is an important part of an access agenda. In addition to fully funding SNAP/Food Stamps benefits, the federal government provides nearly half of a state's costs to administer the program. When states invest in SNAP/Food Stamps caseworkers and office infrastructure, they draw down federal funds to pay for that portion of those investments. Each federally funded dollar of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits generates nearly double that dollar in economic activity. Additionally, investing in increased SNAP/Food Stamps participation can increase state revenues. For example, in California each dollar of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits frees up an estimated 45 cents more recipients spend on taxable goods, yielding additional sales tax revenues for the state.

California Legislative Analyst's Office, "Analysis of the '04-'05 Budget Bill" (February 2004):

[http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis\\_2004/health\\_ss/hss\\_20\\_foodstamps\\_anl04.htm](http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2004/health_ss/hss_20_foodstamps_anl04.htm)

For FY 2009 and FY 2010, in addition to the regular nearly 50/50 match rate funding for SNAP/Food Stamps administration, the federal government provided states with extra SNAP/Food Stamps administration funds that require no state match. Pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), FNS distributed \$145 million in additional SNAP/Food Stamps state administrative funding for FY 2009, and another \$150 million in FY 2010. More recently, pursuant to the FY 2010 Defense Appropriations Bill (DoD) that was enacted in December 2009, FNS has distributed another \$400 million in federal funds for SNAP/Food Stamps state administration. States can use the ARRA and DoD law dollars for the range of things that administering SNAP/Food Stamps entails, such as hiring caseworkers, paying for computer and other equipment upgrades, and supporting outreach efforts. FNS has explained: "States are to use the [DoD] funds to supplement, not supplant, current State funds for SNAP."

FNS, Memo (guidance on tracking ARRA SNAP/Food Stamps funding):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/022309.pdf>

FNS, Memoranda (breakdown of ARRA FY 2009 and FY 2010 funds and FY 2010 DoD funds allocated among states): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/030609a.pdf>

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/081309.pdf>

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2010/021210.pdf>

FNS, Memo (The Department of Defense Appropriations Bill Clarification to Administrative Funding Question) (March 15, 2010):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2010/031510.pdf>

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has pointed out that upfront investment in SNAP/Food Stamps technology infrastructure provides states and localities with innovative and wide-ranging ways to improve

SNAP/Food Stamps access and may reduce long-term program administrative costs. Technology upgrades allow caseworkers to spend less time on data entry, handle fewer phone calls about routine questions, and lose less time searching for misplaced documents.

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pp. 23-25):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

## **FNS SNAP/Food Stamps Participation Grants**

FNS provides 100 percent federally-funded "Participation Grants," mostly to state agencies for projects "aimed at simplifying the SNAP/Food Stamps application and eligibility systems or improving access to SNAP/Food Stamps benefits by eligible households."<sup>2</sup> Up to 25 percent of a Participation Grant can support SNAP/Food Stamps outreach activities. A total of \$5 million a year is awarded on a competitive basis, with most grants averaging \$1 million for a multi-year grant period. Participation Grants require the cooperation of the state SNAP/Food Stamps administrative agency; nonprofit entities such as community-based organizations, faith-based groups, food banks, and emergency feeding organizations may apply as partners. Requests for proposals typically are announced in the spring.

FNS, information about Participation Grants:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/program-improvement.htm>

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (p. 29):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

## **FNS SNAP/Food Stamps Competitive Outreach Grants**

FNS 100 percent federally-funded grants also support SNAP/Food Stamps outreach activities by nonprofit organizations and others and are awarded through a competitive grant process. In recent years, FNS has awarded approximately \$1 million annually in outreach grants, usually for eight to ten organizations at \$75,000 to \$125,000 each, for grant periods of up to 24 months. Requests for proposals are usually announced in the spring.

FNS, information about SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Grants:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/grants.htm>

## **Federal SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Reimbursements/Match**

A state agency can draw down federal SNAP/Food Stamps outreach reimbursements for allowable activities if it submits and receives approval from FNS for its state SNAP/Food Stamps outreach plan, usually a simple approval process. Private funds (e.g., from foundations, food retailers, private donations, or the budgets of community groups conducting the outreach) as well as regular state budget sources can serve as the state share to leverage the federal 50/50 reimbursement.

Building an outreach partnership with the state SNAP/Food Stamps agency is one of the most cost-effective ways for nonprofits and foundations to increase the scope of their outreach services to people struggling against hunger.

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<sup>2</sup> "USDA To Award \$5 Million in Grants To Increase Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program"  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/2009/PR-0056.htm>

Some of the SNAP/Food Stamps outreach activities that are eligible for federal 50/50 reimbursements include: mounting media activities to promote the program; developing and distributing written information about SNAP/Food Stamps; providing application assistance; and conducting eligibility prescreenings. FNS has clarified that state SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Plans may include activities directed to access and retention of current recipients as well as outreach and education efforts directed to nonparticipating but potentially eligible persons.<sup>3</sup> Plan information submitted must include specific information on the scope, design, and financing of the outreach, including the source of the state matching funds. States have until August 15 to submit annual plans to FNS for the fiscal year lasting from October 1st to September 30th, but can amend their plans during the year.

FNS, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State Outreach Plan Guidance:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/stateplan.htm>

## **Federal SNAP/Food Stamps Bonuses**

FNS provides states with “High Performance Bonuses” for effective SNAP/Food Stamps program operations, including best or most improved performance on payment accuracy, negative error rate (the rate of incorrect denials, suspensions, or termination of benefits), percentage of low-income residents served, and timeliness of case processing. In recent years these 100 percent federally-funded awards to states have ranged from \$37,000 to \$10 million. While FNS does not require that states utilize these awards for SNAP/Food Stamps activities, advocates can encourage states to invest some or all of the bonus funds to improve nutrition program operations and/or outreach.

In Vermont, bonus monies have been used to fund or enhance modernization efforts, including phone system updates, document imaging and a web-based application. In Oregon, advocates and the state agency have worked together to identify ways to reinvest performance bonus money in outreach and program operations. Among the many projects started or expanded with this money are outreach to older Americans in rural areas, support for SNAP/Food Stamps outreach at the C.A.S.H Oregon tax sites that help low-income people file their taxes and access the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit, purchase of headsets for eligibility workers handling phone interviews, salaries for more caseworker hires, support for expanding Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) capacity at farmers’ markets, and development of a resource kit to help medical professionals connect their patients to SNAP/Food Stamps and other nutrition programs.

## **Temporary Federal Funding: ARRA TANF Emergency Funds**

During FY 2009 and FY 2010, ARRA Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Funds provide states with a four-to-one federal to state reimbursement for a range of important purposes, including some that could lead to increased access and better customer service in SNAP/Food Stamps. For example, states could use TANF Emergency Funds to pay for the costs of additional SNAP/Food Stamps caseworkers and/or nonprofit-based outreach workers. In addition to wage subsidies, this reimbursement money can go toward all administrative costs of operating a subsidized employment program. The state’s share to leverage the four-to-one reimbursement may come from state funds, TANF contingency funds, or spending by third parties, including local governments, foundations, and nonprofits.

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<sup>3</sup> Memorandum regarding Food Stamp Outreach Plan Activities to USDA FNS Regional Food Stamp Directors, from Jessica Shahin, USDA Associate Deputy Director for the Food Stamp Program, 6/19/06:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2006/061906.pdf>

HHS Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Q&A on the TANF Emergency Fund:  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/recovery/tanf-faq.htm>

ACF, TANF Emergency Fund in the Recovery Act of 2009, (PowerPoint):  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/TANF\\_ARRA\\_Info.ppt](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/TANF_ARRA_Info.ppt)

FNS, "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Funds Available to States to Improve Participation Summer Food Service Programs" (March 24, 2010) (press release):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/2010/0148.htm>

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL): <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=19185>

NCSL, "Ten Ways to Use Short-Term TANF Benefits and (Mostly) Federal Money to Help Low-Income Families and Children":  
<http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=18674>

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), TANF Emergency Fund resource page:  
[http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=temporary\\_assistance&id=0001](http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=temporary_assistance&id=0001)

CLASP, TANF Emergency Fund Q&A: <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/TANF-EFC-Q-Nov-2.pdf>

## **Pilot Funding: Partnership Fund for Program Integrity Innovation**

SNAP/Food Stamps pilot projects also might be funded under the new federal Partnership Fund for Program Integrity Innovation. The Partnership Fund is focused on federal assistance programs that states administer, such as SNAP/Food Stamps. Over three years the Partnership fund is expected to provide a total of \$37.5 million in "seed money for innovative pilots to reduce improper payments, improve administrative efficiency and service delivery, while also reducing access barriers and protecting beneficiaries."<sup>4</sup>

White House, Partner4Solutions:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/partner4solutions>

## **Community Development Block Grant Funds**

FNS recently clarified that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds can be used as the state share to pull down the SNAP/Food Stamps outreach 50/50 reimbursement. This is an exception to the normal rule that does not allow federal dollars to serve as the state source for additional federal matching funds. CDBG, a HUD-administered program, provides funding to states and local governments for multi-program activities that benefit community development. State and local officials should review existing CDBG initiatives to determine if these already involve SNAP/Food Stamps outreach activities that could qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps outreach reimbursement, as well as consider new ways to invest some of their CDBG funds to qualify for federal SNAP/Food Stamps reimbursement.

HUD, Community Development Block Grants:  
<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>

HUD, Guidebooks for Grantees and Subrecipients in the CDBG Program:  
<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/library/subrecipient/>

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<sup>4</sup> White House, "Partner4Solutions:" <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/partner4solutions>

Two CDBG funding streams appear particularly promising for leveraging federal match for SNAP/Food Stamps outreach: *entitlement communities* grants and *state-administered* grants. Entitlement communities are high population localities that receive direct federal funding to support programs that benefit low- and moderate-income persons or meet other community development objectives. Under the CDBG entitlement communities program, localities are given substantial flexibility to design their own programs, with the requirement that at least 70 percent of the funds go to activities that benefit low- to moderate-income people.

Community development funds for non-entitlement areas are administered by the states. Under this program, states award CDBG grants to local governments based on funding priorities and selection criteria developed by the state. Advocates can work with city and county officials to include SNAP/Food Stamps outreach activities in grant applications, and with the state in the CDBG priority-setting process.

HUD, Entitlement Communities CDBG Program:

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/entitlement/>

HUD, State-administered CDBG grants:

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/stateadmin/>

HUD, ARRA's CDBG Formula Allocations by State/Community:

<http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/RECOVERY/programs/COMMUNITY>

## Other Community Resources

Securing dedicated governmental funding is one way but not the only way to build capacity for community groups to conduct SNAP/Food Stamps outreach. Community foundations, city councils, food retailers, and others can help with resources and leadership. They can ask local radio and TV outlets to run Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and encourage newspapers to get the word out about SNAP/Food Stamps. For example, some food retailers have dedicated space in their weekly newspaper circulars for special messages about SNAP/Food Stamps. Groups can utilize the SNAP/Food Stamp outreach section of the FNS website to access free brochures and media materials (see section of this toolkit on "Tools and Materials"). Groups can make cash and/or in-kind donations to SNAP/Food Stamps outreach campaigns. As discussed in more detail in the funding section above, private and nonprofit sector investments in SNAP/Food Stamps outreach campaigns effectively can be doubled if they are identified and included in a state's SNAP/Food Stamps outreach plan that leverages federal reimbursement for allowable activities.

FNS, SNAP/Food Stamps outreach materials and information:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/default.htm>



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# Building Blocks for Successful Application Assistance and Outreach

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## What Are Key Elements of Outreach?

Outreach activities connect eligible people to SNAP/Food Stamps benefits by educating potential applicants about the program and the advantages of obtaining its benefits, prescreening applicants, and assisting applicants with the requisite forms, documents, and process. Outreach can open paths to the program by reaching low-income people in their daily lives, through trusted sources, and with the information and assistance they need. Most outreach strategies are based on a mix of four core components:

**1. Education.** One of the most basic functions of outreach is to inform people about the program by describing its benefits, dispelling myths, and letting them know how to apply. Educating people about the program and its application requirements helps reduce confusion among potential recipients, thereby smoothing the application process.

Tools for education include flyers and brochures, paid advertisements and Public Service Announcements (PSAs), hotlines, websites, information sessions to educate groups of potential applicants about the program and the eligibility process, and dissemination networks through agencies and organizations that touch the lives of low-income people.

**2. Prescreening.** Predicting an applicant's eligibility and benefit level – the likely amount is often higher than originally expected – can encourage that person to go through the sometimes daunting application process. Client prescreenings also help eligibility offices, because they increase the likelihood that those who do apply will qualify for benefits.

Using a prescreening tool can range from getting answers to a few quick questions on paper, to inputting information on sophisticated computer-based and/or online programs. Prescreening can take place anywhere outreach workers interact one-on-one with potential applicants, from staffed hotlines and group presentations that rely on clients taking the initiative to ask for help, to food pantries, waiting rooms and residences where outreach workers seek out clients.

**3. Application assistance.** Application assistance also can take place anywhere outreach workers or others familiar with SNAP/Food Stamps are interacting directly with potential applicants. Outreach workers can field questions from applicants, help them complete necessary forms, gather supporting documentation, and, in many cases, submit application packets directly to SNAP/Food Stamps offices. Some outreach workers also track applications, assist with scheduling interviews, and follow up with caseworkers or applicants as necessary, or help clients find an authorized representative to help them.<sup>5</sup> Well-executed application assistance helps eligibility offices, because it makes it more likely that applications submitted are error-free, complete, and significantly less time-consuming to process.

One significant way to expand the scope of application assistance is offering trainings. An outreach training program can equip a broad range of community partners with the knowledge base and other tools to help connect people to SNAP/Food Stamps.

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<sup>5</sup> An authorized representative for SNAP/Food Stamps purposes is an individual, usually a relative or trusted friend, appointed by the applicant to assist in the application process and/or to transact benefits on behalf of the household.

**4. Recertification assistance.** Participating households are certified eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps benefits for a specific number of months, and at the end of that period must be formally recertified. Many SNAP/Food Stamps recipients lose benefits at recertification, even though they continue to be financially eligible for them. Often families that do not complete the recertification process by their deadlines reapply as new applicants weeks or months later. This case “churning” (on, off, on again) is a problem for clients and SNAP/Food Stamps offices. Needy households lose weeks or months of benefits. SNAP/Food Stamps offices face more work in processing new cases than they would have in completing recertifications for the same households. Outreach-based strategies can ameliorate “churning” problems. Outreach workers can contact clients due to recertify and assist them in doing so. Such recertification assistance helps eligibility offices by reducing churning, reducing staff contacts to obtain verifications, and speeding up processing times.

## **Collaborations to Make Outreach and Application Assistance More Effective**

Collaboration with other nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and private businesses can greatly enrich a SNAP/Food Stamps outreach project’s efforts. Forging strong partnerships with USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) regional offices and state and local SNAP/Food Stamps agencies is a hallmark of model SNAP/Food Stamps outreach and access initiatives. By collaborating with schools, health clinics, grocery retailers, churches and other religious congregations, libraries, and others, outreach projects can reach people in their daily lives, and provide them with information, prescreening and assistance in settings that are comfortable to them.

Anti-hunger advocates and others mounting SNAP/Food Stamps outreach efforts can partner with FNS on a range of SNAP/Food Stamps fronts. Regional FNS offices review state SNAP/Food Stamps outreach plans and reimbursement funds. Regional FNS offices also conduct “access reviews,” through which they examine enrollment practices in select SNAP/Food Stamps offices. Regional FNS offices process requests from states for waivers of federal SNAP/Food Stamps rules. Regional FNS offices help schedule site visits for federal officials, events that often garner press attention. Regional FNS offices also publish newsletters and often convene meetings of stakeholders. For a list of regional FNS office contacts, go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/Contacts/RegionContacts.htm>

Model outreach initiatives also involve collaboration with state and local SNAP/Food Stamps agencies. Federal SNAP/Food Stamps competitive grants typically require a letter of commitment of cooperation from such agencies. Obtaining and analyzing data from SNAP/Food Stamps agencies also can help an outreach project evaluate its effectiveness in generating applications that are approved.

State and local SNAP/Food Stamps offices should consider forming partnerships with sister agencies that serve like clients. Good candidates include agencies that provide services or benefits to persons with disabilities, older Americans, families with children, noncitizens or homeless individuals. Clients of these agencies often are income-eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps. Agency case managers have financial and nonfinancial eligibility information readily available. These partnerships can ease administrative burdens for the client and SNAP/Food Stamps case managers while providing sister agency clients a valuable resource.

Moreover, community partners and SNAP/Food Stamps agencies have resources that can assist the other partners. For example, the Alameda County Community Food Bank tapped the expertise of the local SNAP/Food Stamps agency to develop and hold SNAP/Food Stamps outreach trainings for more than 500 people. Seeking input and collaboration from SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility offices helps outreach projects troubleshoot problem areas, supports SNAP/Food Stamps agency work, and improves customer service and SNAP/Food Stamps access for clients.

“Outstationing” an eligibility worker at a community organization can expand where and when people can access SNAP/Food Stamp state and local services. In North Dakota, agency officials have found that providing outstationing services is “imperative to providing access to our customers” given the lack of transportation options for the area’s elderly and working poor, many of whom live on reservations. In New York City, the West Side Campaign Against Hunger hosts eligibility workers two days a week at its food pantry, so it can directly connect its clients with the services they need. In early 2008, Massachusetts piloted SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Centers where eligibility workers are colocated within local community health and senior centers. These colocated Massachusetts eligibility workers offer in-person, regular access to information and application services for SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. FNS reports that Tennessee’s “roving caseworker” model, which equips a caseworker with a mobile office, has gotten good reviews from clients and caseworkers.

American Public Human Services Association, “Successful Food Stamp Innovations,” description of North Dakota SNAP/Food Stamps outstationing program (p. 8):

<http://www.aphsa.org/Policy/Doc/Successful-Food-Stamp-Innovations.pdf>

West Side Campaign Against Hunger (video): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYPtpVXLgO4>

State of Massachusetts, Massachusetts SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Centers:

[http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Government&L2=Newsroom&L3=Department+of+Transitional+Assistance+News%2C+Updates%2C+and+Announcements&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dta\\_g\\_new\\_fs\\_outreach\\_centers&csid=Eeohhs2](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Government&L2=Newsroom&L3=Department+of+Transitional+Assistance+News%2C+Updates%2C+and+Announcements&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dta_g_new_fs_outreach_centers&csid=Eeohhs2)

FNS, “Program Access Toolkit” (2010) (p. 14):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FNS, “State/Local SNAP Agencies Outreach Toolkit:”

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits\\_state.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits_state.htm)

Forming a SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach Committee to bring together the public agency and nonprofits on a regular basis can jumpstart collaboration in a community and/or strengthen existing partnerships. In rural Columbia County, Oregon, an outreach committee of representatives from the local eligibility office, Head Start, local food pantries, and nutrition education programs met once a month for a year to identify barriers to SNAP/Food Stamps and ways to overcome those barriers. The group developed a fax-in application model, so that SNAP/Food Stamps applicants could apply by fax from designated sites in each small town in the county and simultaneously call the office to schedule an interview. Additionally, if even one trip to the eligibility office is a hardship for them, those applicants could schedule a phone interview and have their EBT cards mailed to them. This initiative saved many needy people from having to make an extra hour-long trip to and from the nearest eligibility office.

Illinois Hunger Coalition (IHC) Community Quality Committees are composed of a broad range of members, including advocates, community-based organizations, schools, food pantries, health care providers, churches, government officials and SNAP/Food Stamps office staff. These committees meet every six weeks. Committee meetings allow for an exchange of information about resources for families and individuals in need. Community groups and SNAP/Food Stamps office staff make appropriate referrals. Most importantly, the Community Quality Committees foster relationships and trust among group members that collaborate not only to identify problems but to offer solutions that increase access to food and services across Illinois.

Maryland Hunger Solutions co-chairs the Coalition for a Healthy Maryland, an alliance that includes partners from the federal, state, and local agencies handling the Food Supplement Program (the Maryland name for SNAP/Food Stamps), as well as area food banks and nonprofit organizations. By pooling resources and collaborating on events, Coalition members have educated community-based organizations about recent

improvements to SNAP/Food Stamps and other nutrition programs. The Coalition's "Food for Families" resource fair in Baltimore in September 2009 attracted more than 350 attendees.

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) has a strong nationwide coalition of state SNAP/Food Stamps administrators. Through its annual SNAP/Food Stamps administrators' conference, nationwide conference calls on current issues and vast email network of state contacts, state SNAP/Food Stamps administrators identify and share access policy strategies and successful outreach models.

Oregon Hunger Task Force. "Food Stamp Outreach Guide," (section on how to form an outreach committee): <http://oregonhunger.org/fs-outreach-guide-07.html>

Illinois Hunger Coalition website: <http://www.ilhunger.org/index.html>

APHSA website: <http://www.aphsa.org>

APHSA, "Successful Food Stamp Innovations" (highlighting state outreach efforts): <http://www.aphsa.org/Policy/Doc/Successful-Food-Stamp-Innovations.pdf>

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pp. 30-31): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

State and local elected officials can be strong allies of efforts to increase access to SNAP/Food Stamps and to expand outreach to potentially eligible people. They can help both by working with state and local agencies to improve policy and by taking steps to fund or encourage outreach activities to increase participation. Their constituent service staff also can be helpful to applicants and recipients struggling with agency red tape.

The Hatcher Group, "Feeding America's Families: How Elected Officials Can Help Families in Need Receive Food Stamps and Nutrition Assistance" (Summer 2006): [http://www.thehatchergroup.com/doc/Food\\_Stamp\\_Outreach\\_08.06.pdf](http://www.thehatchergroup.com/doc/Food_Stamp_Outreach_08.06.pdf)

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Hunger and Nutrition Partnership (webpage): <http://www.ncsl.org/IssuesResearch/HumanServices/TheFoodStampProgram/tabid/16303/Default.aspx> and <http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/documents/statefed/humserv/FSP.pdf>

National League of Cities (NLC), "Helping Working Families," (a toolkit on public benefits outreach and enrollment, describes what city leaders can do to promote outreach efforts): <http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/2EBA4F749F324321BB0299A7A75903A4/hwfactionkit.pdf>

## Identifying Barriers and Targeting Strategies

SNAP/Food Stamps participation among eligible people nationally is only 66 percent – meaning that one in three eligible people is left unserved. Understanding who is not being reached, and why, is a first step to crafting targeted outreach strategies.

Certain subgroups are particularly susceptible to low rates of SNAP/Food Stamps participation among eligible individuals. Among the working poor, only 56 percent of eligible people receive benefits.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> FNS, "Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2007." (November 2009): [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits\\_state.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits_state.htm)  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2007.pdf>

immigrant community is severely underrepresented; just under half of eligible non-citizens participated in SNAP/Food Stamps in 2007.<sup>7</sup> SNAP/Food Stamps participation was lower still among older Americans – in 2007 only 32 percent of eligible individuals 60 years of age or older participated in the program.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the variation in SNAP/Food Stamps participation is due to particular barriers faced by different groups – for example, fear about the impact of SNAP/Food Stamps on immigration status for noncitizens, and confusion and lower levels of ability that may keep older Americans from completing the application process.

A simple but powerful barrier to SNAP/Food Stamps participation is lack of awareness: too many people do not realize that they may be eligible for benefits. According to a 2004 study, more than half of eligible non-participants did not think they were eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps.<sup>9</sup> Lack of awareness is of particular concern in the current economic environment, when many people who have never accessed SNAP/Food Stamps before are in serious need for the first time.

Even for people aware of SNAP/Food Stamps, myriad barriers to access loom. These include long, complex application forms, difficulty getting to eligibility offices, burdensome verification requirements, and insufficient notice of the steps needed for recertifying.

SNAP/Food Stamps access barriers – and the latest evidence regarding their impact for the general public and also particular demographic groups – are discussed in detail in a FRAC report, which reviews a multitude of research studies on SNAP/Food Stamps access.

FRAC, “Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps: A Review of the Literature” (February 2008): <http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSPaccess.pdf>

Application assistance and other forms of outreach can help overcome barriers that prevent eligible people from accessing SNAP/Food Stamps. Outreach serves a critical function by eliminating misconceptions about eligibility rules that keep many people from applying. Application assistance can provide clients with critical information and supports tailored to their situations, such as help gathering verifications, setting up interviews and obtaining translation services.<sup>10</sup> The Atlanta Community Food Bank’s outreach coordinator spends nearly half of her time following up with clients on their appointments and document submissions and trouble-shooting barriers during the application process.

For examples of how SNAP/Food Stamps outreach initiatives around the country are targeting different demographic groups and adapting to the challenges and opportunities of different settings, see the section on “Making a Difference: Effective SNAP/Food Stamps Strategies Tailored to Groups and Locations.”

## **Data Matching: Finding People Who Are Likely Eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps**

In addition to identifying barriers to SNAP/Food Stamps for particular groups and planning strategies to dismantle those barriers, agencies and organizations can target outreach efforts by harnessing already-available data. By matching SNAP/Food Stamps and Medicaid databases, New York City identified

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<sup>7</sup> FNS, “Trends in SNAP Participation Rates: 2000 – 2007.” (June 2009):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2007Sum.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> FNS, “Trends in SNAP Participation Rates: 2000 – 2007.” (June 2009):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2007Sum.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Susan Bartlett and Nancy R. Burstein. Abt Associates, Inc. for the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Food Stamp Program Access Study: Eligible Nonparticipants.” (May 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, “Outreach Strategies for Medicaid and SCHIP: An Overview of Effective Strategies and Activities.” (April 2006): <http://www.kff.org/medicaid/upload/7495.pdf>

Medicaid recipients who appeared to be eligible for but not receiving SNAP/Food Stamps. Based on that data match, the city informed 600,000 Medicaid recipients about their potential eligibility for SNAP/Food Stamps and where to apply. SNAP/Food Stamps agencies should seek out similar sister agency partnerships for outreach.

The effectiveness of data matching in increasing SNAP/Food Stamps enrollment often is affected by policy choices the state makes. For example, if the state applies a SNAP/Food Stamps gross income test between 165 percent and 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (a choice available to it under broad-based categorical eligibility), it increases the chances that matches with other programs that apply gross income tests above the previously standard SNAP/Food Stamps 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level gross income test will lead to qualifying cases. For more on broad-based categorical eligibility, see “Strategies for States to Increase Access to SNAP/Food Stamps,” below.

The National Council on Aging’s (NCOA) National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment has compiled a list of innovative and successful data-driven strategies to help connect older Americans and persons with disabilities to a variety of benefits such as SNAP/Food Stamps, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Medicare Savings Program, and Medicare Part D Low Income Subsidy. The examples in the NCOA guide show how states can make the most of the information they already have to implement targeted outreach, enrollment and retention initiatives.

National Council on Aging, “Using Data-Driven Strategies to Enhance Benefits Outreach, Enrollment, and Retention Activities” (November 2009): [http://www.centerforbenefits.org/Data-Driven\\_Strategies\\_Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.centerforbenefits.org/Data-Driven_Strategies_Brief_FINAL.pdf)

Many states have Combined Application Projects (CAPs) which simplify the SNAP/Food Stamp application process for SSI applicants and recipients. Some (referred to as “modified” CAPs) involve data matching of potentially eligible SSI clients against current SNAP/Food Stamp caseloads. The SNAP agency then sends the SSI client a SNAP/Food Stamps application (sometimes a shortened version). Outreach to SSI clients is done in a variety of ways. To learn more about SSI CAP models, go to page 35 of this toolkit, for the section “Explore SNAP/Food Stamps demonstration projects to streamline processes.”

## **Cultural Competency as a Key to Outreach**

Cultural competence, or the ability to interact and communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds, is important for effective outreach in a nation as diverse as ours. As FNS states in its outreach toolkit section on reaching diverse audiences, “Diversity means not only people of different nationalities, ethnic groups, and religious backgrounds, but also includes gender and age, people with disabilities, as well as the extent to which immigrants have integrated into mainstream American culture.”<sup>11</sup> Some of the best ways to improve cultural competency include building partnerships with organizations and community leaders from the target community and holding focus groups to hear from clients in their own voices.

FNS, “Community Partners Outreach Toolkit,” (guidance on cultural competency topics): [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA\\_partners4.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA_partners4.pdf)

Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, “SNAP (Food Stamps) Outreach Guide” (how to set up and conduct focus groups): <http://oregonhunger.org/snap-outreach-guide>

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<sup>11</sup> FNS, Community Partners Outreach Toolkit (p. D1): [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA\\_partners4.pdf#page=2](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA_partners4.pdf#page=2)

## Prescreening to Focus Assistance and Encourage People to Apply

Prescreening potential applicants for SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility can be a powerful way to help individuals make an informed decision to apply. A 2004 USDA report found that “most nonparticipant households (69 percent) reported [that they] would apply for food stamps if they knew for certain they were eligible.” For many overstretched families who find the process daunting, assuring them they are likely eligible and estimating the benefits they are likely to receive can provide reassurance that the effort it takes to apply will be worth it.

FRAC’s D.C.-based initiative D.C. Hunger Solutions has a quick paper-based prescreening tool that asks two core questions:

1. How many people purchase and prepare food together at home?
2. What is your income before taxes each month?

(Note: in states that have not eliminated the asset test through categorical eligibility, it would also be necessary to ask how much the household has in assets, for example in checking or savings accounts)

D.C. Hunger Solutions’ prescreener tool charts show by household size annual and monthly SNAP/Food Stamps gross income limits and monthly maximum SNAP/Food Stamps benefit levels.

D.C. Hunger Solutions prescreening tool:

[http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/quick\\_food\\_stamp\\_screener09-10.pdf](http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/quick_food_stamp_screener09-10.pdf)

The Rhode Island Food Stamp Outreach Project also has easy-to-use prescreening tools – one for prescreening the general population and one tailored for prescreening elderly and disabled households. (Note: Rhode Island prescreening sheets reflect expanded eligibility rules pursuant to the state’s implementation of broad-based categorical eligibility.)

RI Food Stamp Outreach Project prescreening tools:

<http://www.eatbettertoday.com/wp-content/uploads/file/09-10%20general%20SNAP%20screener.pdf>

<http://www.eatbettertoday.com/wp-content/uploads/file/09-10%20senior%20SNAP%20screener.pdf>

FNS offers a SNAP/Food Stamps online prescreening tool on its website: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>

Computer-based prescreening tools can help outreach workers get answers to more detailed questions and estimate likely SNAP/Food Stamps benefit amounts for clients. It is important that clients understand from outreach workers (or from the host website) that any computer-based or online prescreening tool provides only an estimation of eligibility and likely benefit amount, not a determination of eligibility or confirmation of the exact amount of SNAP/Food Stamp benefits the household will receive.

An example of a state-specific online prescreening tool can be found on the Utahns Against Hunger website. This quick, user-friendly “Food Stamp Calculator” generates a likely benefit amount estimate based on eight or nine questions. It provides a link to the Utah Food Stamp application and other links and phone numbers applicants can use to get more information. For details, go to: <http://www.uah.org/>

The National League of Cities has a guide to public benefit prescreening tools, including discussion of available tools, as well as advice for selecting, designing, and using prescreening tools:

<http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/E2DF31BA4AFF4ADEB19BA434142B0545/iyefscreeningtools.pdf>

There are a variety of nationally franchised, multi-benefit prescreening tools available to organizations and localities, including

- AARP Benefits QuickLINK: [http://www.benefitscheckup.org/index.cfm?partner\\_id=22](http://www.benefitscheckup.org/index.cfm?partner_id=22)
- National Council on Aging, Benefits CheckUp: [https://www.benefitscheckup.org/moreprograms.cfm?partner\\_id=0](https://www.benefitscheckup.org/moreprograms.cfm?partner_id=0)
- COMPASS: <https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/compass/CMHOM.aspx>
- The Benefit Bank: <http://www.thebenefitbank.com/>
- The Benefit Screener: <http://www.massresources.org/infopages.cfm?ButtonID=16>
- Seedco's Earn Benefits: <http://www.earnbenefits.org/page.php?pageID=85>
- HelpEngen (formerly known as "Real Benefits"): <https://www.helpengen.com/nonmembers/loginForm.jsp>
- One-e-App: <http://www.oneeapp.org/>
- Oregon Helps!: <http://www.oregonhelps.org/>
- SingleStop USA (counselors use a multibenefit calculator): <http://www.singlestopusa.org>

## Promotional Materials for SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach

Promotional SNAP/Food Stamps flyers and other printed materials are useful in outreach projects. Outreach workers can hand them out at events, give them to partner agencies to give to their clients, use them in information sessions, and post them in a variety of busy community locations.

Mailing SNAP/Food Stamps materials can be an effective way to reach target populations that might not otherwise seek SNAP/Food Stamps information. In Massachusetts, the Division of Unemployment Assistance includes a SNAP/Food Stamps information postcard in routine mailings to residents receiving unemployment insurance payments. In Rhode Island, advocates worked with Social Security Administration offices to insert into a mailing information encouraging Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients to apply for SNAP/Food Stamps.

Fortunately, there are numerous great sources for promotional SNAP/Food Stamps materials. FNS produces many useful materials that can be downloaded or ordered in bulk for free. In addition to flyers and brochures, the FNS website features a manila-sized envelope with a checklist of items a client might need to complete a SNAP/Food Stamps application. Many nonprofit organizations have found that the envelope is a useful resource for helping households assemble all required documentation for submission with their initial application. FNS also makes available for download high resolution, professional quality photographs that organizations can use to create their own outreach materials. FNS posts PSAs for TV and radio in English and in Spanish, as well as "radio novellas" and scripts for paid radio ads.

For outreach to legal immigrant and English as a Second Language (ESL) communities, FNS offers, in more than 30 languages, detailed fact sheets on eligibility, including rules specific to legal immigrant households.

Note: FNS materials are not state-specific. Check with your local SNAP/Food Stamps office to see whether there are already state-specific materials, or if the information on FNS materials conforms to specific rules applied in your state.

FNS, SNAP/Food Stamps outreach resource page:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/default.htm>

FNS, SNAP/Food Stamps materials in languages other than English:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/translations.htm>

## Websites and SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach

Many states are making SNAP/Food Stamps information and materials available online. In its Program Access Toolkit, FNS reports that online applications reduce the amount of time SNAP/Food Stamps caseworkers must spend completing data entry, meaning that they can get eligible SNAP/Food Stamps households their benefits more quickly and reduce their workloads.

A website can be a valuable outreach and access tool. The Internet has become an increasingly important access point for families – particularly those facing prolonged unemployment and poverty for the first time. Putting the SNAP/Food Stamps website address on program materials, promotional items and as e-mail tag lines lets people know how they can get more information about SNAP/Food Stamps.

Websites can facilitate coordinated outreach in a state by allowing projects to post outreach materials for download and let partner organizations know how to request a SNAP/Food Stamps training. Web-based postings regarding SNAP/Food Stamps policy changes and local SNAP/Food Stamps office moves help keep clients and advocates aware of program developments.

As an alternative to building a multi-page website, service providers and others with existing websites can add a short posting about SNAP/Food Stamps, list SNAP/Food Stamps hotline numbers, and offer links to sites offering SNAP/Food Stamps applications and prescreening assistance.

Vermontfoodhelp.com, a project of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, provides helpful, easy-to-find information about how 3SquaresVT (Vermont's name for SNAP/Food Stamps) works, the application process and eligibility guidelines, including information and messaging detailed to working families, homeless persons, immigrants, seniors, students, and AmeriCorps members. Visitors to the website can use an online prescreening tool to estimate whether they qualify for 3SquaresVT and how much they might receive in benefits. They also can download the 3SquaresVT application or request they receive an application and an accompanying "help guide" by mail.

Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger's vermontfoodhelp.com:

<http://www.vermontfoodhelp.com/>

Other examples of SNAP/Food Stamps websites:

- Rhode Island SNAP/Food Stamps Information Center: [eatbettertoday.com](http://eatbettertoday.com)
- Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger's SNAP/Food Stamps FAQ: <http://www.hungercoalition.org/faqs-food-stamps>

In some states, advocates and SNAP/Food Stamps agencies make state-specific outreach materials available online. For example, the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF) website offers brochures targeted to students and seniors, and flyers for farmers' markets and food pantries. OHRTF worked with the Oregon Department of Human Services to make the materials available for mail order free of charge. Vermontfoodhelp.com, an online project of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (VTCECH), offers flyers and handouts. These range from a general audience handout on things to remember when reporting changes or going through recertification, to fact sheets targeted to immigrants, older adults, and homeless persons.

OHRTF (outreach materials): <http://oregonhunger.org/food-stamp-materials.html>

VTCECH (outreach materials):

[http://www.vermontfoodhelp.com/outreach\\_tools/outreach\\_tools.php](http://www.vermontfoodhelp.com/outreach_tools/outreach_tools.php)

## Training Volunteers and Community Partners

Training volunteers and partner agencies also can be an effective way of expanding the reach of SNAP/Food Stamps marketing and application assistance. In Massachusetts, the Western Massachusetts Food Bank hired a dedicated SNAP/Food Stamps outreach worker to train a corps of volunteers. The volunteers will provide marketing, prescreenings and online application assistance in rural areas. SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach staff from the state SNAP/Food Stamps agency provided the initial trainings and outreach materials.

In addition to a basic review of eligibility requirements and the application process, a SNAP/Food Stamps training agenda can pass on crucial tips to help applicants complete the process, specialized information for certain subpopulations (e.g., immigrants or older Americans), or other strategies tailored to specific audiences.

Training partner models provide multiple benefits:

- It can raise awareness of SNAP/Food Stamps among groups most likely to interact with the people who need and likely qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps;
- It can establish networks to distribute information – posters, fact sheets, and other materials that partner groups can put up in their offices;
- Trainers from the outreach project and state SNAP/Food Stamps agency can hear from trainees about access issues and concerns and strategize with them about ways to remove real or perceived client barriers to program access.

Alameda County Community Food Bank's training facilitator Elizabeth Gomez ends her training sessions by giving participants four ways to help enroll people in SNAP/Food Stamps: put out posters and promotional materials, invite outreach workers to host an enrollment clinic, refer clients to the food bank's outreach team, and provide direct prescreening and application assistance to interested applicants.

D.C. Hunger Solutions stays in touch with the agencies and organizations it trains about SNAP/Food Stamps. Every month, D.C. Hunger Solutions e-mails out a "monthly outreach tip." One month it might draw readers' attention to a newly-created SNAP/Food Stamp Benefit Estimator tool; another month, it might describe how to assess whether an applicant may qualify for expedited processing.

The California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), which manages SNAP/Food Stamps outreach projects in California, has published a toolkit aimed at those new to SNAP/Food Stamps advocacy. CAFB designed its toolkit "to address the need for training by offering a basic orientation to the food stamp system in California and describing the full array of resources and support available for developing an effective outreach program." The CAFB guide provides detailed information about eligibility, the application process, client rights, prescreening, outreach supports and materials, and other topics.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has identified strong training programs to equip community partner staff with accurate information on SNAP/Food Stamps policies and practices as a "best practice" for community partnerships.

California Association of Food Banks, "Food Stamp Outreach and Access Toolkit: Basics for Beginners:" <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/NetworkFSO-ToolkitBasics.pdf>

Western Massachusetts Food Bank: <http://www.foodbankwma.org>

Alameda County Community Food Bank: <http://www.accfb.org>

D.C. Hunger Solutions, "Food Stamp Volunteer Training" (PowerPoint):  
[http://frac.org/food\\_stamp\\_volunteer\\_training\\_v7.ppt](http://frac.org/food_stamp_volunteer_training_v7.ppt)

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (p. 31):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

## Helplines to Support Outreach and Provide Application Assistance

Telephone helplines can greatly enhance community-based outreach efforts. The FNS SNAP/Food Stamps national hotline (1-800-221-5689) connects callers with a live operator who mails out SNAP/Food Stamps information packets.

Some states have established dedicated SNAP/Food Stamps hotlines. In Massachusetts, the toll-free number (1866-950-Food) is answered by state SNAP/Food Stamps hotline staff who respond to SNAP/Food Stamps-only questions about eligibility, benefit levels, and the application process. They also mail application packages or provide online application assistance to callers.

SNAP/Food Stamps Call Centers are another option for states to respond to basic program inquiries. Some states are developing automated voice response systems and online tools to assist applicants or ongoing clients with basic questions about their cases. The Pennsylvania My Compass Account, similar to an online banking system, allows clients to set up an account to access up-to-date information about their SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. These helpline and call center strategies can relieve burdens on case workers while improving customer service for SNAP/Food Stamps clients.

Many non-governmental anti-hunger organizations have implemented helplines statewide and/or locally. In Michigan, the Center for Civil Justice operates a SNAP/Food Stamps telephone helpline (1-800-481-4989) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. five days a week. The Illinois Hunger Coalition operates a statewide "Hunger Hotline" (1-800-359-2613) providing information and application assistance for SNAP/Food Stamps and other benefit programs, as well as referrals to local food pantries and other resources.

In Massachusetts, Project Bread's toll-free FoodSource Hotline (1-800-645-8333) counselors provide information about SNAP/Food Stamps and other nutrition programs, as well as refer callers to emergency food resources. The FoodSource Hotline provides information in 160 languages - from Arabic and Cambodian, to Russian and Vietnamese. It serves deaf callers through a TTY line (1-800-377-1292).

Increasingly, 211 numbers hosted by local United Way agencies make referrals to a variety of services, including SNAP/Food Stamps. During the recession, such helplines have reported jumps in the numbers of calls from families needing assistance. For example, San Francisco Bay area 211 centers reported that calls for food, clothing, shelter and other basic needs were up by more than half over the prior year.<sup>12</sup>

Another type of hotline helpful for SNAP/Food Stamps recipients is the EBT call center, where recipients can gain information about the status of their SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. EBT call center lines can be particularly helpful for informing SNAP/Food Stamps clients about the process for obtaining replacement SNAP/Food Stamps allotments if they have lost food due to a power outage or other disaster situation. SNAP/Food Stamps outreach workers report that clients in such situations typically turn to the EBT call centers to ascertain the status of their SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. SNAP/Food Stamps outreach projects should ask their states to place relevant messages about replacement benefits through the EBT call center line.

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<sup>12</sup> See "Calls to 211 social service lines keep rising," by John Simerman, Contra Costa Times, updated 2/22/10:  
[http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci\\_14437874](http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_14437874)

Pennsylvania My COMPASS Account:

<https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/compass/CMHOM.aspx>

Michigan Food Stamp Partnership: <http://www.foodstamphelp.org/>

FNS, Poster advertising FNS SNAP/Food Stamps Toll-free Helpline (1-800-221-5689):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/SmallReasonPostr.pdf>

FNS, SNAP/Food Stamps EBT Customer Service Numbers:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/pdfs/state-lines.pdf>

FNS, EBT Status Report (state-by-state SNAP/Food Stamps EBT vendors list):

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/ebt\\_status\\_report.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/ebt_status_report.htm)

## Media Strategies for SNAP/Food Stamps Outreach

Media coverage of hunger and SNAP/Food Stamps can be effective in spreading word about the program. Each story provides an opportunity to fight stigma, challenge myths about program eligibility and practices, and let people know how to apply for benefits.

There are many creative ways to earn unpaid press coverage. The beginning of a new service (like a hotline), the implementation of positive SNAP/Food Stamps policy changes, the release of new data, statements by celebrities, and site visits from elected officials all can serve as excellent hooks for generating positive media coverage of SNAP/Food Stamps.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has resources for partners to use in generating media. These include information about how to pitch a story, do a media interview, and target media outlets; templates for media advisories and press releases; and PSA scripts that partners can ask local media outlets to air free of charge.

FNS, "Community Partner Outreach Toolkit" (section on media outreach):

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA\\_partners3.pdf#page=2](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA_partners3.pdf#page=2)

FNS, "Outreach Toolkit: How To's for Media Relations and Outreach:"

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA\\_partners6.pdf#page=2](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/USDA_partners6.pdf#page=2)

FNS, "Optimize Your Press Release for Fruitful Results,"

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2010/Community/SNAP\\_community\\_Chapter10.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2010/Community/SNAP_community_Chapter10.pdf)

FNS, "Is Advertising Part of Your Menu?:"

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2010/Community/SNAP\\_community\\_Chapter10.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2010/Community/SNAP_community_Chapter10.pdf)

FNS, SNAP/Food Stamps Public Service Announcements:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/radio/default.htm>

The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), which is managed by the Nutrition Consortium of New York State, amplifies its SNAP/Food Stamps messages by having all of its 45 NOEP coordinators around New York state conduct media and promotional outreach around coordinated, two-month long campaigns. The first campaign in 2010, targeted to working families, used the slogan, "You work hard, now let food

stamps work for you.” During each campaign, NOEP coordinators echo the statewide theme in letters to the editor, paid TV, radio and print advertisements, and posters distributed to community organizations.

“Stay healthy while helping the economy,” Letter to the editor, by NOEP resource adviser Victoria Brownell, Watertown Daily Times, 1/27/10:

<http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20100127/OPINION02/301279992>

Media coverage of SNAP/Food Stamps can help change misperceptions about participation among target populations and increase awareness among opinion leaders who can reach those groups. Leaders from aging organizations can be particularly influential in reaching older Americans. Good examples of such media outreach are below.

“Feeding the Hungry should be a SNAP,” Op Ed by AARP Foundation Board Chair N. Joyce Payne, Ed.D, Black Voices News, 9/30/09: <http://blackvoicenews.com/more-sections/8-commentary/43540-feeding-the-hungry-should-be-a-snap.html>

“SNAP Getting Food Stamps to Elderly”, by Joe Seelig, Highlands Today, 8/17/09: <http://www2.highlandstoday.com/content/2009/aug/17/la-snap-getting-food-stamps-to-elderly/>

The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) has undertaken outreach to university and community college students who might be eligible to receive SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. It began by sending out a press release that highlighted the steep costs of higher education in Massachusetts, the difficulties many students have in meeting basic needs, and the criteria that would make many students likely eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps benefits. As a result, the Boston Globe ran an article profiling a student who was receiving SNAP/Food Stamps and outlined how other students might qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps. Subsequent to this coverage, MLRI received requests from student newspapers and others in the higher education community for press interviews and other collaborations on SNAP/Food Stamps outreach targeted to students.

“Food Stamps Offer Lifeline,” by Peter Schworm, Boston Globe, 12/22/08: [http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2008/12/22/food\\_stamps\\_offer\\_lifeline/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2008/12/22/food_stamps_offer_lifeline/?page=1)

The Food Stamp Challenge, in which participants limit their food costs for a week to the average SNAP/Food Stamps benefit, is another hook for generating media coverage of hunger and SNAP/Food Stamps. Many public figures, elected officials, advocates, media personalities, and community members have taken the challenge and earned significant media attention, including storied highlighting the need for policy changes to improve SNAP/Food Stamps benefit levels and access.

Members of Congress who participated in the food stamp challenge, Food Stamp Challenge Blog: <http://foodstampchallenge.typepad.com/>

The Hatcher Group and FRAC, “Food Stamp Challenge Toolkit”:  
[http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSC\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSC_Toolkit.pdf)

“A Food Stamp Challenge That We All Can Help With,” Op Ed by Maryland Hunger Solutions Director Kimberley Chin and Maryland Department of Human Resources Family Investment Administration Director Kevin McGuire, Washington Post, 8/3/08: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/01/AR2008080102633.html>

The Hatcher Group has prepared a guide about SNAP/Food Stamps outreach for elected officials. It includes helpful templates and planning tools for those outreach activities.

The Hatcher Group, "Feeding America's Families: How Elected Officials Can Help Families in Need Receive Food Stamps and Nutrition Assistance:"

[http://www.thehatchergroup.com/doc/Food\\_Stamp\\_Outreach\\_08.06.pdf](http://www.thehatchergroup.com/doc/Food_Stamp_Outreach_08.06.pdf)

Nominating entities for FNS awards for their service to SNAP/Food Stamps customers can also be good hooks for generating media coverage of the program. "Hunger Champion" awards go to local SNAP/Food Stamps offices. "Golden Grocer" awards go to food retailers.

FNS, Golden Grocer Award Nominations:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/coalition/2010\\_golden-grocers.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/coalition/2010_golden-grocers.htm)

FNS, Hunger Champion Award Nominations:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/coalition/2010\\_hunger\\_champions.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/coalition/2010_hunger_champions.htm)

A powerful way to challenge stereotypes about SNAP/Food Stamps and reduce stigma is to feature real clients in media coverage. Outreach can help identify participants willing to share their stories.

Quick tips for facilitating client stories:

- Get the facts! What is the person's work situation? How many children does she have, and what are the children's ages? Is the person struggling with any transportation or medical problems? How much difference did the boost in SNAP/Food Stamps allotments that began in April 2009 mean in the types of foods that the person could obtain or the length of time benefits last? The more details you have, the more that person – and the help provided them by SNAP/Food Stamps – comes alive to your audience.
- Choose the stories strategically. Whether you are seeking to break a stereotype about eligibility, highlight a new trend in the need for SNAP/Food Stamps, or simply put a face on the program, the client's story will drive the narrative people read.
- When D.C. Hunger Solutions was promoting a D.C. City Council bill to ease income and resource rules for SNAP/Food Stamps, it asked a working mother of four boys to share her story. Though struggling to meet the basics for her family, she did not qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps. Her income from her full-time job was just above the regular gross income limit for SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility, but below the higher gross income test that would apply under the broad-based categorical eligibility provisions proposed in the bill then pending before the D.C. City Council. D.C. Hunger Solutions Director Alex Ashbrook reports that the woman's willingness to share her story publicly was a "key" to the successful drive for the Food Stamps Expansion Act in D.C.
- Establish a relationship of trust with the client. For many people, sharing with the media personal information about the hardships they are facing can be daunting. Some clients will not be comfortable doing so and should not be pressured. Others, however, will agree to tell their stories. This is especially so if they trust the intermediary and they understand that telling their story is part of an effort to improve access, fight stigma and help other people.
- Create a story bank. You can begin this informally by keeping notes and contact information for SNAP/Food Stamps clients who are good candidates for media coverage. Having multiple leads to SNAP/Food Stamps clients at your fingertips is quite helpful, because media requests for interviews often come with little lead time.
- Learn from good examples. For a televised interview in which a SNAP/Food Stamps client shares her family's experience, go to "Headline: Living on Food Stamps" (Business News Network, 2/4/2010): <http://watch.bnn.ca/headline/february-2010/headline-february-4-2010/#clip263558>

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## Strategies for States to Increase Access to SNAP/Food Stamps, Maximize Benefits, and Decrease Administrative Workload

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Given today's difficult economy, increasing access to SNAP/Food Stamps for unemployed, underemployed, and other vulnerable low-income populations is more important than ever.

At the same time, lower wages, higher unemployment, and other impacts of the recession are resulting in revenue losses to state budgets, compounding state challenges to serve more people and identify administrative efficiencies. Even with 100 percent federal funding of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits, roughly half federal funding of administrative costs, and special federal pots of money for administration, some states are cutting staff and harming access to the program.

Better strategies are available.

A number of SNAP/Food Stamps options are available to states to increase client access, maximize benefits and reduce administrative burdens. States can target specific populations or choose policies that assist SNAP/Food Stamps clients generally. This section highlights several such policy options for states to consider. These and other strategies are described in greater detail in FRAC's resource guide "Smart Choices in Hard Times:" [http://frac.org/pdf/smartchoices\\_2010.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/smartchoices_2010.pdf)

### SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options that Streamline the Eligibility Process and Reduce Client Burdens and Office Workloads

***Encourage waiver of the SNAP/Food Stamps face-to-face interview.*** Conducting client interviews via telephone rather than in-person in SNAP/Food Stamps offices can streamline the process for clients as well as SNAP/Food Stamps offices. Difficulties getting to the local SNAP/Food Stamps office and waiting for appointments, and the stigma often associated with visiting a public benefits office are often reasons for not participating in SNAP/Food Stamps. Currently 34 states have waivers of the face-to-face interview requirement,<sup>13</sup> and more states are exploring their options at both application and recertification. Waiving face-to-face interviews is especially helpful for working families, newly jobless persons, older Americans, rural families, and persons with disabilities. In addition to being more convenient for clients, particularly those who work, telephone interviews help reduce traffic flow in offices, allow for expansion of service hours and teleworking, and, by cutting down on missed interviews, can improve the state's timeliness record.

In its "Program Access Toolkit," FNS reported that addressing common myths and other concerns and providing caseworkers with appropriate equipment are keys to successful implementation of SNAP/Food Stamps telephone interviews. "State agencies can reassure workers that states with [the telephone interview] option have not reported an impact on error rates after the implementation of telephone interviews."<sup>14</sup>

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) launched a website entitled "The 411 on Phone Interviews in California." This website is a key resource for SNAP/Food Stamps administrators, program analysts, and advocates across California implementing the waiver of the face-to-face interview. California counties now have the option to conduct telephone interviews for all households at initial application and recertification without the need to document hardship. The 411 website includes sample documents, frequently asked questions, myths and facts, and county and community resources on phone interview policy. With only one-third of working Californians participating in the program in 2007, the worst such rate in the nation,

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<sup>13</sup> Clients for whom having a face-to-face in-office interview would be a "hardship" are entitled to have the interview conducted in another manner (e.g., over the telephone or at home). The FNS waivers to states allow them to offer telephone interviews to all clients regardless of individual hardship.

<sup>14</sup> FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (p. 20): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

this initiative provides an opportunity for counties across the state to reach those working households and newly jobless people who are eligible for food assistance.

In addition to giving states authority to conduct SNAP/Food Stamps interviews via telephone rather than face-to-face, FNS has approved several demonstration projects that allow community partners to conduct SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility interviews. These projects are subject to detailed evaluation to assess impacts on payment accuracy, program access, and customer service. States should plan to devote staff time towards such research if they undertake a SNAP/Food Stamps demonstration project. FNS notes that community partner interviewer projects can save states time and resources but entail extensive training of partners and strong oversight on the part of the state SNAP/Food Stamps agency.

Waiver of SNAP/Food Stamps face-to-face interview: 7 C.F.R. § 273.2(e) and § 273.14(b)(3)

FNS "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pp. 20, 32-35):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FNS, Policy Memorandum regarding SNAP Changes in FNS Approval of Waivers of the Face-to-Face Interview Requirement, February 13, 2009:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/021309.pdf>

FNS, "State Options Report" (June 2009) (pp. 24-25):  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State\\_Options/8-State\\_Options.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State_Options/8-State_Options.pdf)  
(Reporting on which states have been given broad authority to waive the face-to-face interview, and which have implemented call centers)

FNS Workload Management Matrix, March 4, 2009:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/matrix.pdf>

FNS Guidance, Certification Policies to Support Workload Management, January 9, 2009:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/010909.pdf>

FNS, Summary of Certification Interview Policy Relevant to Community Partner Interviewer Demonstration Projects (March 2, 2010): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2010/030210.pdf>

FRAC, "Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps: A Review of the Literature," (February 2008) (pp. 27-31 and pp. 52-54): <http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSPaccess.pdf> (Describing the research on barriers households face due to office locations, office hours, and various interview practices)

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 18):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

CFPA, 411 on Phone Interviews in California (website):  
<http://www.cfpa.net/PhoneInterviewsCalifornia.html>

***Streamline SNAP/Food Stamps verifications.*** Providing verification of information for key facts in the SNAP/Food Stamps application is cited as a significant barrier for clients, often entailing much time, multiple office visits, and some out-of-pocket costs. Requiring numerous verifications also increases the workload for the state SNAP/Food Stamps agency, which must collect and track the documents, adhere to specialized rules, and remind clients of deadlines for submitting verifications. By minimizing the number and type of required verifications, states can make it easier for clients to access SNAP/Food Stamps benefits and easier for workers to process applications. For example, states can:

*Allow SNAP/Food Stamps applicants to self-declare dependent care expenses.* Many SNAP/Food Stamps clients are struggling with high dependent care costs but few take the dependent care deduction nor fully realize the benefits of it. Recent FNS guidance confirms that states do not need to require verification of a SNAP/Food Stamps household's dependent care expenses, unless the expenses are determined questionable. Allowing applicants to self-declare dependent care expenses makes it easier for clients to take full advantage of the deduction, and for states to reduce their own administrative costs. Costs should include a client's costs for transportation to and from the dependent care site and states can simplify calculating the costs of travel by car by applying the federal mileage rate.

FNS, "Verifications Requirements and State Options" (July 10, 2009) (chart):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/verification-requirements.pdf>

FNS, Memo (confirming that SNAP/Food Stamps dependent care expenses need not be verified) (July 31, 2008): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2008/073108.pdf>

FNS, Memo (clarifying that households may claim transportation costs as part of their SNAP/Food Stamps dependent care deduction) (August 29, 2008): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2008/082908.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 7):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

***Allow SNAP/Food Stamps applicants to self-declare housing costs.*** Although FNS requires verification of residence – which can be furnished with a broad range of documents bearing the applicant's address – federal SNAP/Food Stamps rules do not require applicants to verify shelter costs (costs which can be a factor in determining benefit levels). Anti-hunger advocates report that it may be difficult or uncomfortable for a household to secure a written statement from a landlord or property manager to be given to a SNAP/Food Stamps agency, and it can be especially challenging for households in doubled-up situations. As with the dependent care deduction discussed above, the fewer documents the SNAP/Food Stamps worker is required to record and file, much less verify, the fewer administrative tasks all around. Self-declaration of housing costs contributes to case streamlining.

Mandatory SNAP/Food Stamps verifications: 7 CFR § 273.2(f)(1)

SNAP/Food Stamps State agency options and deductible expenses: 7 CFR § 273.2(f)(3)

FNS, Verifications Requirements and State Options, (July 10, 2009) (Chart):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/verification-requirements.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 18):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

States can streamline verifications further. Several other eligibility factors also can be self-declared (e.g., household composition, sources of non-countable income, U.S. citizenship, and student eligibility).

## **Maximize SNAP/Food Stamps Benefit Amounts by Extending LIHEAP Benefits to SNAP/Food Stamps Recipients**

Receipt of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) payments entitles a SNAP/Food Stamps household to have its shelter costs for SNAP/Food Stamps purposes calculated using the higher heating/cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). Higher shelter cost deductions in turn mean higher

SNAP/Food Stamps monthly allotments. States can encourage their LIHEAP agencies to provide a cash LIHEAP benefit – if need be, even a nominal benefit – directly to SNAP/Food Stamps households that are not already receiving the higher SUA for their shelter deduction. This special LIHEAP benefit simplifies the SNAP/Food Stamps shelter calculation and significantly increases SNAP/Food Stamps benefits for vast numbers of households, thereby providing additional nutrition assistance to families and generating additional economic activity in communities.

LIHEEA receipt and heating/cooling SUA: 7 CFR §273.9(d)(6)(iii)(C)

D.C. Hunger Solutions, Issue Brief (in support of the Food Stamp Expansion Act):  
[http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/heat\\_and\\_eat\\_feb2009.pdf](http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/heat_and_eat_feb2009.pdf)

State of Massachusetts, DTA Field Operations Memo 2007-31 (regarding new special LIHEEA benefit for SNAP/Food Stamps households) (June 28, 2007):  
[http://www.masslegalservices.org/docs/FO\\_2007-31.pdf](http://www.masslegalservices.org/docs/FO_2007-31.pdf)

FRAC, “Heat and Eat: Using Federal Nutrition Programs to Soften Low-Income Households’ Food/Fuel Dilemma” (March 2009): [http://www.frac.org/pdf/heat\\_and\\_eat09.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/heat_and_eat09.pdf)

FRAC, “Smart Choices in Hard Times” (February 2010) (p. 17):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

## **SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options to Reach Low-Income Working Families and the Newly Jobless**

Broad-based categorical eligibility, “simplified” reporting and a standard self-employed business deduction are three key strategies states can pursue to increase SNAP/Food Stamps access and streamline the administrative process. They are particularly helpful to low-income working families. FNS “encourages all States to consider implementing broad-based categorical eligibility as a way to improve program access and simplify the administration of SNAP.”<sup>15</sup>

***Expand Categorical Eligibility.*** “Categorical eligibility” means that recipients of benefits under other means-tested programs like the state-operated Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program can be eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps without regard to the asset test and with a higher gross income test than the one that normally excludes households with gross income over 130 percent of the poverty line. A state can choose to provide categorical eligibility not only to TANF cash beneficiaries, but to groups of other recipients of TANF benefits and services.

By providing all SNAP/Food Stamps applicants with a service funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, states can process all cases under categorical eligibility (“Cat El”) rules that apply a higher gross income test and eliminate the asset test. Services that trigger broad-based categorical eligibility include providing SNAP/Food Stamps applicants with referral pamphlets or toll-free numbers with information on other TANF-funded services. A higher gross income standard makes the SNAP/Food Stamps benefits available to significantly more low-income households struggling to make ends meet. Elimination of the asset test allows the state to shorten application forms, track fewer verifications and reduce the risk of quality control (QC) errors – significantly easing case processing for state agencies and households alike. These options have been widely adopted by states in recent years.

SNAP/Food Stamps Categorical Eligibility: 7 C.F.R. § 273.2(j)(2)(i)

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<sup>15</sup> FNS, “Program Access Toolkit” (2010) (p.17): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pps. 17-19):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FRAC, Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility Maps (showing which states have raised the gross income test or asset test): [http://www.frac.org/pdf/map\\_raising\\_gross\\_income\\_test.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/map_raising_gross_income_test.pdf) and [http://www.frac.org/pdf/map\\_eliminating\\_asset\\_test.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/map_eliminating_asset_test.pdf)

FNS, "Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (chart):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2010/032310.pdf>

DC Hunger Solutions, Issue Brief (in support of the Food Stamp Expansion Act):  
<http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/DC-cat-elfinal3.pdf>

FNS, Letter to Regions (regarding improving access to SNAP/Food Stamps through broad-based categorical eligibility) (September 30, 2009):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/093009.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (pp. 4-5):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

***Simplify SNAP/Food Stamps reporting requirements.*** One of the more widely adopted State options allowed by the 2002 Farm Bill is simplified (semi-annual) reporting. As expected, simplified reporting has improved program access and reduced error rates by limiting the number of interim changes in circumstances reported by clients and acted on by States. Simplified reporting allows States to reduce the information that SNAP/Food Stamps recipients provide to the SNAP/Food Stamps office to maintain eligibility and benefits during their certification period. The 2002 Farm Bill allowed States to assign most households to simplified reporting (expanding previous rules that allowed simplified reporting only for households with earnings). States may assign certification periods of four months or longer, though most typically choose either a 12-month certification with a required semiannual report or a six-month certification.

Simplified reporting households are required to report interim income changes only if they result in income that exceeds the SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility limit (130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines). Expanded categorical eligibility in conjunction with simplified reporting allows for a further reduction in SNAP/Food Stamps reporting requirements. Those simplified reporting households in states with broad-based categorical eligibility can be excused from reporting on that income unless it exceeds the higher gross income test the state applies. Combining broad-based categorical eligibility that applies a higher gross income limit with simplified reporting greatly lessens administrative burdens for both state SNAP/Food Stamps offices and clients.

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (p. 17):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FNS, "State Options Report" (June 2009) (pp. 1-4):  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State\\_Options/8-State\\_Options.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State_Options/8-State_Options.pdf)

FNS, Workload Management Matrix (March 4, 2009):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/matrix.pdf>

FNS, Guidance: Interim Reporting Requirements for Participants Subject to Simplified Reporting (December 8, 2008): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Memo/08/120808.pdf>

FNS, Guidance, Certification Policies to Support Workload Management (January 9, 2009):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/010909.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 5):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

***Establish a SNAP/Food Stamps standard business expense deduction.*** In determining eligibility and benefits, business expenses for self-employed workers are deductible from gross income. In lieu of requiring SNAP/Food Stamps households to document actual business expenses – which can be difficult and time-consuming for both the client and the eligibility worker – states can establish a standard business expense deduction (from pre-tax gross income). Many states have SNAP/Food Stamps standard business deductions as high as 40 or 50 percent of gross income. The applicant can then claim business expenses above the threshold if she can document the actual expense.

SNAP/Food Stamps self-employment expenses: 7 CFR § 273.11(b)(3)(iv) and (v)

Averaging SNAP/Food Stamps income calculation: 7 CFR § 273.10(C)(2)

FNS, "State Options Report" (June 2009) (p. 14):  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/rules/Memo/Support/State\\_Options/8-State\\_Options.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/rules/Memo/Support/State_Options/8-State_Options.pdf)

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 8):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

## **SNAP/Food Stamps Policy Options Helpful to Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities**

***Eliminate the SNAP/Food Stamps asset test.*** A broad-based categorical eligibility policy can especially benefit households with older Americans or disabled persons by eliminating the SNAP/Food Stamps asset test. This both adds to the number of eligible persons and cuts red tape. Shorter application forms and fewer necessary documents streamline the enrollment process for this vulnerable population.

SNAP/Food Stamps Categorical Eligibility: 7 C.F.R. § 273.2(j)(2)(i)

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pps. 17-19):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FRAC, Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility Maps (showing which states have raised the gross income test or asset test): [http://www.frac.org/pdf/map\\_raising\\_gross\\_income\\_test.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/map_raising_gross_income_test.pdf) and [http://www.frac.org/pdf/map\\_eliminating\\_asset\\_test.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/map_eliminating_asset_test.pdf)

FNS, "Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (chart):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2010/032310.pdf>

DC Hunger Solutions, Issue Brief (in support of the Food Stamp Expansion Act):  
<http://www.dchunger.org/pdf/DC-cat-elfinal3.pdf>

FNS, Letter to Regions (regarding improving access to SNAP/Food Stamps through broad-based categorical eligibility) (September 30, 2009):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/2009/093009.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (p. 10):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

**Develop a Standard SNAP/Food Stamps medical expense deduction.** A standard medical expense deduction allows households with older Americans and disabled to more easily deduct the cost of their medical care, rather than going through the burdensome process of verifying every element of their medical expenses. By requesting and implementing a standard medical deduction waiver, several states have significantly reduced SNAP/Food Stamps verification burdens for older Americans and persons with disabilities. Households still can claim documented medical costs above the deduction. The standard medical deduction saves both SNAP/Food Stamps workers and most households the time and energy entailed in collecting proofs of fluctuating medical expenses; implementing the standard medical deduction also reduces a state's exposure for Quality Control ("QC") errors due to erroneous eligibility calculations.

SNAP/Food Stamps medical expenses deduction: 7 CFR 273.9(d)(3)

States with SNAP/Food Stamps medical deduction waivers (amount of waiver): Massachusetts (\$90), Vermont (\$138), and New Hampshire (\$83)

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (pp. 12-13):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

**Explore demonstration projects linking SSI recipients to SNAP/Food Stamps and otherwise reducing paperwork.** Many states have Combined Application Projects (CAPS) to provide SNAP/Food Stamps benefits to persons who receive means-tested Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments based on the information already provided and verified by the Social Security Administration. CAPs reduce the need for elderly and disabled households to be interviewed or provide separate and duplicative verifications, and also reduce state QC errors. FNS and FRAC have developed extensive materials explaining how different combined application models work.

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (p. 36):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>

FRAC, "A Guide to the Supplement Security Income/Food Stamp Program Combined Application Projects" (January 2004): <http://www.frac.org/pdf/CAPreport.pdf>

FNS, "Combined Application Projects, Guidance to States for Developing Projects" (March 2005)  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/promising-practices/CAPsDevelopmentGuidance.pdf>

FRAC, "Smart Choices in Hard Times" (February 2010) (pp. 14-15):  
[http://www.frac.org/smart\\_choices\\_hard\\_times.htm](http://www.frac.org/smart_choices_hard_times.htm)

As part of its effort to increase SNAP/Food Stamps participation among the underserved, FNS has approved other demonstration projects to simplify SNAP/Food Stamps applications for elderly or disabled households with no earned income. Information on name, Social Security number, and citizenship and immigration status are verified via data match; no face-to-face interview is required. As demonstrations, these elderly simplified application projects in Alabama, Florida and South Carolina are subject to evaluation of their impact on payment accuracy, program access and customer service. States should prepare to devote staff time towards such research if they undertake SNAP/Food Stamps demonstration projects.

FNS, "Program Access Toolkit" (2010) (pp. 32-33):  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/2010-toolkit.pdf>



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## Making the Case for Expanding Participation in SNAP/Food Stamps

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Using timely and on-point information is a key element of effective advocacy. Below are links to data and other resources that can help you make the case for expanding access to SNAP/Food Stamps in your state or locality. (*This section updated February 2011*)

### Data Resources Regarding Food Insecurity

- ***People in your state struggling with hunger.*** Each November, USDA releases new estimates of the numbers of households and individuals experiencing food insecurity – meaning that they struggle to put enough food on the table. In 2009, 14.7 percent of Americans were food insecure and 5.7 experienced very low food security some time during the year. The state-level estimates are based on data from surveys conducted over three years. For the most recent food insecurity numbers: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR108/ERR108.pdf> FRAC analysis of state food insecurity data: [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/food\\_insecurity\\_by\\_state\\_2007-2009.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/food_insecurity_by_state_2007-2009.pdf)
- ***Food hardship rates.*** FRAC analyzed Gallup survey data from January 2008 through December 2009 to determine the extent to which households are struggling to afford enough food. FRAC's analysis shows rates of food hardship by states for 2009 and for 2008, Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and congressional districts for 2008 – 2009 averages, including data specific to households with children. For FRAC's food hardship charts and related information: <http://frac.org/new-data-reveal-extent-of-hunger-in-every-corner-of-the-us/> Updated FRAC analysis of food hardship rates for the nation (January through September 2010) and states (January through June 2010): [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/foodhardship\\_nation2010.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/foodhardship_nation2010.pdf) and [http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/FoodHardship\\_State2010.pdf](http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/FoodHardship_State2010.pdf)

### Data Resources Regarding State and County Participation Rates

- ***SNAP/Food Stamps participation rate in your state.*** Two separate FNS estimates measure the extent to which SNAP/Food Stamps is reaching low-income people in a state. The first is the FNS estimate of the percent of SNAP/Food Stamps eligible people who participate in the program. This study also estimates participation rates for eligible individuals in households with earned income (“working poor”). For 2008 SNAP/Food Stamps participation rate estimates: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2008.pdf> FRAC posting on 2008 SNAP/Food Stamp participation estimates: <http://frac.org/new-usda-data-give-state-by-state-snapfood-stamp-participation-rates-for-2008/>
- ***SNAP/Food Stamps Program Access Index.*** A second USDA measure of the reach of SNAP/Food Stamps is the more recent in time but less comprehensive measure called Program Access Index (PAI). The PAI compares the number of SNAP/Food Stamps recipients in the state to the number of people with incomes below 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The PAI also serves as a factor for SNAP/Food Stamps performance bonus awards to states and is announced each September for the prior year. For PAI data for 2008: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/SNAP/FILES/Other/pai2008.pdf>
- ***State-by-state estimates of elderly participation in SNAP/Food Stamps (for FY 2000 through FY 2007).*** See the September 2010 report produced by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc: [http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/nutrition/SNAP\\_elderly.pdf](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/nutrition/SNAP_elderly.pdf)

- **Calculate unofficial local participation estimates.** FRAC has developed an easy way for you to estimate county-level SNAP/Food Stamps participation and the federal benefits lost in the county due to underparticipation. For FRAC's "Food Stamps Calculator" and instructions on its use: <http://frac.org/data/>.

## Other State-by-State Data

- **State-by-state SNAP/Food Stamps caseload data and trends.** Each month FNS updates SNAP/Food Stamps caseload data (number of participants and benefits paid) by state. FRAC publishes charts ranking states: by SNAP/Food Stamps participants as a share of the overall state population; and by the rate of increase in SNAP/Food Stamps caseloads over one-month, one-year, and five-year time periods. For FRAC state SNAP/Food Stamps charts on caseloads and trends: <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/snapfood-stamp-monthly-participation-data/>
- **County-level SNAP/Food Stamps caseloads and poverty rates at a glance.** Based on data collected by the New York Times for June 2009 SNAP/Food Stamps caseloads, FRAC has compared county SNAP/Food Stamps caseloads to the numbers of people living below 125 percent of Federal Poverty Level in the period 2006-2008. This comparison gives advocates, policy makers, SNAP/Food Stamps administrators, and outreach projects a rough gauge of how well different counties within the same state are doing in getting SNAP/Food Stamps to their low-income residents. See FRAC charts at: [http://frac.org/pdf/ny\\_times\\_snap\\_poverty\\_formatted.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/ny_times_snap_poverty_formatted.pdf)
- **State-by-state SNAP/Food Stamps and Joblessness.** A FRAC chart provides advocates with data about how the share of the state's population receiving SNAP compares with the share of the state's workforce classified as U-6, those experiencing unemployment or underemployment. See FRAC chart: <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/snapfood-stamp-monthly-participation-data/snap-and-u-6-participation/> Additional information on labor measures: [www.bls.gov/lau/stalt10q3.htm](http://www.bls.gov/lau/stalt10q3.htm) Glossary for labor statistics: [www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#top](http://www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#top)
- **Assessing SNAP/Food Stamps customer service.** Two key measures of how well a state is doing in quickly helping needy households and correctly determining SNAP/Food Stamps benefits eligibility are timeliness rates and negative error rates. Timeliness rates measure what percent of applications a state processed within federal guidelines. The negative error rate reflects the percentage of eligible households improperly denied at application or recertification. Both timeliness and negative error rates are factors for USDA's SNAP/Food Stamps performance bonus awards to states.
  - For state timeliness in SNAP/Food Stamps processing rates for 2009: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/qc/pdfs/FY\\_2009\\_Application\\_Processing\\_TL.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/qc/pdfs/FY_2009_Application_Processing_TL.pdf)
  - For background on SNAP/Food Stamps timeliness standards, see FRAC's "Getting Food Stamps to Hungry Families on Time," September 2005, <http://www.frac.org/pdf/timeliness.pdf>
  - FNS Power Point, "The Negative Error Rate – Why it's important to you," presented at AASD annual meeting, October 2009, available at: <http://foodstamp.aphsa.org/09presentations.html>
  - For more information on SNAP/Food Stamps negative error rates, contact [evollinger@frac.org](mailto:evollinger@frac.org).
- **SNAP/Food Stamps cases closed for procedural reasons.** Many households lose SNAP/Food Stamps benefits due to barriers related to the recertification process. Even though they may remain financially eligible, household's cases are closed when they fail to submit forms and verifications on time or attend an interview. Case closings place an added burden on

eligibility offices when families return weeks or months later as new applicants. Ask your state agency about the rate of SNAP/Food Stamps cases that are closed “for procedural reasons” (such as missed appointments or missing documentation), rather than because clients were financially ineligible. For an example of how states might track this information, see: [http://www.dss.state.la.us/assets/docs/searchable/OFS/Statistics/Stat08-09/Food%20Stamp/fy0809\\_FS\\_Closures.pdf](http://www.dss.state.la.us/assets/docs/searchable/OFS/Statistics/Stat08-09/Food%20Stamp/fy0809_FS_Closures.pdf). For more on case closures due to procedural reasons, see Urban Justice Center, “Keeping Food on the Table,” (September 2007) <http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/projects/KeepingFoodOnTheTable.pdf>.

- **FRAC’s state of your state.** For a quick snapshot of state data on the use of SNAP/Food Stamps and other federal nutrition programs as well as indicators of hunger, poverty and unemployment, see FRAC’s state profiles: <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/reports-2/>

## Talking Points

This section summarizes talking points available in the Appendix to help advocates and others make the case for expanding SNAP/Food Stamps participation and access in your state or locality. Note: the talking points use national data and refer to the program as SNAP/Food Stamps. Please tailor the talking points to reflect state data and the name of the program in your state.

- **Expanding SNAP/Food Stamps to fight the recession and sustain a recovery.** With unemployment, hunger, and economic insecurity affecting tens of millions of Americans, now is a critical time for states to increase access to and participation in SNAP/Food Stamps. These talking points convey the scope of the problems and describe how SNAP/Food Stamps can serve needy families and stimulate economic activity in local communities. (See Appendix)
- **How SNAP/Food Stamps outreach and application assistance can streamline administrative workloads.** With the recession driving increases in SNAP/Food Stamps caseloads and reducing state revenues, some state officials may wonder why conducting outreach to potentially eligible people is warranted. These talking points make the case that increasing outreach and application assistance not only will connect families to vital supports during these tough times, but can help states better manage their caseloads and bring in badly-needed federal funds. (See Appendix)
- **The “Business Case.”** Generating nearly \$9 in local economic activity for every \$5 in new benefits, SNAP/Food Stamps is one of the most effective means of stimulating the economy – something particularly important as the country aims to move from recession to sustained recovery. The new multiplier (updated in 2010) estimates that each \$1 in federal SNAP/Food Stamp benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. For ERS report summary showing the economic affect of SNAP/Food Stamp benefits, go to: [http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR103/ERR103\\_ReportSummary.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR103/ERR103_ReportSummary.pdf)
- **SNAP/Food Stamps and the President’s Goal of Ending Childhood Hunger by 2015.** President Obama has set a goal of ending childhood hunger in the United States by 2015. Advocates can make the case that expanding access to and participation in SNAP/Food Stamps is a critical step towards that worthy goal. (See Appendix)



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## Appendix: Talking Points

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### Talking Points: SNAP/Food Stamps—Moving from Recession to a Sustained Recovery

#### *People and Communities are in need.*

- Even before the recession began there was widespread and persistent poverty and food insecurity in the United States. The recession made things far worse for tens of millions of Americans, and even the most optimistic projections don't anticipate employment and wages rising quickly enough to rapidly repair the damage. With so many families in need, the support provided by SNAP/Food Stamps benefits is more important than ever.
- Millions of Americans have been thrown into hardship during this recession. In March 2010, the national unemployment rate was 9.7 percent; more than one in three unemployed persons had been jobless for six months or more. More than 26 million workers were unemployed, no longer looking for work, or underemployed.<sup>16</sup>
- According to USDA, more than 49.1 million Americans lived in households struggling against hunger in 2008. That means one in six Americans struggling against hunger. More than 17 million lived in households with "very low food security," the most dire food security status documented by USDA.<sup>17</sup>
- When asked in the last quarter of 2009, "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed," 18.5 percent of households in the U.S. answered "yes." Throughout 2009, nearly a quarter of households with children reported food hardship.<sup>18</sup>
- SNAP/Food Stamps offices across the country are seeing a new population of applicants: working families in which one spouse or both have been laid off, single, jobless individuals who have exhausted their unemployment insurance payments, and others suffering from this terrible recession. These households often are accessing a public benefit program for the very first time.
- Despite great need, millions of eligible people do not participate in SNAP/Food Stamps. One in three people eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps – more than 13 million people nationwide in 2007 – did not receive benefits; that number has likely grown due to the worsening economy.<sup>19</sup>

#### *SNAP/Food Stamps benefits matter.*

- As Americans make hard choices about how to spend limited resources, SNAP/Food Stamps outreach can help make sure nutritious food is one basic they don't have to go without.

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<sup>16</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept of Labor., "Employment Situation Summary." (April 2, 2010):

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Mark Nord et al, USDA Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2008." (November 2009):

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err83/>

<sup>18</sup> FRAC, "Food Hardship: A Closer Look At Hunger." [http://www.frac.org/pdf/food\\_hardship\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_report_2010.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Karen Cunyningham and Laura Castner, Mathematica Policy Research for FNS, "Reaching Those In Need: State Supplementation Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2007." (November 2009): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2007.pdf>

- SNAP/Food Stamps benefits help families stretch their food budgets. The average monthly household allotment in 2009 was \$275,<sup>20</sup> with nearly \$40 of that monthly allotment a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provision that boosted SNAP/Food Stamps benefits starting April 1, 2009.

***SNAP/Food Stamps help states deliver services.***

- Higher unemployment has cost states revenues, leaving many states challenged to fund services for vulnerable people, just when needs have become more acute.
- SNAP/Food Stamps, a 100 percent federally-funded benefit, helps both families and states when times are tough. A counter-cyclical entitlement program, SNAP/Food Stamps is designed to kick in effectively to serve more eligible people when need increases.
- The federal government helps pay for state administration of SNAP/Food Stamps. Because of the recession, the federal government also has provided states with extra 100 percent federally-funded support for state SNAP/Food Stamps administration during the period through Federal Fiscal Year 2011.

***SNAP/Food Stamps as economic stimulus.***

- SNAP/Food Stamps is a powerful tool for economic recovery. It's widely recognized as one of the most effective ways for the government to stimulate the economy, earning it a central role in any recovery agenda.<sup>21</sup>
- Increasing access to SNAP/Food Stamps is a wise investment in these difficult times. Every dollar in benefits generates a "multiplier effect" of \$1.84 in economic activity. When eligible people don't participate in SNAP/Food Stamps, communities miss out on the economic boost of new food stamp dollars flowing into the state and families miss out on better access to healthy foods.
- The federal government pays 100 percent of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits, with state governments sharing only administrative costs with the federal government. Low participation in SNAP/Food Stamps means that states are leaving federal dollars on the table while families and communities struggle without resources intended to help them.

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<sup>20</sup> FNS, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Benefit Per Household: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/19SNAPavg\\$HH.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/19SNAPavg$HH.htm)

<sup>21</sup> For more on the economic stimulative effect of SNAP/Food Stamps spending, go to: [www.realstimulus.org](http://www.realstimulus.org)

## Talking Points: Making the Case to State Officials for SNAP/Food Stamps Application Assistance and Outreach

### *People and communities are in need.*

- Even before the recession began there was widespread and persistent poverty and food insecurity in the United States. The recession made things far worse for tens of millions of Americans, and even the most optimistic projections don't anticipate employment and wages rising quickly enough to rapidly repair the damage. With so many families in need, the support provided by SNAP/Food Stamps benefits is more important than ever.
- Millions of Americans have been thrown into hardship during this recession. In March 2010, the national unemployment rate was 9.7 percent; more than one in three unemployed persons had been jobless for six months or more. More than 26 million workers were unemployed, no longer looking for work, or underemployed.<sup>22</sup>
- According to USDA, more than 49.1 million Americans lived in households struggling against hunger in 2008. That means one in six Americans struggling against hunger. More than 17 million lived in households with "very low food security," the most dire food security status documented by USDA.<sup>23</sup>
- When asked in the last quarter of 2009, "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed," 18.5 percent of households in the U.S. answered "yes." Throughout 2009, nearly a quarter of households with children reported food hardship.<sup>24</sup>
- SNAP/Food Stamps offices across the country are seeing a new population of applicants: working families in which one spouse or both have been laid off, single, jobless individuals who have exhausted their unemployment insurance payments, and others suffering from this terrible recession. These households often are accessing a public benefit program for the very first time.
- Despite great need, millions of eligible people do not participate in SNAP/Food Stamps. One in three people eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps – more than 13 million people nationwide in 2007 – did not receive benefits; that number has likely grown due to the worsening economy.<sup>25</sup>

### *SNAP/Food Stamps application assistance and outreach can connect families to 100 percent federally-funded benefits.*

- Outreach provides a vital bridge between underserved populations and the sometimes daunting SNAP/Food Stamps application process. By educating people about the program, prescreening potential applicants, and helping them fill out the application form and gather their documentation, outreach workers can help struggling families overcome barriers that prevent them from receiving 100 percent federally-funded benefits.

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<sup>22</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept of Labor., "Employment Situation Summary." (April 2, 2010):

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Mark Nord et al, USDA Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2008." (November 2009):

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err83/>

<sup>24</sup> FRAC, "Food Hardship: A Closer Look At Hunger." [http://www.frac.org/pdf/food\\_hardship\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_report_2010.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Karen Cunyningham and Laura Castner, Mathematica Policy Research for FNS, "Reaching Those In Need: State Supplementation Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2007." (November 2009):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2007.pdf>

- Many eligible non-participants do not realize that they may be eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps benefits; most (69 percent) say they would apply if they knew they were eligible. Outreach workers can help clients make informed decisions. They also can prescreen potential applicants to estimate whether they could be found eligible, and for how much in benefits they may qualify – families often do not apply because they underestimate the amount of benefits they will receive.
- Oregon state officials report a project of coordinated outreach and application simplification that began in 2000 helped close SNAP/Food Stamps participation gaps in the state and was a positive factor in Oregon's obtaining more than five million dollars in performance bonuses from the federal government. In less than a decade the SNAP/Food Stamps rate of participation among eligible people in Oregon has risen from mid-range to one of the highest in the nation (85 percent).<sup>26</sup>

***SNAP/Food Stamps outreach provides critical support to overstretched eligibility offices.***

- In this time of acute need and tight state budgets, outreach by community partners can provide help to overstretched SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility offices by screening potential applicants, answering client questions and educating them about the program.
- An FNS webinar on “Increasing Participation while Decreasing Workload,” described how SNAP/Food Stamps outreach and application assistance can provide support to overburdened SNAP/Food Stamps eligibility offices by<sup>27</sup>
  - Increasing the completeness of applications;
  - Increasing the likelihood that applicants will be found eligible; and
  - Procuring additional resources for the eligibility process without using state funds.
- Particularly when so many families are falling into need for the first time, educating people about SNAP/Food Stamps and the application process can help reduce client confusion and piecemeal SNAP/Food Stamps application submissions.
- SNAP/Food Stamps outreach workers can answer client questions and help people fill out application forms and gather documents so that eligibility caseworkers don't have to spend extra time on these tasks.
- SNAP/Food Stamps application assistance can deliver to eligibility offices applications that are clean and complete, reducing processing costs to the state and improving the chances that case processing can be completed within federal standards for timeliness.
- Outreach to SNAP/Food Stamps recipients at recertification can help eligible families stay connected to benefits while they are still in financial need. Too often, states experience “churning,” whereby needy clients who don't complete the recertification process successfully, lose benefits for a period and later reapply as new applicants. Failing to recertify these households and processing them as new cases entails unnecessary extra time and costs to the state, as well as depriving the households of essential food assistance. Application assistance can reduce the case “churning” and benefit both households and states.

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<sup>26</sup> Oregon Department of Human Services, “Increasing Participation While Decreasing Workload.” (USDA webinar, presentation by Eliza Devlin) (2009). For bonus and quality measures, see: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/program-improvement.htm>

<sup>27</sup> FNS Office of Strategic Initiatives, Partnership, and Outreach “Increasing Participation While Decreasing Workload” (USDA webinar, presentation by Duke Storen) (2009).

## Talking Points: SNAP/Food Stamps and Ending Childhood Hunger

### *The President's Goal to End Childhood Hunger*

- In a nation as affluent as the United States, no person should go hungry. The Obama Administration has set a goal to end childhood hunger in this country by 2015. Reaching this goal is crucial for the country, for the economy, for schools and communities, for families and especially for children themselves.
- 16.7 million children in the U.S. live in households that face a constant struggle against hunger. Hunger and food insecurity lead to significant health, developmental, and behavioral problems for children.<sup>28</sup>
- When asked in the last quarter of 2009, "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed," 18.5 percent of households in the U.S. answered "yes." Throughout 2009, nearly a quarter of households with children reported food hardship.<sup>29</sup>

### *FRAC's seven essential steps to achieving end childhood hunger goal*

- FRAC has set out seven essential strategies in "Ending Childhood Hunger by 2015: The Essential Strategies for Achieving the President's Goal." They focus on improving and expanding the nation's nutrition programs and bolstering the economy and strengthening supports for working families in order to move more out of poverty, the root cause of hunger in this country.

In brief, the seven strategies are:

- Restore economic growth and create jobs with better wages for lower income workers.
- Raise the incomes of the lowest-income families.
- Strengthen SNAP/Food Stamps.
- Strengthen Child Nutrition Programs.
- Engage the entire federal government in ending childhood hunger.
- Work with states, localities and nonprofits to expand and improve participation in federal nutrition programs.
- Make sure all families have convenient access to reasonably priced, healthy food.

For the full FRAC recommendations for ending US childhood hunger by 2015, go to [http://www.frac.org/pdf/endingchildhunger\\_2015paper.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/endingchildhunger_2015paper.pdf)

### *SNAP/Food Stamps & ending childhood hunger*

- SNAP/Food Stamps is the nation's most important direct defense against hunger and reaching more eligible people and doing so with more adequate benefits is absolutely essential to eliminate childhood hunger.

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Nord et al, USDA Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2008" (November 2009): <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err83/>; Cook et al, "Food Insecurity is Associated with Adverse Health Outcomes among Human Infants and Toddlers" (June 2004): <http://jn.nutrition.org/cgi/reprint/134/6/1432>; FRAC, Children's HealthWatch, "Reading, Writing, and Hungry: The consequences of food insecurity on children, and on our nation's economic success" (November, 2008): [http://www.frac.org/pdf/reading\\_writing\\_hungry\\_report.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/reading_writing_hungry_report.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> FRAC, "Food Hardship: A Closer Look At Hunger." [http://www.frac.org/pdf/food\\_hardship\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_report_2010.pdf)

- SNAP/Food Stamps is fundamentally strong, but needs some key improvements to carry its share of the weight in reaching the 2015 ending childhood hunger goal.
- Access and outreach should be increased to ensure that SNAP/Food Stamps is reaching families with children in need. Although nearly half of all SNAP/Food Stamps recipients are children, many more families with children are eligible for but do not receive SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. In 2007, SNAP/Food Stamps missed one in five eligible households with children.<sup>30</sup>
- SNAP/Food Stamps benefits should be increased to assure that families have consistent access to a nutritionally adequate diet. States should implement available options that bring SNAP/Food Stamps families larger federally-funded benefit allotment amounts.

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<sup>30</sup> Joshua Leftin & Kari Wolkwitz, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service, "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007." (June 2009)  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2007.pdf>