

An infographic with a central white circle containing the Social Innovation Laboratory logo. The logo features a stylized globe with colorful segments (blue, yellow, orange, red) and the text "SOCIAL INNOVATION LABORATORY". A thick dark grey line radiates from the central circle, branching out to connect to several smaller circles. These smaller circles contain stylized human icons: a woman with red hair in an orange top, a man with a beard in a suit, a woman in a red top, a man in a red shirt, and a man in a white shirt. There are also several solid-colored circles (orange, yellow, cyan, dark grey) connected to the main structure by thin lines. The background is a blue geometric pattern of triangles.

EXPANDING THE SNAP E&T WORKFORCE SKILLS PROVIDER BASE:

A field based resource for recruiting and incorporating experienced workforce providers into the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T).



It is said that the best way to predict the future is to create it. SNAP E&T programs provide education, training, and support services for SNAP recipients who are interested in building their skills, which is a proven method for increasing the economic stability of low-income workers. Many states are eager to increase the participation of SNAP eligible citizens to programs like the SNAP E&T 50/50 program but lack providers to meet the need. Building a future with skilled citizens and greater economic prosperity will require workforce providers to help eligible citizen take advantage of these programs. The quickest way to build a state's portfolio of strong workforce provider programs is to identify and involve workforce providers that already provide similar services to low income individuals utilizing different funding mechanisms (i.e. TANF, WIOA, etc.). This brief resource document provides lessons learned from working with three different TANF funded workforce services providers each in a different state to assist them in becoming approved SNAP E&T providers.



THE CHALLENGE



Many state and organizational leaders don't have a problem envisioning the future they want for their organization or the people they serve, but often they are unaware of the challenges and obstacles that prevent them from realizing their vision. The greatest challenges found were the interrelated issues of communication (about change and about the process) and getting buy-in from all those potentially affected by the change.

It was found during this process that the level of willingness on the part of state level officials to consider new workforce providers varied enormously across different states. Inertia and the satisfaction with the status quo are powerful forces that make officials ask themselves, "Is this too much trouble?"

State officials try to determine if the benefits of a potential new provider is worth the investment of time and efforts necessary to bring a new provider into the state plan (which is the required action). In two of the three states that that this author interacted with state SNAP officials were open and interested, and even eager, to bring new quality providers onto the state plan. However, in one state where this author worked, there was no interest in expanding the program or considering new providers. It appeared in this case that politics and political leverage were more important to the key stakeholders than program expansion.



In this document, it is assumed that the reader has the capacity to identify, or has already identified, high quality workforce service providers that can perform the tasks required by SNAP E&T program requirements. Equally important is the challenge of building buy-in on the part of the workforce provider. Strong existing non-SNAP workforce service providers already have functioning and funded programs. There is a strong possibility that the resources, staff time, new data tracking requirements, and the requirement for a 50% match for the SNAP E&T program make the cost of participating in SNAP E&T to high.



THE PROCESS

STEP

01



INVESTIGATION & INTRODUCTION

Before bringing two organizations (workforce service providers and State SNAP E&T officials) together the person(s) doing the connecting should have a good understanding of all parties involved. Unless the parties are well known, some research should be done by examining organizational publications and websites and by talking to people who are familiar with the organizations.

Things to pay attention to include:

- Current services of the organization and how well those match with SNAP E&T criteria
- Populations served/targeted and if they are already SNAP eligible
- Quality of service, or reputation for quality of services
- Capacity to handle additional clients and to navigate an unfamiliar bureaucracy

STEP
02



MAKE CONTACT & BROACH THE TOPIC

Organizations not currently involved in the SNAP E&T program will likely be unfamiliar with the program and hesitant to get involved in a process that may appear to require a lot of effort when they are already overburdened serving their current clients. A good amount of education will be required with a focus on the benefit of the program to the organization and the people that it serves.

This process should include:

- An overview of the SNAP E&T program
- A strong focus on the shared values and beliefs of the SNAP E&T program and the target organization: That all participants have the ability to learn (and the right to) skills and education that they need to obtain a good job and reduce the need for governmental support programs.
- Be the expert - provide a reliable set of accurate information, and a sense of whether this is a good fit for the organization.
- Explore in broad strokes the programs and funding streams the organization has that could be used for a 50/50 match process, and, in effect, double the funds available for some participants.
- Make the organization a collaborative partner – don't come in with an end in mind, maintain a collaborative open-ended process of exploration.

STEP
03



MAKE CONTACT WITH STATE LEADERS

Once the organizational partners are interested in the idea, but before a great deal of work or planning has taken place, it is important to make contact with the State SNAP E&T administrative leadership. The most effective approach to this process is receiving an introduction from a third-party authority. For this author, introductions were facilitated with in-state or regional SNAP representatives, by Federal SNAP and Technical Assistance providers associated with the SNAP E&T Learning academy.

During such contacts, it is important to accomplish several goals:

- Explain your role in the process (I am a learning academy fellow and this is part of my project; I am a consultant trying to build the resources of this organization; I am a staff member of the organization, and we are interested in this; I work in the SNAP Program and I think this organization is a good opportunity for us; etc.).
- Gain an understanding of the State's position, plans, and goals. Is there an opportunity or interest in expanding SNAP E&T or finding new workforce service providers?
- Sell or educate the state on the services, reputation, and shared values and interests of the organization with the state's goals. The goal is not to push too hard, but just to build enough interest in the organization to learn more or take the next step.
- Make it clear that you (and the organization) are not coming in with a set plan but are interested in a mutual collaborative process that fulfills the needs the state has, and that the organization can be flexible in the nature and extent of the services it provides.

STEP

04



GENERATE BUY-IN & CREATE A PLAN

At the time both the state and the workforce service providers are interested enough to move forward in exploring the opportunity, the next step is to dig into the details of how this works, and to firm up the commitment of the organization and the openness of the state.

This process includes:

- Collecting data on shared organization and SNAP participants. How many current participants/clients could be served by a SNAP E&T program, what is the potential for recruitment in a particular geographic location?
- Collect detailed data on the funding streams that the organization has in its budget that could be used for a 50/50 match. How much money in non-federal (including non-TANF) funding is available from state and private sources for workforce services, and to what extent do current clients meet the SNAP E&T requirements?
- Collaboratively create a draft plan of services provided and numbers served for state consideration, review and inclusion in the state plan.
- Be realistic with all parties about the timeline and expectations. Help the organization understand that this will be a slow process and encourage them to start small to gain a working knowledge of the rules and processes of the SNAP E&T program before engaging large numbers of individuals. It may be several years before a SNAP E&T aspect of the organizations service begins to produce additional resources.
- Submit proposal for inclusion in the state plan. Depending on the time of year and the process, there may be a significant wait from the time of submission to the time the plan is included in the state plan and approved by the Federal SNAP E&T Authority.

LESSONS LEARNED

There were several lessons learned that are important considerations at all phases of such a process. These concepts are not unique to implementing a SNAP E&T planning process but are useful to remember nonetheless.



BE (PLAY) THE EXPERT



BE COLLABORATIVE



TELL IT LIKE IT IS



MAKE A BUSINESS CASE



BREAK IT DOWN



INVOLVE EMPLOYEES



BE (PLAY) THE EXPERT

Community based organizations (workforce providers) are wary about expending resources and efforts on new and unproven ideas, particularly when they are unclear about the steps required or the long-term benefit to their organization. Likewise, state SNAP E&T officials may have little experience in identifying and vetting high quality workforce providers to expand their program. All players in the process are comforted by having an expert to help guide the process.

Graduates of the SNAP E&T Learning Academy are among the most knowledgeable people in this area (which was the purpose of the Learning Academy). While you may never feel like an “expert,” having a person with Learning Academy experience involved in the identification and on-boarding of new SNAP E&T workforce providers is a great asset for all involved. As the expert, don’t be afraid to be assertive, if you approach organizational leaders or state SNAP officials timidly, they may think you lack confidence and you’ll fail to make your points.





BE COLLABORATIVE

Getting buy-in from all parties is not easy. In part, this is because of the tendency and need to sell ideas to potential partners. To some degree it is necessary to sell the benefits of the SNAP E&T program or to sell the quality of a workforce service provider partner, but in general it is better to educate than sell. Selling implies a predetermined result; workforce partner and state agencies will be more resistant when they feel you are trying to “sell to them.” True buy-in involves a collaborative process of co-creation. All parties sharing what they have to offer, what they want and need, and finding the natural overlaps creates real commitment and buy-in.



” ▶▶▶▶▶ TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Getting a workforce provider approved and onto a state plan may not be quick or easy, and it may never generate huge returns for a program that already serves a different population. Likewise, no community based workforce provider may ever be the perfect, full service, worry free partner that a state program would like to engage. For parties to not be disappointed by the process, and for innovative ideas and solutions to emerge, the process must begin with the reality of facts that may not always be kind to the provider or the state. In honest discussions, the right choices often become clear.





MAKE A BUSINESS CASE

The single most influential factor in building excitement in community based organizations is the potential benefit that implementing a SNAP E&T program may have on their bottom line. The ability to receive more funds for doing the same kind of work with the same type of clients they may already be serving (low income individuals) and using current program funds to match for 50% more funds is a powerful incentive. Making the reality of this potential clear is a key factor to creating buy in. Similarly, from a state perspective, having a new partner who can provide services to thousands of new SNAP E&T participants is a powerful motivator when looking to expand their state programs.



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BREAK IT DOWN

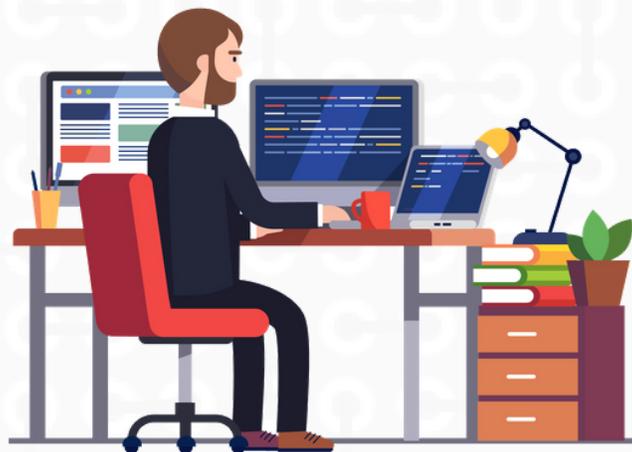
Undertaking such initiatives can seem overwhelming to overworked community based organizations. By breaking the process down into discrete phases or steps (as outlined above), short term goals and outcomes can be focused on, and longer-term obstacles and tasks can be delayed until it is clear the process is moving forward to the next phase. Taking tasks one at a time, reduces wasted effort on all parts, and helps develop commitment by showing progress.





INVOLVE EMPLOYEES

By initially focusing on current workforce services programs that community-based organizations already implement and that could be used as a 50/50 match program, a change agent is able to build excitement while potentially doubling the revenue that a program can bring in. However, the excitement evident at the management level of an organization may not be shared by staff who are tasked with implementing the program. Involving affected program staff in the discussion is a crucial step in creating buy-in because if a SNAP E&T program is eventually implemented it will only be successful if the front-line staff are on board. Perhaps more importantly, front-line staff are critical in fully vetting the viability of a program for matching potential early in the process. No one will know the population served and the services provided better than the people who work directly with the program on a daily basis.



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