



Excellent Service for All

Innovation in the Food Stamp Program

Access, Outreach, Payment Accuracy, Nutrition Education, Certification Policy & Quality Control

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
Mid-Atlantic Region
Food Stamp Program



Spring 2006



What's Inside

**Operations Review Module
for Local Offices - 3**

**Food Stamp Hunger Champions - 4
2006 Nomination Process**

2005 Mentors:

**Santa Cruz County, California
Polk County, Iowa**

Payment Accuracy Awards - 7

Face-to-Face Alternative - 7

FSET and CWP Resources - 8

**Newport News, Virginia
Baltimore City, Maryland**

Nutrition Education Changes - 10

FSP Products★Services - 11

**Radio Advertisements
National Pre-Screening Tool
Free Publications**

New toolkits from FNS boost outreach efforts

The Food and Nutrition Service recently released its newest outreach product - food stamp outreach toolkits. The toolkits are full of ideas, templates and resources for sharing information about food stamp benefits with eligible non-participants, potential partners, government officials and the public.

There is one toolkit for food stamp offices and another for partners such as faith- and community-based organizations. The toolkit for partners differs in its inclusion of an extensive section on media activities.

Toolkit for Food Stamp Offices

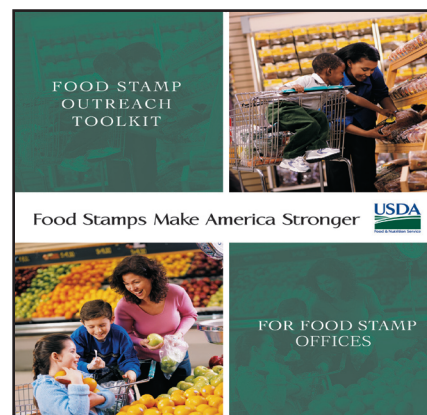
Each section of the *Food Stamp Outreach Toolkit for Food Stamp Offices* features easy-to-follow instructions, helpful hints and useful materials.

The following information summarizes the various sections.

◆Partnerships◆

The Food and Nutrition Service, state and local food stamp offices, faith- and community-based organizations, anti-hunger advocacy groups and retailers, for example, share in a common goal - to reduce hunger and improve nutrition.

The *Partnerships* section of the toolkit provides 10 steps for establishing a partnership, template materials to initiate one and examples of materials and potential partners.



◆ *The outreach toolkits are a valuable resource for anyone just getting started and for those who are seasoned at conducting outreach activities.* ◆

The toolkit makes a strong case for forming partnerships with the business community; for example, if the national participation rate rose five percentage points, 1.7 million more low-income people would have an additional \$1.1 billion in benefits per year to purchase healthy food, and \$2 billion total in new economic activity would be generated nationwide.

The toolkit suggests activities for potential partners. Examples:

- Conduct pre-screening, and provide application assistance and translation services.
- Play public service announcements on in-store public address systems.



- Provide flyers and brochures in mailings and weekly food circulars.
- Supply information on store receipts, utility bills, patient forms stapled to prescription drugs, paycheck stubs, grocery bags and employee packets.

◆ **Promising Practices** ◆

The *Promising Practices* section will help toolkit users to develop outreach activities. The Food and Nutrition Service collects promising outreach practices, and as the toolkit explains, these creative ideas can be found on the agency's website.

◆ **Resources** ◆

The last section of the toolkit provides a bundle of resources available through the Food and Nutrition Service, including a video, *Community Hunger Champions – Helping People Eat Right When Money's Tight*, which tells how local food stamp offices and community agencies work together to help inform low-income individuals about the Food Stamp Program.

The eight-minute production highlights the role of eligibility

specialists in case management and their link between customers and food stamp benefits. It also features the connection between eligibility specialists, faith- and community-based organizations and local businesses that interact to enroll eligible people in the Food Stamp Program.

A food bank representative tells how his organization uses the food stamp pre-screening tool of the Food and Nutrition Service to identify potential recipients. Food bank staff members talk about how they help individuals fill out the application for benefits and how they provide them with a verification checklist/envelope available through the Food and Nutrition Service.

The eligibility specialists explain how working with partners cuts down on processing time at the local office. (The narrator emphasizes that enrollment is ultimately determined by the eligibility specialists.)

The video also describes the importance of the Food Stamp Program in terms of providing nutrition assistance to customers and economic development for the community.

Toolkit for Partners



The toolkit for partners differs from the one for food stamp offices in its inclusion of an extensive section on media activities.

The 50-plus pages of the *Media Outreach* section includes information on selecting a target audience, developing a media list, brainstorming story ideas, preparing materials and information, identifying spokespersons, contacting the media and evaluating efforts.

It also gives tips on planning and carrying-out media events, press conferences and interviews. There are sample letters, press releases and media advisories for obtaining coverage and hints on placing public service announcements.

Interested?

Both toolkits can be downloaded from the website of the Food and Nutrition Service:

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/tool-kits.htm#State_

Printed copies of both toolkits will be available in a few months. They will contain the aforementioned video and CDs of templates and resources.

An extensive array of food stamp outreach products and services has been funded, produced and brought to you by the Food and Nutrition Service during the past several years. See pages 11 - 12 for some of these resources.

Thanks to These Local Offices

Local offices within the Mid-Atlantic Region assisted in the production of the video, *Community Hunger Champions - Helping People Eat Right When Money's Tight*:

- **Taylor Street Service Center, DC Department of Human Services**
- **Loudoun County Department of Social Services, Leesburg, VA**
- **Alexandria Department of Social Services, Alexandria, VA**
- **Fairfax County Department of Social Services, Fairfax, VA**

Guide developed for local offices to self-assess operations

The Mid-Atlantic Payment Accuracy Team (MA PAT) recently developed a tool for local offices to assess how they deliver services.

The following is a sampling of questions from the *Operations Review Module: A Self-Assessment Guide for Local Agencies*. As you will read, the majority of them transcend program boundaries.

1. Customer Service

Are the hours of operation posted on the exterior of the building? Do we have a drop-box, mail slot or other means that customers can use to drop off applications and information? Are workers prepared with information about other community resources that customers may find helpful?

2. Intake Process and Appointment Scheduling

Are applications readily available? What kinds of efforts are made to serve people with special needs - language barriers, disabilities, etc.? Are bilingual staff or interpreters available? Are staff members out-stationed from time-to-time at community locations other than the office?

3. Interviewing

Are workers aware of their nonverbal communication - body language and tone of voice? Are workers aware of cultural issues that may influence communication with customers? Have we provided any training to workers in this area?

4. Work Process/Flow/Procedures/Timeframes

What is the process with a typical application, from the date of receipt until the interview is held? Is the process efficient, effective and customer-friendly? Does it contribute to maintaining/improving staff morale?

5. Caseload/Workload Management Issues

What alternatives have been developed to assist customers who work during traditional office hours? In what capacities are non-salaried workers used?

6. Training

As we think-through the training we provide to new staff, what aspects are most effective? What training needs are not being addressed completely? How do we ensure that the work done by new workers is accurate?

7. Case Reviews

Are applications reviewed before they are finalized? Is a sample of cases reviewed or are they all reviewed? Who reviews the cases that are selected? What is done with the results? Who is responsible for fixing the errors that are discovered through this process?

8. Verification and Documentation

Does the narration clearly explain which documents were used and how they support actions taken? Do supervisors look at documentation and provide feedback to workers when reviewing cases? Do staff need refresher training in this area?

9. Policy

How are administrative notices/policy alerts distributed when there are program changes or clarifications? Do we receive timely, accurate clarifications when we ask questions? How is training provided on policy issues?

10. Anticipating Changes

Do we provide specific help to our customers to clarify their reporting responsibilities? How do we determine whether reported changes are processed in a timely manner? Do we have an "express window" for customers to report changes and ask questions? →

11. Fraud

What steps do we take during the course of certification and recertification to prevent fraud? How do we ensure that a clear explanation of reporting requirements is given to applicants?

12. Corrective Action Planning

What kinds of staff are included in the development of corrective action initiatives? Are eligibility workers and support staff included? Who has overall responsibility for corrective action planning, monitoring and evaluating?

Some agencies may wish to use the entire guide at once; others may find it more effective to use one section each month or at each unit or office meeting.

The last few years have brought a number of changes in the Food Stamp Program. With these changes come opportunities to modify office procedures and forms, take advantage of new options for automation and streamline the way local offices operate.

Conducting the kind of voluntary review suggested in the module may provide alternative approaches that allow limited resources and staff time to be used even more productively. Through this process, local agencies may discover economies of scale that benefit both customer and agency. Some of these alternatives also may serve to strengthen partnerships and collaborations with faith- and community-based organizations.

An e-version of the review guide can be obtained through the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the Food and Nutrition Service:
sally.jacobson-brown@fns.usda.gov.

2006 Food Stamp Hunger Champions

The Food Stamp Outreach Coalition announced recently that it is seeking to honor exemplary local food stamp offices again this year through its Food Stamp Hunger Champions program.

Local offices with a unique and creative approach to serving their customers will be selected as the 2006 Food Stamp Hunger Champions.

The nomination process is simple. Any individual, agency or organization that has worked, observed or has personal experience with a local food stamp office, may nominate that office. Offices may self-nominate.

Three of the areas in which the nomination will be rated are: outreach, access and office efficiency. A detailed justification, not to exceed one page, must be provided. The justification should include, but is not limited to:

- ✎ How have outreach activities positively affected participation rates?
- ✎ Are there innovative partnerships with other government agencies or private organizations?
- ✎ What processes make accessing the program easier for working persons, immigrants and the elderly?
- ✎ What assistance is available to parents whose children accompany them to the office?
- ✎ How courteous and personable is the office staff?
- ✎ Are the wait times reasonable?
- ✎ Is the staff knowledgeable of other assistance programs?
- ✎ Are timeframes met for food stamp applications and expedited benefits?
- ✎ What is the overall objective, activity, program or process that sets the office apart from other offices?

Awardees will be honored at the 2006 State Food Stamp Directors Conference, hosted by the APHSA. In addition, all awardees as well as nominees will be listed on the website of the Food and Nutrition Service.

To find out more about the nomination requirements, get a downloadable nomination form or nominate on-line:
www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/champions.htm.

The Food Stamp Outreach Coalition is a national group of organizations that provide a forum for the sharing of outreach ideas, strategies and resources to improve the accessibility to and increase participation in the Food Stamp Program.

Questions on the 2006 Food Stamp Hunger Champions program or the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition should be directed to:
FSOC@fns.usda.gov.

★Take advantage of this great opportunity to be recognized nationally for work well-done!★

The nomination deadline is June 30, 2006.



2005

Food Stamp Hunger Champions

The first Food Stamp Hunger Champions were named this past year. Two local food stamp offices were selected as Mentors and four as Honorable Mentors.

The following two articles feature the Mentors - Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County, California, and Iowa Department of Human Services, Polk County.

Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County, California

Forming partnerships to increase food stamp participation...

“Collaboration is the Santa Cruz way, and it’s a big part of how we operate,” says Claudine Wildman, Benefit Services director of the Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County (HRA). “We know that we can’t serve everyone well by ourselves, so we work hard at developing relationships and are committed to finding ways to serve those in need.”

In forming associations, Claudine says it is important for the HRA to include all agencies that can make a contribution.

“Cast the net far and wide. Invite community agencies to an informational meeting that has a clear message: We’re interested in increasing the number of people who receive food stamps, and we know you might be serving clients who could benefit from our services.”

Don’t forget to include internal resources. Co-workers and customers can be valuable partners as well, but in a different way.

“Line staff members have an incredible sense of the clients – who they are, what they need and what prevents them from completing the process. We also have our existing clients, who can tell us about the kinds of barriers they are facing. These conversations can really guide you in terms of other places to reach.”

Internal partners also can help to promote food stamp benefits through word-of-mouth advertising.

“When you do a good job, people talk to their friends and family, and that has yielded positive results for us.”

The HRA also is working to reach part-time and seasonal workers who could really benefit from a number of programs, but has only been somewhat successful in this area, says Claudine. She says the HRA also would like to do more outreach with schools. *(If you have ideas for the HRA, get in touch with Claudine. Her contact information follows.)*

While the following information was provided by Claudine about her experience in working with particular organizations, we felt it could be generally useful to anyone who is thinking of linking with partners:

- *Don’t allow concern about funding to interfere with the development of relationships.*
- *Be open to new ideas.*
- *Cultivate a comprehensive plan with agencies that want to partner.*
- *Identify a point person in each food stamp office, and ask your partners to do the same.*
- *Meet with your partners and/or check-in by e-mail regularly.*
- *Train community outreach workers on the requirements of the Food Stamp Program.*

To swap information, contact Claudine Wildman, Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County, California, (831) 454-4236, claudine.wildman@hra.co.santa-cruz.ca.us.

2005 Food Stamp Hunger Champions

Iowa Department of Human Services, Polk County

Partnering with a contractor...

Among its ventures, the Iowa Department of Human Services, Polk County (DHS), worked with a contractor in 2004 to help the agency conduct outreach throughout the county, including Des Moines, the largest city. Primary Health Care, Inc. (PHC) was selected because it was already doing a lot of outreach for homeless folks in the community, and its work fit well with the DHS goal of “taking food assistance to the streets,” says Lori Lipscomb, DHS field office manager.

Advertising

DHS and the contractor brainstormed ways to reach people where they were. One way involved advertising the availability of the Food Assistance Program (the name of the Food Stamp Program throughout Iowa) on the side of a PHC vehicle used for outreach.

“Our workers were inundated, and when we started talking about outreach, they were really concerned. By accessing new resources...it freed up the workers’ time to focus on the eligibility part of the equation.” - Lori Lipscomb, Polk County

The DHS and PHC also secured the placement of advertisements throughout the Metropolitan Transit Authority bus system. In addition, they aired a series of eight radio spots, *Food for Thought*, on a local radio station. Each radio segment focused on the Food Assistance Program and nutrition and food tips.

Give-away bags that targeted families and seniors also were a part of the DHS/PHC initiative. The nylon totes were packed with small, free items related to food assistance and nutrition (magnets, coloring books, pens and pencils, EBT account registers, 2-1-1 information, for example) and were made available by PHC at health, senior, ethnic and cultural fairs, congregate meal sites, open houses at schools and church meetings. Brochures and applications for the Food Assistance Program and the number for the statewide toll-free call center also were included in the bags. For the seniors, good health was emphasized and specifically what types of food could be purchased with \$10 in benefits (15 breakfasts or 10 other meals).

6★ *Excellent Service for All*



Providing Applications Off-Site

During the four-month contract, PHC assisted customers with the completion of applications. In the community, PHC printed applications and copied forms of verification for the potential customers of the

Food Assistance Program, using its laptops and portable printers and copiers. PHC submitted these documents to the local DHS offices and interviews were scheduled.

Following-up with Customers

While these services proved to be a successful part of the process, the number of individuals who followed-through and attended the certification interview was less than expected, says Lori. So, her agency and the contractor put their heads together again and came up with a call-back system. DHS and PHC identified the applicants who failed to make it through the process and reconnected with them. Assistance was made available a second time, and most often, the follow-up reduced this barrier to participation.

In summing up the experience of working on an outreach project with a contractor, Lori says, “Our workers were inundated, and when we started talking about outreach, they were really concerned. By accessing new resources and having the contractor do the actual outreach, it freed up the workers’ time to focus on the eligibility part of the equation.”

Lori has these suggestions for anyone who is getting started in food stamp outreach. “We would encourage others just beginning to think about outreach to find out what kind of funding sources are available. (Funding for contracted products and services provided by PHC was obtained by the DHS from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and was matched by the Food and Nutrition Service.) Use local partners, think outside of the box, and try some creative things that you haven’t done before. And don’t forget the value of trying to reach people where they already are.”

To swap information, contact Lori Lipscomb, Iowa Department of Human Services, Polk County, (515) 283-9206, llipsco1@dhs.state.ia.us.



Payment Accuracy Success

The Mid-Atlantic Region presented awards in March to its state and local agencies for achievements in payment accuracy during fiscal year 2005.*

State Agency Awards

The *Administrator's Award*, honoring the state with the best payment accuracy rate, was presented to the *Virgin Islands*, for its payment accuracy rate of 97.99 percent.

Virginia received the *Rising Star Award* in honor of its "most improved" payment accuracy rate, which increased from 93.60 percent to 94.41 percent. The *Star Performer Award* for the best negative error rate was presented to *New Jersey*, for correctly processing negative actions 99.54 percent of the time. *Delaware* also earned the *Rising Star Award* for increasing its accuracy in dealing with negative actions from 87.13 percent in fiscal year 2004 to 93.62 percent in fiscal year 2005.

Local Office Awards

The *Director's Award* recognizes the best payment accuracy rate achieved by one of the region's largest project areas. *Allegheny County, Pennsylvania* was honored for its payment accuracy rate of 95.20 percent.

Additional awards were given to project areas that had food stamp caseloads of at least 8,000 households. Four local departments were recognized with the *Star Performer Award* for achieving 100 percent payment accuracy: *Bergen and Middlesex counties, New Jersey*; and *Bucks and Lackawanna counties, Pennsylvania*.

Five other departments were applauded for excellence in payment accuracy: *Berks County, Pennsylvania* (99.4 percent), *Beaver County, Pennsylvania* (98 percent), *Lehigh County, Pennsylvania* (97.7 percent) and *Erie County, Pennsylvania* (97.6 percent).

Mercer County, Pennsylvania received the *Rising Star Award* for most-improved payment accuracy. In just one year, its payment accuracy rate increased from 86.46 percent to 98.32 percent.

*based on state-reported data for FY 2005.

Pennsylvania provides telephone interviews at all recertifications

The Food and Nutrition Service recently granted the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) a waiver to conduct telephone interviews in lieu of face-to-face interviews for the recertification of all households.

The DPW requested the two-year waiver to reduce quality control errors and help eligibility specialists to use their time more effectively. For customers, the DPW believes the waiver would simplify the application process, increase participation, reduce travel costs and accommodate individuals who work.

The alternative to interviewing in-office waives the federal regulation at 7 CFR 273.14(b)(3), which requires state agencies to conduct a face-to-face interview at least once every 12 months as part of the recertification process.

The DPW also has taken the option at federal regulation at 7 CFR 273.2(e)(2), which allows state agencies to waive the face-to-face interview in favor of a telephone interview for households in which all members are elderly or disabled and do not have earned income.

The waiver approval was based on guidance issued July 25, 2003, which requires that the payment error rate of the requesting state agency must be below the most recently announced national average. Approval also was based on three other conditions:

- The state agency must grant a face-to-face interview if it requested by a household or its authorized representative. (The DPW retains the option to conduct a face-to-face interview if it would be more appropriate.)
- The waiver only applies at recertification.
- One year after implementation of the waiver, the state agency must provide the Food and Nutrition Service with an interim report that includes data on payment error rates for households affected by the waiver; this will help to determine whether the waiver caused an adverse impact.

To swap information, contact Donna Roe, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, (717) 787-4081, droe@state.pa.us.

FSP and TANF work programs prove beneficial to participants, customers and local office staff

Food Stamp Program - Employment and Training Program

Five years ago a Newport News mom and her three children lived in public housing and received food stamps, cash assistance and medical assistance. More recently, she was hired full-time, and she now owns a home and a car.

The life changes experienced by this family in Virginia can be attributed in part to the food stamp Employment and Training Program (E&T). Another contributing factor is the policy of the Newport News Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide E&T participants with valuable work experience and skills through volunteer positions there. For this family, the result was a foot in the door both in terms of employment and a place to call their own.

As a condition of eligibility, every member of a food stamp household, unless exempt, must register for work. Also, depending on the state agency that administers the Food Stamp Program, individuals may be required to participate in E&T, which generally consists of one or more, or a combination of, employment and training components.

As unpaid assistants, the E&T participants in Newport News are required to work the equivalent of their food stamp benefits divided by the minimum wage.

The participants learn reception, mail functions, appointment scheduling, mainframe computer support (inquiry-only capability after signing a confidentiality statement), security and confidentiality expectations, policies and procedures, telephone etiquette and voice mail properties. They can be found at work anywhere from the mailroom to the call center to the director's office.

Benefits to Volunteers

During the past five years, the DSS has hired 20 of the E&T participants.

"As part of its overall mission, the Newport News Department of Social Services promotes employ-

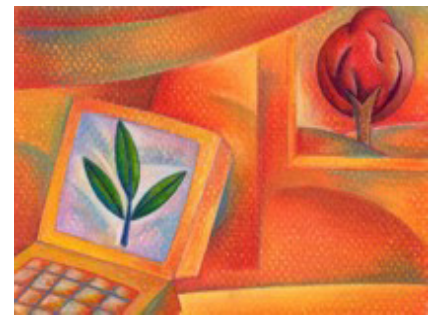
ment through its programs and partnerships to achieve optimal well-being for families," says Larry Odom, DSS senior supervisor. "Volunteer assignments in any organization can help individuals to form and demonstrate good work habits - arriving promptly, showing initiative in learning, completing assignments and notifying the supervisor of expected absences."

Benefits to Customers

Providing work experience to the E&T participants also benefits food stamp customers - after all, these individuals are, or were, food stamp customers themselves.

Larry explains, "Because E&T volunteers experience 'both sides of the desk', they come with a basic understanding of eligibility reporting requirements and the renewal process. This may help them to assimilate quickly into the work environment.

"We think their personal experiences give them the added ability to relate well with other food stamp customers in reassuring them that their concerns and needs are being addressed."



Benefits to Agency

The agency staff benefit from working with those who at one time may have sat across the desk from them. The life stories shared by the E&T volunteers and hires give the eligibility specialists valuable insight into the needs of customers. In addition, they obviously provide much-needed clerical and other support to manage and streamline the workload.

Working within a large public agency, their experiences may give them an appreciation for caseload size, volume of work and the strain of vacancies, Larry adds.

The agency is pleased with the retention rate for E&T participants who have been hired, Larry says. "More of these employees have remained aboard than have left or been terminated."

When the E&T participants compete for a position at the DSS, they must interview like everyone else, provide references, and if hired, they have the same probation period as other employees, says Larry.

To swap information, contact: Larry Odom, Newport News Department of Social Services, (757) 926-6552, lvo700@eastern.dss.state.va.us, or Dorrie Thompson, Newport News Department of Social Services, Food Stamp Employment and Training Unit, (757) 926-6388, dat700@eastern.dss.state.va.us.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families - Community Works Program

The Hilton Heights Family Investment Center of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services provides customers with real-life work experience that equips them with knowledge, skills and confidence. Staff there want to be sure the customers who are fulfilling their TANF work requirement, gain experience that will benefit them, says Clyde Johnson, former director of Hilton Heights.

“In the past, recipients assigned to a Family Investment Center were given assignments limited to filing and delivering correspondence. However, to make the work experience more realistic and beneficial, we had to rethink how work was assigned, says Clyde.

So, Hilton Heights integrated its Work Experience Clerks into the primary functions of every program unit in the office.

The clerks are responsible for logging and processing faxes and mail, filing applications for food stamps, cash assistance and medical assistance and matching verification documents returned with applications filed. They also telephone customers when information requested has not been returned for

any of the assistance programs that the local agency administers.

Bringing customers into the clerical positions at Hilton Heights began in January 2004. Since then the Baltimore City Department of Social Services has been able to offer permanent, state employment to approximately 40 of these customers. The program, which initially was a three-month pilot, has proved its worth to the agency and its customers.

Clyde explains, the clerks are involved in what it takes to process and finalize applications for public assistance, so they are more empathetic to situations that interfere with the finalization of an application, and as a result, become good public relations spokespersons.

The Work Experience Clerks gain real job-related skills in office procedures and application of computer technology to improve work efficiency. And they also benefit in a more personal way. “When you give someone something really important to do, and they know they’re making a contribution, it changes everything,” says Clyde.

The Baltimore City Department of Social Services is a stop

along the way for some of the Work Experience Clerks. The experiences obtained there help them to develop skills that are transferable and give them the confidence to seek and subsequently gain paid employment. Most are grateful for the opportunity to understand what goes into processing and approving applications and for the opportunity to contribute to the program’s overall success, Clyde says.

To swap information, contact: Clyde Johnson, Baltimore City Department of Social Services, (443) 423-4314, cjohnson@dhr.state.md.us.

The TANF Community Works Program requires customers to participate in a work activity for 40 hours a week until they gain employment in the private or public sector (24 hours in an activity that simulates work and 16 hours in activities like education and job search).

In the Baltimore City Department of Social Services more than 125 Work Experience Clerks are assigned to the Family Investment Centers and the central administration facility.

In the Family Investment Centers they work in all programs and perform the same functions as those described in the companion article on Hilton Heights. At the Food Stamp Change Center (in central administration), the clerks file, photocopy, answer phones and forward mail.











Food Stamp Nutrition Education

Guiding Principles

The Food and Nutrition Service is strengthening food stamp nutrition education through its release this past September of the Guiding Principles. The six principles (previously called the Framework) basically describe the agency's vision for nutrition education and take into account the nutrition and budget concerns of food stamp eligibles.

The Principles...







-  Are intended for food stamp participants and individuals eligible for the Food Stamp Program.
-  Are a set of learning experiences designed to facilitate the voluntary adoption of eating and other nutrition-related behaviors conducive to good health and well being for those on a limited budget.
-  Have the greatest potential impact on the nutrition-related behaviors of the overall food stamp population when it targets women and children in food stamp eligible households.
-  Use science-based, behaviorally-focused interventions and can maximize its national impact by concentrating on a small set of key outcomes.
-  Can maximize its reach when coordination and collaboration take place among a variety of stakeholders at the local, state, regional and national levels.
-  Are enhanced when the specific roles and responsibilities of local, state and national food stamp agencies and nutrition education providers are defined and put into practice.

The Food and Nutrition Service uses the Guiding Principles when creating the guidance for state nutrition education plans.

State Plans

States seeking federal funding for food stamp nutrition education must submit a state nutrition education plan. The plans for federal fiscal year 2007 are due to the Food and Nutrition Service by August 15, 2006. Please take note: The Food Stamp Nutrition Education Guidance has been revised. These are some of the highlights:

Changes to Plan Guidance...

-  Recommendation to maximize investment by directing messages toward women and children; these two groups of individuals make up the majority of food stamp customers.
-  Encouragement to focus efforts on promoting three behavioral outcomes: increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole-grains and non-fat and low-fat milk products; daily physical activity; and balancing food consumption with energy expended.
-  Inclusion of references to the USDA food guide system, *MyPyramid*, which was released in April 2005.
-  Support of collaboration among agencies to reinforce efforts, including participation in a State Nutrition Action Plan. These plans promote a common goal regarding healthy eating and active lifestyle habits. For more information on State Nutrition Action Plans: www.fns.usda.gov/oane/SNAP/SNAP.htm.
-  Creation of an additional category of participants - likely-eligibles. Likely-eligibles are people who probably are eligible for food stamps but have yet to apply for benefits.
-  Requirement to reference the Food Stamp Program during nutrition education sessions and ensure the visibility of the program on nutrition education materials.

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM Products★Services

Radio Advertisements

Radio advertisements about the Food Stamp Program are airing now on stations around the country. Part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's campaign to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, they will run March 1 through the end of April and again July 1 through the end of August.

The advertisements target low-income seniors, the working poor and legal immigrants, focus on dispelling

myths and emphasize the nutrition and work support benefits of food stamps. There are three English and two Spanish advertisements.

For the states within in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Food and Nutrition Service, the advertisements provide the national toll-free number of the Food Stamp Program (1-800-221-5689).

Radio Stations in States Within the Mid-Atlantic Region

Washington, DC

Also covering the **Maryland** and **Virginia** counties and cities of Frederick, Loudoun, Montgomery, Fairfax, Prince William, Stafford, Charles, Calvert, Prince George's and Alexandria

WTOP-FM; WGMS-FM; WLZL-FM*; WMMJ-FM

Baltimore

Also covering the counties of Carroll, Howard, Anne Arundel, Harford and Queen Anne

WBAL-AM; WLIF-FM; WPOC-FM; WWIN-FM

Philadelphia

Also covering the **Pennsylvania** and **New Jersey** counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Burlington, Camden and Gloucester

KYW-AM; WBEB-FM; WDAS-FM; VRNB-FM

Pittsburgh

Also covering the counties of Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland

KDKA-AM; WDSY-FM; WDVE-FM; WSHH-FM

Also, the **New York City** stations will spill to the **New Jersey** counties of Bergen, Essex, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset and Union

WINS-AM; WLTV-FM; WPAT-FM*; WRKS-FM; WSKQ-FM;
WWPR-FM

*Spanish language station

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM Products★Services

National Pre-Screening Tool

Individuals can learn whether they may be eligible to participate in the Food Stamp Program by accessing the pre-screening tool of the Food and Nutrition Service: www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov. If the user is from a state that has its own pre-screening tool, such as Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, they will be linked automatically to the pre-screening system of their state. The Food and Nutrition Service encourages faith- and community-based organizations to assist applicants in accessing the national and state pre-screening tools.

Free Publications

The Food and Nutrition Service provides free food stamp publications in 36 languages*. The materials provide information on: food stamp eligibility specific to the general public, immigrants, the elderly and the disabled; public charge; and verification required for eligibility. To download the materials: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm.

*Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Croatian, English, Farsi, French, Greek, Haitian-Creole, Hebrew, Hindi, Hmong, Igbo, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Kurdish, Laotian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese and Yoruba.

Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations

The guiding principle behind President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative is that all social service providers, including faith-based charities, should be able to compete on an equal footing for public dollars to provide public service.

In 2002, the President signed Executive Order 13279, *Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-based and Community Organizations*. Among other things, it clarified the rights and responsibilities of faith-based organizations that partner with the federal government and required federal departments and agencies to ensure their policies were aligned with the Executive Order.

On July 9, 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a final regulation in accordance with the Executive Order, *Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations*. The regulation guarantees equal treatment for all organizations applying for U.S. Department of Agriculture assistance and is being implemented at state and local levels.

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