

# Workforce Development Training and SNAP: A Powerful Combination for Maryland's Striving Workers

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## *Summary*

For the many Marylanders who are struggling to make ends meet the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a vital resource. New time limits on food assistance threaten the food security of the thousands of Marylanders who rely on this resource. One important policy lever the state can use to help these families to get ahead is to maximize the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), a federal program that provides funds to states to support workforce training programs for food assistance recipients. SNAP E&T provides an excellent opportunity to help people receiving food assistance get the skills and credentials they need to get good-paying jobs. It also ensures that working-age adults without dependents don't lose their food assistance due to harsh federal time limits while they're building skills and seeking employment, and it can bring funding that expands high-quality workforce training programs.

Following recent changes to model best practices from other states, Maryland is on track to have one of the strongest SNAP E&T programs in the country, though there is still room to make it more effective and help more people get well-paying jobs. By creating additional partnerships with community organizations, the state's SNAP E&T program could enroll more people and take advantage of additional federal funds.

## How SNAP E&T Works

The federal SNAP E&T program provides states with funding to operate workforce development programs serving individuals who receive nutrition assistance. States have some flexibility in how they use those funds but they are generally used for things like job search assistance, education or vocational training programs. States can also determine whether SNAP recipients who aren't working are required to

participate in a program, or whether the SNAP E&T program is voluntary. Maryland's program is voluntary, but for adults subject to the SNAP time limits, choosing not to participate puts them at risk of losing their food assistance.

States can also use SNAP E&T funding to help people afford child care, transportation, or other things that allow them to attend an education or training program. Another feature allows state governments to partner with community colleges, nonprofits, and other community-based organizations to expand SNAP participants' access to education, training, and supportive services. Maryland has started working with community partners and is working to develop additional partnerships.

## History of SNAP E&T in Maryland

Maryland has recently changed how it runs its SNAP E&T program in an effort to make it more effective and serve more people. In 2015 the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service chose 10 states, including Maryland, to receive two years of comprehensive technical assistance for their SNAP E&T programs from the National Skills Coalition and Seattle Jobs Initiative through the "SNAP to Skills" program. Before becoming a SNAP to Skills state, Maryland used all of its federal SNAP E&T grant to support job search activities for program participants, dividing up the fairly small amount of federal funds – about \$1 million – between different jurisdictions. Focusing on one-on-one job search prevented the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) from taking advantage of opportunities to grow the

### FUNDING METHODS FOR SNAP E&T


The federal funding process for SNAP E&T allows states to leverage both public and private investments in job training to access additional federal dollars to support and expand training programs. Unlocking additional funds in Maryland would allow more participants to access skill-building opportunities. Developing community partnerships allows the state to utilize the expertise and resources of existing programs that provide services to SNAP recipients, such as community colleges, and provides partners with additional resources.

The SNAP E&T program includes three types of grants.

**E&T Program Grant:** The federal government provides employment and training block grants to each state based on the number of food assistance recipients in the state. For 2016, Maryland has \$1.2 million. Maryland's Department of Human Resources is currently using this grant to support staff costs to run its SNAP employment and training program and to offer seed funds to some third-party program providers to help them become SNAP E&T partners.

**ABAWD Promise:** These grants are available to states that pledge to provide employment and training opportunities to adults without dependents who are at risk of losing SNAP eligibility due to the time limits. The federal government has allocated \$20 million per year to be divided among participating states. The grants are allocated based on the number of people classified as "able-bodied adults without dependents" (ABAWDs). The Seattle Jobs Initiative, one of the expert groups mentoring Maryland's SNAP E&T program, does not recommend that states pursue this grant, as other grant types could provide a greater benefits to the community. In Maryland, scaling the project to such a large size so quickly would be unmanageable for Maryland's Department of Human Resources. Therefore, the state has decided not to participate.

**50 Percent Reimbursement Grants:** Third-party providers, such as community colleges and nonprofits, are eligible to receive federal reimbursement for up to 50 percent of certain program costs and supportive services necessary for SNAP participants to participate in an employment and training program. This pool of federal funding is intended for programs that a provider is already supporting through existing, non-federal funds. They can receive federal reimbursement for certain program costs supported by state or local government funds or private dollars. This is the funding stream with the most potential for growth. It leverages the expertise of the community and allows the state to access a greater amount of funding than the ABAWD Promise funds.



program and unlock more federal funding. With guidance from the SNAP to Skills program, Maryland began adding skill-building and work placement programs.<sup>i</sup>

Maryland also changed its SNAP E&T program, which the state calls Food Supplement Education and Training (FSET), to be voluntary instead of mandatory. DHR transitioned to a voluntary program in order to help more participants retain their food assistance benefits and to encourage participants to sign up for training on their own. This approach allows states to focus investments on the participants most likely to benefit from training, eliminates concerns about others receiving sanctions for not complying with the program requirements (although participants can still lose assistance for other reasons), and reduces administrative burdens for state and local providers.

The SNAP E&T program is challenging to execute without sufficient dedicated administrative staff due to the complexity of scheduling and coordinating many different partner organizations. Maryland redirected some of its federal funding to support a larger administrative team at DHR and now has greater capacity at the state level to plan, develop, operate, and monitor partnerships in jurisdictions throughout the state. DHR started with small pilot programs to help focus the capacity and resources available and help the department staff figure out what does and does not work. The agency is now working to develop additional partnerships to bring the SNAP E&T program to additional jurisdictions.

Maryland's strategy to use the federal program grant money to build the support team to reach adults without dependents who would be subject to the time limit has so far proven to be a success. Maryland received bonus funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the SNAP program, for its exemplary outreach efforts. When the state receives and spends those funds, Maryland will be able to receive additional federal dollars through the matching reimbursement grant.

## Support for Those at Risk of Losing Food Assistance

Employment and training programs are particularly important for one category of SNAP recipients: adults between ages 18 and 49 who do not have dependent children. People who are classified as “able-bodied adults without dependents” (often referred to as ABAWDs) can receive only three months of SNAP benefits in a 36-month period unless they work or participate in an employment and training program for at least 20 hours a week, or participate in a workfare or volunteer program.

During the most recent recession, the federal government allowed Maryland and other states to waive the three-month time limit. With unemployment rates improving, however, many states must reinstate the time limit. Maryland's statewide waiver for the three-month time limit ended on January 1, 2016 but 16 counties are still exempt from the time limit. Adult SNAP recipients who aren't caring for children are at increased risk of hunger and food insecurity in the eight counties where the time limit is in effect: Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Washington. There are approximately 51,970<sup>ii</sup> people eligible for food assistance who are classified as able-bodied, working age adults without dependents in Maryland and 16,255 adults will be at risk of hunger due to the time limit.

COUNTY	NUMBER OF ABAWDS (OCT. 2015)	% OF SNAP CASELOAD
Anne Arundel	2,169	4.16%
Baltimore	5,544	10.67%
Carroll	563	1.08%
Frederick <sup>iii</sup>	-	-
Howard	579	1.11%
Montgomery	1,561	3.00%
Prince George's	4,888	9.41%
Washington <sup>iv</sup>	960	1.85%
<b>TOTAL<sup>v</sup></b>	<b>16,255</b>	<b>31.28%</b>

Approved work activities that will allow people to maintain their food assistance can include volunteering, actively applying for jobs, working part time, and attending classes. If someone works or participates in an approved work activity for at least 80 hours per month, they will continue receiving much-needed help to afford enough to eat. If the recipient stops working or works for less than 80 hours per month, they will no longer be eligible for food assistance for three years.

One common challenge for individuals subject to this requirement is not being able to find enough work hours to maintain their SNAP benefits. Many SNAP recipients do work but cannot get enough hours to reach the 80-hour-per-month minimum, which makes them subject to the same penalties as not working at all. People may already have a job but are not able to schedule enough hours due to barriers such as just-in-time scheduling and canceled shifts. The vast majority of part-time workers have irregular schedules and many receive their schedules one week or less in advance, which can make it hard to hold a second job<sup>vi</sup>. An employment and training program could potentially help people who caught in this situation gain skills that allow them to get more sustainable employment.

While Maryland's E&T program as a whole is voluntary for SNAP recipients, the state categorizes employment and training program participants as mandatory or voluntary. Mandatory SNAP E&T participants are those who do not qualify for an exemption from the time limit (such as disability or pregnancy) and do not already work more than 80 hours per month. They must participate in an employment and training program as a condition of continuing to receive food assistance. In a state where SNAP E&T is mandatory rather than voluntary, all SNAP recipients would be considered mandatory participants.

Voluntary SNAP E&T participants are food assistance recipients who qualify for a federal or state exemption from the time limits but still choose to participate in an employment and training program. The experience of Washington state demonstrated voluntary participation in other states was more effective than mandatory participation and that people who choose to participate are more likely to gain family-supporting job skills.<sup>vii</sup> Participants in other voluntary program states have found the assistance with expenses like travel or interview clothing to be beneficial, which creates an incentive to use the program.

## Unlocking Additional Funds to Serve More People

Maryland's vision is to scale up its SNAP E&T program at a sustainable, yet aggressive, pace in order to ensure that those who are at risk of losing much-needed food assistance due to the time limit are set up with a program that will help them maintain their SNAP benefits while they improve their job prospects. Growing the number of partner organizations to unlock more federal matching funds will be key to the success of this effort.

Maryland's Department of Human Resources launched a pilot project in Baltimore City to test expansion strategies and get a better idea of what can succeed in a wider scale. The Baltimore pilot will provide approximately 260 people with job training in the manufacturing, green construction, and health care fields. Six separate workforce development groups that specialize in different vocations will conduct the training. At first, the program will focus on providing training to non-custodial parents who owe child support, a population of more than 12,000 adults in Baltimore. At places like the Baltimore Regional Training Center, participants can learn skills like welding and health care services in hopes of getting a job in one of these growing fields. DHR estimates that there are around 20,000 job openings in Maryland in the manufacturing and health care fields that require these types of skills. The community partners in Baltimore include Baltimore Community College, Civic Works, Center for Urban Families, Jane Addams Resource Corp., Job Opportunities Task Force and Humanim.

One provider, the Jane Addams Resource Corp., expressly offers job training programs to help participants qualify for positions the welding and machining sectors. The program is focused on participants who face high barriers to employment, such as criminal backgrounds, high poverty, no work experience, and lack of access to transportation. The Jane Addams Resource Corp. works closely with nearby employers to tailor the training for available local jobs with sustainable incomes, benefits, and careers. They also keep in close contact with Baltimore-area companies in order to modify the program curricula based on employer feedback. They place field trainers at local businesses, which creates a pipeline for students to access open jobs. By establishing relationships with local company executives, the Jane Addams group has become a trusted and reliable source of well-qualified workers.

Humanim's employment services include career placement along with intensive follow-up services to help participants be successful in their new positions, including job coaching, intensive case management, and participant/employer advocacy. Humanim also offers other supported employment alternatives such as contract and cooperative work schedules. These allow participants to engage with the program in the way that makes sense for their circumstances.

By getting specific training that meets the needs of local businesses, SNAP participants in these training programs have a better chance of starting stable, well-paying careers. The end goal of the program is to help people support themselves and their families without food assistance.

## Monitoring Maryland's Progress

Tracking the success of SNAP E&T participants is essential to the program's effectiveness. Under new federal requirements, for the first time states must collect and report on participant outcomes under SNAP E&T. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service established four national metrics for tracking and reporting on SNAP E&T participation. Previously the reporting metrics varied from state to state.

The metrics are:

- Number and percentage of participants in unsubsidized employment in second quarter after completion
- Number and percentage of participants in unsubsidized employment in fourth quarter after completion
- Median earnings for those in unsubsidized employment in second quarter after completion
- Number and percentage of participants that completed a training, educational, work experience, or on-the-job training component

Maryland's Department of Human Resources is using an existing state database to track how many people get jobs through SNAP E&T. The Maryland Workforce Exchange is an online database that houses administrative information for people receiving food assistance and tracks how many people are enrolled in different types of career pathway programs. The first report using the new reporting metrics is expected in fall 2017.

## Recommendations to Improve Maryland's SNAP E&T Program

While Maryland's program is several steps ahead of those in many other states, with the growing pressure of the SNAP time limit, it must do more to expand its employment and training programs to help more people maintain their food assistance while they are pursuing employment opportunities that would allow them to make ends meet without assistance. There also opportunities to bring more federal funds to Maryland through SNAP E&T to support workforce training programs.

- Maryland should identify strategies for connecting additional people at risk of losing their benefits to 20 hours of high-quality employment and job training activities a week so they can maintain their food assistance while building the skills necessary to get a good job. Just over half of the people currently enrolled in Maryland's SNAP E&T program were referred to the program by a community organization, nonprofit, or another state agency. Another 26 percent of E&T participants found the program on their own, through friend or family referrals or through an internet search. Maryland state agencies should continue exploring methods to ensure all eligible SNAP recipients are aware of the state's employment and training services.
- DHR should continue its efforts to identify community colleges and other community-based organizations that are ready to participate in SNAP E&T. Using the \$1.2 million in federal grant funding, Maryland DHR has invested in building the infrastructure of the program as well as seeding new providers. However, there are many community colleges and other community

organizations with existing workforce development and continuing education programs that are not yet a part of the SNAP E&T program. This means that those organizations are not yet able to receive a 50 percent federal match for the funds that they currently are spending on the programs.

- DHR should expand access to volunteer opportunities for SNAP participants. Currently, Maryland DHR only recognizes a handful of volunteer positions as valid for SNAP E&T workfare. If DHR identified where SNAP recipients are already volunteering their time and approve the work as applicable to their 20-hour-per-week requirements, some adults without dependents in counties subject to the time limit would have an easier time maintaining food assistance.
- Maryland DHR should also make it a priority to identify exactly how many people in each county are subject to the time limits, or could be in the future, if additional counties lose their waivers. Currently the tracking is inconsistent. With a more accurate count, DHR and other third-party partners can determine how large to scale programs. By using a database that tracks all ABAWDs in the state and their current status of benefits and work, DHR can also better assess if the SNAP E&T program as a whole is working and see which training programs have the most success. This, in combination with the federal metrics, will aid in internal and external reporting.

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<sup>i</sup> Brooke DeRenzis and David Kaz, “Building Skills Through SNAP Employment and Training: Lessons Learned From Four States,” National Skills Coalition, April 2016. <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/SNAP-final-1.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Total number of ABAWDs in Maryland was calculated by taking numbers from DHR’s SNAP E&T State Plan of Operations and MD Hunger Solutions internal numbers. This figure is an estimate based on data collected in October 2015. ABAWDs living in time limit active jurisdictions are identified and sometimes exempted from the time limit based on certain parameters. The estimated total number of ABAWDs is subject to change.

<sup>iii</sup> Data not available for Frederick County.

<sup>iv</sup> Data for Washington County provided by Maryland Hunger Solutions

<sup>v</sup> The figures in this chart are estimates as of October 2015 provided by the MD DHR.

<sup>vi</sup> Lonnie Golden, “Irregular Work Scheduling and its Consequences,” Economic Policy Institute, April 9, 2015. <http://www.epi.org/publication/irregular-work-scheduling-and-its-consequences/>

<sup>vii</sup> Rachel Gragg and David Kaz, “Replicating Success: Recommendations and Best Practices from Washington State’s SNAP E&T Program,” National Skills Coalition, June 2014. [http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Washington-SNAP-brief-web\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Washington-SNAP-brief-web_FINAL.pdf)

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