Expanding SNAP Employment and Training in Northern Virginia

Strategies to Maximize Federal Resources to Grow Program and Services

By Chris Duncombe and Michael J. Cassidy

Executive summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) program helps individuals on food assistance gain the skills, training, or experience to increase their ability to find regular employment and to boost their earning potential. State and local leaders have an opportunity to increase people’s access to these services by more proactively identifying and applying for federal reimbursement that is currently available through SNAP E&T 50 percent reimbursement grants.

The Commonwealth Institute reached out to 52 community-based organizations in Northern Virginia to identify services, through a survey, that are eligible for federal reimbursement under this grant program. Our assessment indicates that responding community-based organizations provided up to $2.1 million last year in services eligible for 50 percent reimbursement; that does not include community colleges, a key provider of education and training services. These reimbursements could have been used to invest in additional SNAP E&T services, thereby strengthening the opportunity for low-income Virginians to reach self-sufficiency at no additional cost to the state.

Virginia should encourage partnerships between state and local social service agencies with third-party providers, such as community colleges and community-based organizations, to maximize the federal resources they could be claiming.

SNAP Employment and Training in Virginia

SNAP E&T services include employment- and earnings-boosting programs such as job search assistance, education and training programs that directly increase a person’s employability, job retention services, and subsidized work programs. Some SNAP E&T funds can also be used to reimburse participants for key work supports (such as child care, transportation, and interview clothing) that help them participate in an E&T program.

SNAP E&T programs can be offered to current SNAP recipients who are not receiving cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. States can make participation in E&T programs mandatory for some groups of SNAP recipients. But many programs – like Virginia’s – are voluntary to ensure all E&T participants are fully invested in the programs and to reduce paperwork and the risk of participants losing benefits due to circumstances that make participation difficult.

Some, but not all, E&T activities can be counted toward fulfilling work requirements for nondisabled, childless adults subject to the three-month time limit.

Unfortunately, Virginia’s SNAP E&T program is fairly small compared to how many people could be participating. Virginia’s Department of Social Services (VDSS) – the state agency that administers the program – estimates that about 3,700 individuals will participate in this program next year. That number pales in comparison to the over 28,000 individuals on SNAP in Virginia who must meet the program’s work requirements and could benefit from SNAP E&T services. It is also dwarfed by the hundreds of thousands of working age adults enrolled in SNAP who could benefit from access to education, training, and work preparation.

One of the reasons Virginia’s SNAP E&T program is relatively small is because it is not available statewide. Only 25 out of
Virginia’s 133 localities currently provide SNAP E&T, which severely limits the reach of these services across the state. Of Northern Virginia localities, Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, and Prince William have active SNAP E&T programs, while Loudoun, Manassas, and Manassas Park do not offer these services.

Even in those localities that do offer SNAP E&T services, individuals go unserved. A more proactive pursuit of federal 50 percent reimbursement grants (50-50 funds) would increase access to education and training services by drawing down additional federal resources and bringing in third-party partners that are already providing these services for the community with private, philanthropic, or local funding.

Federal Fifty Percent Reimbursement Grants

A key strategy for the state to expand access to SNAP E&T services should be to identify and receive all federal reimbursement dollars available for existing investments in employment and training made by community-based organizations and community colleges. Federal 50 percent reimbursement grants (50-50 funds) are available for education, training, or employment support services provided by community-based organizations and community colleges. The services must meet the following criteria: they are provided to individuals eligible for or enrolled in SNAP, funded with non-federal dollars and not be counted as a match for any other federal program, and are not available as an entitlement to the general public.

Unfortunately, Virginia has not been proactive in identifying and applying for the federal 50-50 reimbursement grants. Statewide, Virginia only received $1.3 million in federal reimbursement through the 50-50 grants in FY 2018, while $310 million were claimed in administrative costs and program expenses nationwide.

Securing Third-Party Partners

Other states have developed effective partnerships between state and local agencies administering the SNAP E&T program and third-party providers such as community colleges or community-based organizations. These partnerships have been able to dramatically increase the number of individuals receiving SNAP E&T services and draw down millions of dollars in federal resources through 50-50 reimbursement grants.

This model has been successfully implemented in Washington state with their SNAP E&T program known as Basic Food Employment and Training Program (BFET). With the assistance of the Seattle Jobs Initiative, Seattle Goodwill, and community colleges, the state was able to develop a third-party partnership model that grew from four community-based organizations, one community college, and a budget of $1.4 million in 2006 to...

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**Services Eligible for SNAP E&T 50-50 Reimbursement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and Training Services</th>
<th>Support Services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Job search (e.g. job applications, labor market information)</td>
<td>• Transportation assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Job search training (e.g. resume workshops, skills assessments)</td>
<td>• Child care assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work experience (e.g. on-the-job training, apprenticeships)</td>
<td>• Short-term housing assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education (e.g. basic education, ESL, vocational education, post-secondary programs)</td>
<td>• Pre-employment costs (e.g. licensing fees, uniforms, work shoes, tools or equipment)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Training (e.g. workplace training, vocational rehabilitation)</td>
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**Identifying Reimbursable Services**

**Guide for Organizations Seeking Federal SNAP E&T 50-50 Reimbursement**

**Eligible Services**

Expenditures pay for job search, education, training, or employment support services such as transportation, child care, or housing assistance.

**Organizational Capacity**

Service providers need adequate administrative and financial capacity to track participation and outcome data and manage cash flow prior to reimbursement.

**Eligible Participants**

Individuals must be enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the month receiving services and not receiving TANF cash assistance.

**Eligible Funds**

Funding source must be non-federal (state, local, philanthropic, private donors) and not used as a match for other federal programs.

Source: TCI staff analysis of USDA SNAP to Skills
28 community-based organizations, 34 community colleges, and a budget of almost $30 million in 2013.

**50-50 Reimbursement Grant - Resource Map for Northern Virginia**

TCI staff distributed a questionnaire to 52 community-based organizations across the region to determine whether they provide eligible services to SNAP individuals using non-federal funding. To identify eligible services, the questionnaire asked organizations about the education, training, and employment support services that they provide, funding sources for these services, clients that they serve, and administrative capacity. We received responses from 27 of the 52 organizations that were contacted. Of those that responded, 22 organizations indicated that they provided services eligible for reimbursement, although not all organizations were able to estimate a dollar amount spent on these services.

Our estimate is that between $1.1 million and $2.1 million in eligible services could be submitted for federal 50 percent reimbursement. This amount was calculated by multiplying the dollar amount of non-federal funds spent on eligible services by the percentage of clients eligible for or enrolled in SNAP, as estimated by the organization. Survey respondents were asked to select from a range (0-25 percent, 26-50 percent, 51-75 percent, 76-100 percent), resulting in the estimated range of $1.1 million to $2.1 million.

Most of the responding organizations also indicated that they had the administrative capacity to participate in the program. Almost three-quarters of the responding organizations indicated that they had the cash flow to provide education and training services prior to reimbursement (which could take up to 2-3 months), and two-thirds indicated they had the capacity to determine SNAP eligibility or enrollment. Most of the organizations tracked some outcome data with over 90 percent tracking attendance and completion of services, almost two-thirds tracking job placement, and over half tracking wages. While not all organizations are currently tracking these reporting requirements, partnership with the state and local DSS staff could help overcome that barrier.

Organizations receive non-federal funding for eligible services from a variety of sources: more than 60 percent of respondents indicated that they receive funding from state, county, or city grants, more than 60 percent receive grants from foundations, and slightly less than half indicated receiving grants from private firms or nonprofit organizations.

Similarly, organizations responded that they provide a variety of eligible services. Respondents indicated that they provide or contract out the following education and training services: job search assistance (e.g. job applications, labor market information), job search training (e.g. resume workshops, skills assessments), work experience (e.g. on-the-job training, apprenticeships) education (e.g. basic education, ESL, vocational education, post-secondary programs), and training (e.g. workplace training, vocational rehabilitation). They also responded that they provide or contract out the following employment support services: transportation assistance, child care assistance, housing assistance, pre-employment costs (e.g. licensing fees, uniforms, work shoes, tools or equipment), and books or training manuals.

A more comprehensive discussion of the survey results can be found in the appendix.

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Appendix: Summary of Survey Results

Topline
25 out of 27 (93%) respondents are interested in pursuing this grant opportunity further and participating in an emerging planning group.

22 out of the 27 (82%) receive non-federal funding for the education, training, or employment support services that they provide.

The responding organizations indicate that SNAP enrollees constitute a large portion of their clients. Nine of the 27 respondents (33%) indicate that more than three quarters of their clients are SNAP eligible and 7 of the respondents (26%) indicate that between half to three-quarters of their clients are SNAP eligible. Only 6 respondents indicated that less than one-quarter of their clients are eligible for SNAP.

Funding
The 22 organizations receiving non-federal support receive funding from state, county, or city grants (14), foundations (14), private firms or nonprofits (10), social enterprise funds (3), and private or individual donors (2).

These organizations provided $4.1 million in services using non-federal funds. Based upon their estimate of the range of clients eligible for SNAP, we estimate that between $1.1 million and $2.1 million could be eligible for federal 50 percent matching funds.

Capacity
Nineteen of the 27 responding organizations (70%) indicated that they had the cash flow capacity to wait 2-3 months for federal reimbursement for the 50-50 program.

Many of the organizations already track eligibility or enrollment in SNAP (67%) and outcome data like program participation (93%), job placement (63%), wages (56%), and academic achievement (59%).

Services
The 27 respondents include 19 providers of job readiness training, 11 providers of occupational skills training, 15 adult education providers, and 16 providers of support or wrap-around services (some organizations provide multiple services).

These organizations directly provide education and training services that include job search job search training (21), job search (16), education (16), training (13), and work experience (5).

These organizations directly provide employment support services that include books or training materials (16), transportation assistance (14), pre-employment costs (13), housing assistance (12), and child care assistance (9).