

FOOD STAMP
OUTREACH
TOOLKIT



Food Stamps Make America Stronger



FOR FOOD STAMP
OFFICES

FOREWORD

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COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

U.S. Department of Agriculture
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PARTNER TOOLKIT

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1

HOW TO MILK THIS
TOOLKIT
FOR ALL IT'S WORTH!



INTRODUCTION

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is an investment in our future. It offers nutrition benefits to participating clients, supports work, and provides economic benefits to communities. However, too many low-income people who are eligible for the program do not participate and thus forgo nutrition assistance that could stretch their food dollars at the grocery store. Their communities lose out on the benefits provided by new food stamp dollars flowing into local economies.

In fiscal year 2005, only 65 percent¹ (*All footnotes are research citations. You can find them in the “Resource” section at the end of this toolkit.*) of those eligible for food stamp benefits participated. The most common reason eligible people do not participate is because they do not realize they may be eligible. Others choose not to apply because of myths or misunderstandings about food stamp benefits or because of stigma that continues to persist. Others make a cost-benefit decision that the time involved in applying for benefits is not worth the expected return. Some do not want to accept government assistance. For specific populations, there may be additional compounding factors, such as language barriers for legal immigrants, or time and transportation barriers for the working poor. Seniors may not understand the nature of the program and choose not to apply for benefits, thinking children or families need the help more.

Outreach and education are powerful tools in overcoming barriers to food stamp participation. Even a small increase in food stamp participation can have a substantial impact. If the national participation rate rose 5 percentage points, 1.9 million more low-income people would have an additional \$1.3 billion in benefits per year to use to purchase healthy food and \$2.5 billion total in new economic activity would be generated nationwide.

Why does increasing participation in the FSP make sense for your community?

THE FSP GENERATES ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

The FSP brings Federal dollars into communities in the form of benefits which are redeemed by food stamp participants at local stores. These benefits ripple throughout the economies of the community, State, and Nation. For example:

- Every \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates a total of \$9.20 in community spending.²
- Every additional dollar's worth of food stamp benefits generates 17 to 47 cents of new spending on food.³
- On average, \$1 billion of retail food demand by food stamp recipients generates 3,300 farm jobs.⁴

“*Food stamps are the first line of defense against hunger in our community. Making sure low-income people receive food stamps accomplishes many things. First and most importantly, people get fed. Second, community and faith-based organizations such as ours are relieved of having to provide a higher level of food assistance. Third, the local grocers do business with customers that they may not have otherwise. And fourth, we are all healthier and happier.*”

BILL BOLLING
Executive Director
 Atlanta Community Food Bank
 Atlanta, Georgia



“ A successful [food stamp] redemption program probably means that we are successfully servicing the needs of our community. By being able to meet our customers’ needs during a particular time in their lives, we are often able to establish a relationship that outlives the time a person is eligible for food stamps. In that case we benefit from that customer both now and in the future. Food stamp redemption is a way to get your best customer in the front door and to establish a long-term relationship with that customer. ”

GEORGE MATICS
Purchasing Director
Cardenas Markets, Inc.
Ontario, California

“ To reach common ground, we need to go to higher ground. Together with our business and government leaders, we can build community and economic prosperity for all. ”

DANIELLA LEVINE
Executive Director
Human Service Coalition
Miami, Florida

In fiscal year 2006, the average monthly food stamp benefit per household was approximately \$214.⁵ These benefits, funded by Federal dollars, create business when they are redeemed at your local food retailers. Eighty-six percent of benefits, totaling \$25 billion, were redeemed at the nation’s 35,000 supermarkets. The remaining benefits, totaling \$3.6 billion, contribute to the viability of 121,000 other firms which include grocery stores, convenience stores, combination stores, farmer’s markets, and other retail food stores; plus wholesalers and meal services.⁶

Food stamp benefits are positively and significantly related to household food expenditures.⁷ Although estimates of the impact vary, studies have shown that a \$1 increase in the value of food stamp benefits of a typical recipient household leads to additional food expenditures of between 17 and 47 cents.⁸ Food stamp recipients spend more dollars on food at local retailers in communities than eligible nonparticipants.

Food stamp benefits can be used at authorized farmers markets that sell local produce. This provides additional customers for local farmers and provides food stamp recipients access to healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables that might otherwise be unavailable to them.

THE FSP SUPPORTS WORK AND HELPS LOW-INCOME PEOPLE MAKE THE TRANSITION TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

Nearly 30 percent of participating food stamp households have earnings.⁹ Employees whose nutrition needs are met at home may be healthier and thus may take fewer sick days for themselves or their children. Employees may stay longer with companies that care about them by sharing information about food stamp benefits and its importance as a work support.

The FSP helps families become financially stable and make the transition to self-sufficiency, getting them through the tough times. Half of all new participants will leave the program within nine months.¹⁰

Food stamp benefits are a work support. Food stamp benefits help those leaving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and transitioning to work by supplementing their food budgets so that they can stay independent and work toward self-sufficiency.¹¹ Since food stamp benefits decrease only by 24 to 36 cents for every additional dollar of earnings, food stamp recipients have incentives to work since they will be better off working rather than receiving food stamp benefits alone.¹²



THE FSP HELPS LOW-INCOME FAMILIES MAKE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES AND PUT MORE NUTRITIOUS FOOD ON THE TABLE.

Dietary patterns among low-income people, as well as those of the general public, indicate an excessive consumption of calories, unhealthy fats and sugars, while fruit, vegetable and whole grain intakes are modest.¹³ These poor eating habits contribute to making overweight and obesity a national health problem. In addition to the toll on personal health, this “epidemic” of obesity has economic implications as well. Obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the United States reached \$75 billion in 2003. Taxpayers financed about half of these costs through Medicare and Medicaid.¹⁴

However, research shows that low-income households participating in the FSP have access to more food energy, protein, and a broad array of essential vitamins and minerals in their home food supply compared to eligible nonparticipants.¹⁵ Nationwide, if there were a 5 percentage point increase in the food stamp participation rate, an additional 1.9 million low-income people would reap the nutrition benefits of the FSP. The FSP also helps participants manage their food resources more wisely through [food stamp nutrition education](#). States may exercise the option to provide targeted nutrition education activities or social marketing campaigns designed to help persons eligible for the FSP make healthier food choices and pursue active lifestyles.

Because food stamp benefits are available to most low-income households with few resources, regardless of age, disability status, or family structure, food stamp households are a diverse group. Nine percent of food stamp recipients are aged 60 or older.¹⁶ For the elderly, a particularly vulnerable and underserved population, participation in the FSP and other food assistance programs can help improve nutritional status and well-being and increase independence. Nearly half of food stamp participants are children.¹⁷ Children who are well nourished may have better attendance at school and, once there, may be more focused on learning.

COMBINED EFFORTS ARE NEEDED

The FSP is the cornerstone of the Nation’s nutrition safety net, providing assistance to those who qualify. It helps relieve pressure on emergency food providers, enabling them to provide more assistance to those who do not qualify for food stamp benefits. Because of the nutrition benefits to participants and the economic benefits to the Nation and to States and communities, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has made increasing participation in the FSP a priority. Increasing participation in the FSP requires the combined efforts of national, State, and local public leaders as well as nonprofit community agencies, employers, and anyone else who touches the lives of potentially eligible people.

The rest of this “Introduction” section provides an explanation of the Toolkit, an overview of the Food Stamp Program, food stamp [question-and-answer sheets \(Q&As\)](#), talking points, information about nutrition education providers, and other background materials.

“ The additional support which food stamps provide to needy individuals is readily seen in our stores that serve customers in low-income areas. This benefit not only helps those who require some additional assistance in making ends meet, but is also an aid to the supermarkets making a commitment to serving economically challenged communities. Our partnership with nonprofit organizations in outreaching to potential participants speaks to Pathmark’s commitment to this important program. ”

RICH SAVNER
Director of
Public Affairs and
Government Relations
 Pathmark Stores, Inc.
 Carteret, New Jersey



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Why was this toolkit developed?

We all have a common goal: to improve the ability of low-income people to access nutritious food by participating in the Food Stamp Program (FSP). The information and materials in this toolkit will help you share information about food stamp benefits with those who are eligible but not participating. They will also help you let [potential partners](#), government officials, and the public know how food stamp participation helps the local economy and addresses the national health problem of obesity.

What is food stamp outreach?

Food stamp outreach is providing information or assistance to someone who might be eligible for the Food Stamp Program. The goals of food stamp outreach are to help someone make an informed decision about whether to apply for the program, and ultimately to increase participation by eligible individuals and families.

What is in the toolkit?

This toolkit includes information on:

- The Food Stamp Program
- Maximizing your outreach efforts through developing partnerships
- Placing public service announcements (PSAs)
- Resources

Each section features easy-to-follow instructions, helpful hints, and useful materials (such as PSA scripts and recipe cards). We also have included templates (for letters, calendar listings, etc.) that you can customize with local and State specifics and enhance with information about your organization.

How do I use the toolkit?

The materials in this toolkit show a number of outreach possibilities, and offer your organization the flexibility to pick and choose pieces that work for your specific needs. Throughout the toolkit there are tip sheets that you can duplicate for yourself and your colleagues. You do not have to conduct every one of these activities or invest a lot of time in each one. Do what works best for you and your community.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Findings show that, in addition to the general low-income audience, there are distinct groups that are significantly underrepresented in accessing food stamp benefits. The national outreach campaign is focused on reaching:

GENERAL LOW-INCOME:

Eligible, nonparticipating individuals and families;

WORKING POOR: Employed individuals and families who may not understand that even though they work, they still might qualify;

ELDERLY: People 60 years old or older who may have misunderstandings about the process and potential benefits; and

LEGAL IMMIGRANTS*:

Immigrants may misunderstand [eligibility requirements](#) related to citizenship.

** There are other immigrant groups that could benefit from this educational effort. You may want to connect with local food stamp eligibility workers in your community to identify other distinct groups to target. Some FNS outreach materials are available in 35 languages and can be downloaded from the FNS web site. Refer to the [“Resources”](#) section of this toolkit.*



How do I get started with outreach?

The best way to begin is to ask other organizations in your community if they are currently conducting a food stamp outreach project, or if they have a resource guide, task force, or advisory group. Other food stamp offices and community-based groups would be a good starting point for such a discussion. They may be able to share State and local information and may also have informational materials to add to your effort. By working together, you will be able to further your goals and avoid duplication.

As you start your project, be sure to keep food stamp workers informed of your activities. Explore ways of working together to reduce application barriers — the best outreach efforts will not work if people run into barriers at the food stamp office. Extended office hours, child care areas in waiting rooms, and shorter applications are some examples of how food stamp offices can increase accessibility. Potential roadblocks such as crowded offices, long waiting lines, or repeated visits to the food stamp office may counter your efforts to educate potential applicants about the FSP and prepare them for certification interviews.

Are funds available to help pay for my outreach project?

One way to pay for part of your outreach project is through a State outreach plan. Outreach is an allowable administrative cost for the Food Stamp Program. States can receive 50 percent reimbursement from the Federal Government for necessary, reasonable, and allowable FSP outreach expenditures. States have the option of developing an outreach plan and submitting it for approval to their FNS regional office. FNS encourages States to develop and submit an outreach plan since it provides structure for the activity and enables FNS regional offices to provide technical assistance. The outreach plan also formalizes the State's plans and may be used as a powerful tool to garner community support and resources. Instructions for developing and submitting a plan, as well as examples of allowable and unallowable outreach activities and applicable fiscal policies for State plans, can be found at: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/stateplan.htm.

For more information about State outreach plans, contact your FNS regional office. Contact persons and e-mail addresses are included at the end of this toolkit.

Can I provide nutrition education, too?

Similar to outreach, nutrition education is an allowable administrative cost for the Food Stamp Program. States can receive 50 percent reimbursement from the Federal Government for necessary, reasonable, and allowable nutrition education expenditures. States can develop a nutrition education plan and submit it for approval to their FNS regional office. Almost all States have optional nutrition education plans in place. For a list of organizations participating in State nutrition education plans, go to the Food Stamp Nutrition Connection web site at www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/Stategates/index.html.



What outreach is happening on a national level and how do we fit in?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a nationwide effort to educate and inform eligible nonparticipants — with special emphasis on working poor, elderly, and immigrants — about the Food Stamp Program.

The campaign’s primary goal is to increase enrollment in the FSP and to reinforce its role as a nutrition assistance program. The objectives of the education effort were developed with advice and input from many local food stamp offices and partners. These objectives are to:

- Expand awareness of the FSP as a nutrition assistance and work support program;
- Inform eligible, unenrolled people about where and how they can apply; and
- Ensure that people who are eligible to enroll have reasonable access and can participate with dignity and respect.

This effort, designed to raise awareness of and change beliefs about the FSP, includes promotion of a national toll-free information line through a variety of English and Spanish paid radio advertisements. These advertisements run on stations in major population centers, and in areas with particularly large numbers of eligible but unenrolled populations. In 2007, there was an increase of more than 200 percent in the average monthly requests for information packets via the national toll-free number during the advertising months as compared to the non-advertising months. (Calls could not be tracked in areas where the ads offer a local toll-free number rather than the national one.)

You are an important part of this national effort to inform low-income people across the country about how they and their families can eat right, even when money’s tight. The outreach you conduct on a local level is a vital part of the national campaign.

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions about this toolkit, or about how to conduct outreach to increase local enrollment in the FSP, please e-mail us at fspoutreach@fns.usda.gov or refer to the FNS web site, www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach.htm.

You may also wish to tap the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition, a Web-based network of national advocacy groups and partner organizations, for helpful insight about ways to reach FSP [target audiences](#). Details about this group can be found in the “[Resources](#)” section under “General Food Stamp Outreach Resources,” or by visiting www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/about.htm.

Whether you work at a food bank, at a community or faith-based organization, or with the State or county government, you are an important part of this national effort to inform low-income people across the country about how they and their families can eat right, even when money’s tight. The outreach you conduct on a local level is a vital part of the national campaign.



OVERVIEW OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE



The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is the cornerstone of the Federal nutrition assistance safety net, serving as the first line of defense against hunger. The FSP provides much-needed nutrition support to millions of low-income people. Nearly half of them are children.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS



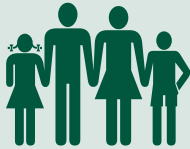
Not only do food stamps help individuals and families when money's tight, but your State and local community also benefit. The average food stamp benefit per person is about \$94 per month (fiscal year 2006 data), which is spent in local grocery stores. In fact, every \$5 in new Federal food stamp benefits generates almost double the amount in local economic activity. Also, every additional dollar in food stamp benefits generates 17 to 47 cents of new spending on food.

ELECTRONIC ISSUANCE



In June 2004, the FSP completed a transformation from paper coupons to an [electronic benefits transfer \(EBT\)](#) card. Participants receive a plastic EBT card (similar to a bank debit card) with the dollar amount for which they are eligible each month. There is evidence that EBT also decreases fraudulent use of food stamps.

UNDERSERVED POPULATION



Millions of low-income people are not accessing the nutrition benefits for which they qualify. To be effective, it is important that our national and local outreach efforts counter myths about the FSP among those who think they are not eligible or have beliefs that discourage them from enrolling.



MYTH	TRUTH
FOUR COMMON FOOD STAMP MYTHS HEARD FROM POTENTIAL APPLICANTS	
<i>“The Food Stamp Program is a welfare program.”</i>	The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition assistance program designed to help individuals and families buy nutritious food when money’s tight.
<i>“Some people receive only \$10 a month in food stamp benefits.”</i>	While some receive \$10, the average food stamp benefit per person is about \$94 per month (fiscal year 2006 data).
<i>“You cannot get food stamp benefits if you have a job.”</i>	Individuals may work and still have income low enough to receive food stamp benefits. In fact, nearly 30 percent of food stamp households had earnings in 2006.
<i>“Other people need food stamps more than I do.”</i>	By receiving food stamp benefits, you are not taking benefits away from another person. Everyone who applies and is determined to be eligible by the State/local eligibility worker will get food stamp benefits.

FOUR COMMON FOOD STAMP MYTHS HEARD FROM ELIGIBILITY WORKERS	
<i>“Outreach could mean more quality control errors.”</i>	The number of low-income people participating in the FSP is growing; however, the error rate is at an all-time low.
<i>“Community workers cannot prescreen for eligibility or help gather verification documents.”</i>	Community groups can prescreen clients using the FNS prescreening tool known as “Step 1” (or the State prescreening tool, if one exists). Additionally, they can help fill out application forms, gather verification information, etc. However, the responsibility for the actual certification of households for program benefits remains with FSP staff.
<i>“Certification interviews must be held at local FSP offices.”</i>	Local FSP offices can take applications or certify households for benefits at remote locations, such as food banks and grocery stores. Local offices may offer telephone interviews when appropriate.
<i>“Outreach will increase my workload.”</i>	Community workers help potential applicants gather appropriate verification documents so that clients are better prepared for the interview and bring the proper paperwork.



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM FACT SHEET

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger. On average, it helps more than 26 million (fiscal year 2006 data) low-income people buy nutritious food each month and make healthy food choices within a limited budget. Eating healthier foods helps low-income people and their families stay well and have the energy they need for today's active lifestyles.

To apply for Food Stamp Program benefits, a person must go through the local food stamp office. If it is not possible to get to the office, a person may apply by telephone or make an appointment for another time or place. Any knowledgeable adult in the family can initiate an application, or the household may designate an "authorized representative" to apply for them.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must have INCOMES under certain levels, based on household size. A household is defined as people who live together and eat meals together.

Applicants may have RESOURCES, but they must be less than a certain level:

- \$2,000 for most households
- \$3,000 for a household with an elderly person (age 60 or older) or disabled person
- Most States exempt one or more vehicles from household resources
- A household's home does not count as a resource

An immigrant is eligible to apply for food stamp benefits if he/she:

- Has been in the United States as a legal resident for five years
- Is a legal immigrant child (not born in the United States)
- Has earned, or can be credited with, 40 quarters of work
- Is a refugee or asylee
- Has a military connection
- Is a member of certain Indian tribes

NOTE: *A child born in the United States or a legal immigrant child is eligible for food stamps, even if he/she is in a family where other members of the household are not eligible.*



The amount of the Food Stamp Program benefit for each household takes into account the household's income, current living expenses, and resources.

Food Stamp Program outreach is critical to reaching those low-income people who are not aware that they may be eligible for, or do not know how to apply for, program benefits. The Food and Nutrition Service has several efforts under way to help with local outreach:

TOOLS AVAILABLE

A prescreening eligibility tool, written at the 6th grade level in both English and Spanish, is available for anyone with Internet access. The tool helps people learn if they are eligible and how much they might receive in monthly benefits. It can be found at www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov.

A toll-free information line (1-800-221-5689) is available in Spanish and English.

Free educational posters and flyers in Spanish and English can be ordered at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>.

Five basic documents in 35 languages can be found online at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm.

A national Food Stamp Outreach Coalition (FSOC) brings together national and local organizations interested in food stamp outreach and helps to empower these groups to do more and better outreach.

The FSOC listserv was developed to be a communication mechanism for those interested in outreach at the local, State, and national levels, and to share ideas among groups. To join, send an e-mail to fsoc@fns.usda.gov.

Certified households receive their benefits through a debit card called an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. EBT cardholder accounts are credited monthly, and food stamp recipients spend their benefits by using the card to buy eligible food in authorized retail food stores. Only food and certain food preparation items can be purchased with food stamp benefits.



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

What is the Food Stamp Program?

The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition assistance program that helps low-income families and individuals purchase nutritious, healthy food. It is the cornerstone of the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net. The U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees the Food Stamp Program at the Federal level through its Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies administer the program at State and local levels. Their responsibilities include determining [eligibility](#) and distributing benefits.

Who is eligible to receive food stamp benefits?

Anyone who meets the eligibility requirements can get food stamp benefits. Household income and other resources have to be under certain limits and are reviewed. The program allows for certain deductions like housing costs, child support, medical expenses, or child-care costs. A household may also have up to \$2000 in assets. Households with a member age 60 or older — or a disabled member — may have up to \$3000 in assets. Assets that do not count toward eligibility requirements include: a home, a vehicle to carry a physically disabled member of a household, the fair market value of one vehicle (up to \$4,650; higher limits in most States), and the resources of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients. Specific details are outlined in the FNS-313 brochure at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/general.htm.

Where can I go to find out if I'm eligible to receive food stamp benefits?

If you have access to a computer, you can quickly find out if you might qualify for food stamp benefits through the prescreening tool available on the USDA web site, www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov. Local food stamp offices can provide information about eligibility, and USDA operates a toll-free number (1-800-221-5689) for people to call if they want to receive information about the Food Stamp Program by mail. Most States also have a toll-free information/hotline number that can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact_info/hotlines.htm.

Some community organizations work closely with food stamp offices and can provide information on the application process.

WHAT IS THE EBT CARD?

All 50 States have made the transition from paper coupons to the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. The EBT card is like a debit card and can be used at USDA-authorized grocery stores across the country. At the cash register, the customer or cashier swipes the EBT card through the card reader at the point of sale and the customer enters a personal identification number to secure the transaction. The system deducts the exact dollar amount of the purchase from the customer's EBT account and deposits it into the retailer's bank account. Once the food stamp EBT transaction is complete, a receipt shows the amount of the food stamp purchase and the amount of food stamp benefits remaining in the EBT account.



What are some of the Food Stamp Program's benefits?

Food stamp benefits provide much-needed help so that low-income people can put good, healthy food on the table. Food stamp benefits help with the grocery bill. Households can use benefits to purchase breads, cereals, fruits and vegetables, meats, fish and poultry, and dairy products. Many States offer free nutrition education materials and programs for food stamp benefit recipients. [Localize here if your State offers materials and/or classes.]

Food stamp benefits also help the local community. Each \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community. Plus, food stamp benefits are funded with Federal dollars — so when everyone who is eligible for the program receives benefits, State and local economies also benefit.

Why is there a national Food Stamp Program outreach effort?

Currently, only about 65 percent of those eligible for food stamp benefits are enrolled. The goal of this national Food Stamp Program outreach effort is to raise awareness of food stamp [eligibility](#) and [benefits](#). The campaign includes promoting a national toll-free information line (1-800-221-5689) (or State toll-free lines where available) through a variety of English and Spanish radio advertisements in major population centers and in areas with large numbers of eligible but unenrolled people.

Who is involved in food stamp outreach?

Food stamp outreach is a community-wide effort enlisting the help of State and local food stamp offices, faith-based groups, food banks, and others. Together, these groups play an important role in helping low-income families learn about and access the Food Stamp Program. Community groups can help in many ways. For example, they can distribute informational materials, conduct prescreening for program eligibility, provide application assistance and forms, and help gather verification documents.

A core group of national antihunger advocacy groups and other organizations are part of a group called the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition. The coalition members also collaborate to promote the nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program through outreach to local antihunger projects.



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM TALKING POINTS AND MESSAGES

Following are suggested talking points regarding the Food Stamp Program. You are encouraged to localize this information with State or local Food Stamp Program data, or promote State-specific resources such as a toll-free food stamp information line or prescreening tool.

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger.

- ✦ Food stamp benefits provide much-needed temporary help with the grocery bill so that low-income people can put good, healthy food on the table.
- ✦ Nearly half of those who receive food stamp benefits are children.

The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition program that helps low-income families and individuals purchase nutritious, healthy food. It is the cornerstone of the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net.

- ✦ Low-income people get financial support to help with their grocery bills so they can buy fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods, dairy products, and other healthy foods. In addition, many Food Stamp Program participants are offered free nutrition education materials and classes to help them make good purchasing choices and stretch their food dollars.

The Food Stamp Program has made some fundamental changes in recent years that make it easier to:

- ✦ Find out about the program
 - * Individuals can call 1-800-221-5689 for a free information packet to learn more about the Food Stamp Program and how to apply. Information is available in English and Spanish.
 - * Individuals can go to a web site featuring a prescreening tool and, by answering a few simple questions, determine if they are eligible for food stamp benefits and how much they might receive. The web site address is www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov.
- ✦ Apply for benefits
 - * FNS and States are working to simplify the application process.

✦ Shop for healthy food

- * There are no more paper coupons. Now, benefits are delivered with an [electronic benefit transfer \(EBT\) card](#) that works like a debit card at the grocery store.

The Food Stamp Program is a win-win for low-income people, local retailers, and local communities.

- ✦ Each \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community.
- ✦ The average benefit per person is about \$94 a month (fiscal year 2006 data).
- ✦ Food Stamp benefits are funded with Federal dollars. When everyone who is eligible for the program receives benefits, State and local economies also benefit.
- ✦ Research shows that low-income households participating in the Food Stamp Program have access to more food energy, protein, and an array of essential vitamins and minerals in their home food supply compared to eligible nonparticipants.
- ✦ Since food stamp benefits help defray the costs of buying healthy foods, low-income people are less likely to have to make hard choices between eating right and paying for other essentials.

USDA and the antihunger community are working as partners to ensure that everyone who is eligible for the Food Stamp Program knows about it and is able to access benefits.

- ✦ Many low-income people are not aware of their [eligibility](#) and how to apply, particularly those who are working, seniors, or legal immigrants.
- ✦ To ensure that everyone who is eligible knows about the benefits of the program, USDA is conducting a national media campaign.



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM QUESTIONS & SUGGESTED ANSWERS FOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS AND SPOKESPERSONS

Why are Questions and Answers (Q&As) important? Q&As are anticipated questions and suggested answers that program administrators and outreach spokespeople can study to help get ready for media interviews or other public speaking. You might receive these questions from the media, the public, or others.

Here are some examples of Q&As about food stamp outreach:

Why are you encouraging people to enroll in the Food Stamp Program?

The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition assistance program that helps low-income people put healthy food on the table. The Food Stamp Program supplements the food budgets of low-income people who are having a tough time paying for food for themselves or their families. Children have important nutritional needs and they make up about half of those currently receiving food stamp benefits. We want everyone who is eligible to have the opportunity to apply for benefits so that they can have access to healthier diets. Our outreach efforts are specially targeted to people who are least likely to understand that they may be eligible: elderly persons, immigrants, and working poor.

Why are you encouraging the use of food stamp benefits when application numbers are increasing already?

Yes, enrollment numbers are increasing. However, there are still many people who need help. Currently, about 35 percent of the eligible households are NOT receiving food stamp benefits. This is usually because they do not think they qualify, or think there are people in greater need of the benefits. We want to reach out to those people, encourage them to get prescreened, and, if appropriate, apply for food stamp benefits so they can get help with their grocery bills. Food stamp benefits are not only good for low-income people; they also help the local economy.

Are the financial benefits worth the effort to enroll?

Food stamp benefits are not intended to be the only means of paying the grocery bill, but they do help low-income people purchase healthier food items, such as fruits and vegetables. Monthly benefits vary based on income and household size. On average, an eligible person receives around \$94 per month (fiscal year 2006 data). This additional support will help low-income households purchase nutritious foods for a healthy diet.

Can people purchase whatever they want with their food stamps?

Food stamp benefits are intended to supplement households' grocery budgets and help them purchase healthier foods. Households can use food stamp benefits for a wide range of food items. Participants are encouraged to use their food stamps wisely to maximize their nutrition impact and economic value. To that end, they are encouraged to buy nutrient-dense foods such as whole-grain bread and cereals; fruits and vegetables; lowfat meats, fish, and poultry and milk products. Other items that can be purchased with food stamp benefits are seeds and plants that produce food. Nonfood items cannot be bought with food stamp benefits.



I have heard that enrolling in the Food Stamp Program is difficult. What does it involve?

USDA and State and local agencies that administer the Food Stamp Program are working to improve the application process by simplifying forms, offering extended office hours, and, in some instances, allowing online applications. Anyone can check to see if they might qualify for benefits through an online prescreening process at www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov.

Anyone interested in finding out more about how to apply should call 1-800-221-5689 for information. [Localize this information if your State or community has a toll-free number.]

How long does it take to start receiving benefits?

If you are in special need because of very low income, you may receive benefits within 7 days, if eligible. However, for others, it may take up to 30 days to receive benefits. At the time of application, an eligibility worker will give applicants this type of information.

What measures are taken to prevent food stamp fraud?

USDA is committed to integrity in all of its nutrition assistance programs. USDA has taken several steps to make it easier to identify and punish those who misuse Food Stamp Program benefits. Retailers who violate program rules, recipients who try to obtain their benefits based on false information, or recipients who sell their benefits can be removed from the program, fined, and even jailed. Also, with the introduction of the electronic benefit card (EBT), which works much like a debit card at a grocery store, the USDA is better able to track and deter fraud.

Doesn't the EBT card make it easier for people to abuse the system?

No. The EBT card makes it more difficult for people to commit food stamp fraud. EBT eliminates paper food stamps and creates an electronic record for each transaction, making fraud easier to detect. Not only does the EBT card cut down on Food Stamp Program abuse, but it also reduces the stigma some people associate with receiving food stamp benefits.

Why are you advertising a free benefit for poor people?

The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition program that helps low-income people have better diets, and better eating can mean better health. There are many people who are eligible for food stamp benefits but are not participating in the program. The FSP is a win-win for local retailers and local communities. Each \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community. Average food stamp benefits are about \$94 a month per person (fiscal year 2006 data), translating to money spent in local grocery stores. Everyone wins when eligible people take advantage of benefits to which they are entitled.



COLLABORATING WITH THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM: NUTRITION EDUCATION PROVIDERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Many communities have a wealth of information available to help your organization promote the nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program (FSP). Focusing on nutrition can help your organization get the attention of individuals who might not be inclined to pick up food stamp informational materials. This gives your organization an opportunity to explain the FSP as a nutrition assistance program to potential applicants — as well as employers, community leaders, and others — who might still associate the FSP with welfare programs. Learn more about FSP nutrition education providers in your community and what role each organization can play to increase FSP participation.

What is the goal of Food Stamp Nutrition Education?

The goal of Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for the FSP will make healthy food choices within their limited budget and choose active lifestyles, as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the USDA Food Guidance System (MyPyramid) recommend.

Why should my organization consider collaborating with Food Stamp Nutrition Education providers?

Outreach and FSNE can work together to communicate messages about how the FSP can help needy families obtain healthy foods. The possibility of better nutrition can help generate interest in the FSP among potentially eligible persons as well as community workers serving that population. FSNE providers have conducted needs assessments to identify which nutrition messages to promote and strategies for communicating these messages to the FSP-eligible population. They also have access to nutrition education materials that are consistent with national nutrition initiatives. By working together, outreach and nutrition education can communicate accurate, unified, and reinforcing messages that have a more powerful reach.

FNS recently developed a series of nutrition education and promotion materials targeting mothers entitled Loving Your Family, Feeding their Future: Nutrition Education Through the Food Stamp Program. The nutrition education messages are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. These nutrition education messages address the needs of English and Spanish speaking mothers with limited literacy skills. This series of education materials includes an educator's handbook, four discussion sessions with accompanying participant handouts, participant guidebook, and an online educator's learning module with a flash video component. These materials were developed primarily for food stamp nutrition education participants, however, they can be used in other nutrition education settings with similar target audiences such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. Educators can access Loving Your Family... materials at <http://foodstamp.nal.usda.gov>.



WHERE CAN I GO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FOOD STAMP NUTRITION EDUCATION?

States often provide nutrition education to FSP participants through contracts with the Cooperative Extension System, State Nutrition Networks, public health departments, and other organizations.

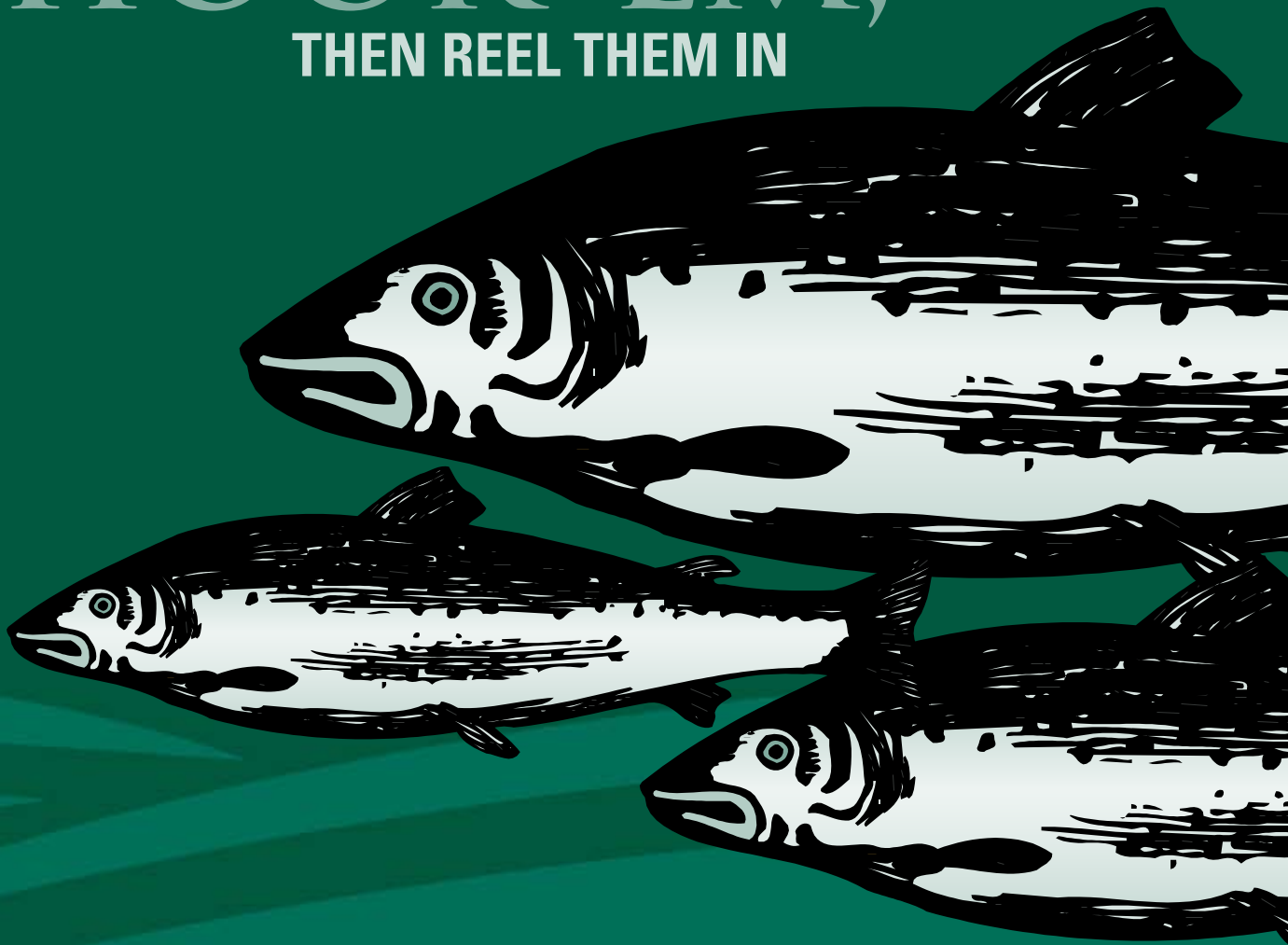
The Food Stamp Nutrition Connection, a project of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and the National Agricultural Library, maintains a list of State FSNE providers. You can access it online at www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/Stategates/index.html, request a print copy by phone at 301-504-5719, or e-mail FSNC@nal.usda.gov.

You can also contact your State or local food stamp offices for information on FSNE activities in your area.



2

HOOK 'EM, THEN REEL THEM IN



DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

How can an outreach partnership help me with my work?

Partners can help you by educating potential food stamp applicants about the [benefits](#) of their participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and preparing them for the application process. This can make your work to determine the eligibility of applicants more efficient.

Here is what you will find in this section:



KEYS TO:

Partnership
Development

- ➔ Ten steps for establishing a partnership;
- ➔ Useful template materials that can be tailored for local needs; and
- ➔ Examples of partnership materials.

What if I have questions about outreach and partnerships?

Go to the Food Stamp Program Web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>. There you can find free materials such as posters, brochures, and flyers to order, as well as general information about outreach, outreach strategies, and promising practices.

Learn from your colleagues by joining the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition, a nationwide network of advocacy groups and partner organizations that works to promote the health and nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program. Formed in 2003, this core group of national food banks, community and faith-based groups, and service organizations works together to end hunger and improve nutrition.

For more information about the Coalition, please visit the web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/about.htm>. You will also find a listing of national partners that may have a local chapter with which you can collaborate.

What are the steps for developing and maintaining a partnership?

You can establish a partnership by following 10 simple steps. These steps may also be helpful if you are approached by a community organization seeking a partnership with you.



10 STEPS TO DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A PARTNERSHIP

1 Find out your State and local policies

2 Assess your customer service

3 Select a target audience

4 Determine which partners will most effectively reach your target audience

5 Research and get prepared

6 Contact your prospective partner

7 Jointly establish your outreach plan

8 Confirm the partnership roles and responsibilities in writing

9 Stay in touch with your partner

10 Evaluate your partnership

STEP 1 | FIND OUT YOUR STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES

As a State or local Government agency, there are some important things you must do before you approach partners with a proposal to work together:

- Always let people in your chain of command know of your plans.
- Be sure you have their approval to move forward with your partnership plans before you begin.

Research your State or local policies

In general, keep the following in mind as you think about your [potential partnerships](#):

- Your State may have activities that are coordinated at the State level only.
- Your State may require approval before a local office can conduct certain types of activities.
- There may be paperwork to complete.
- Your State may already have contracts or grants with groups that could potentially be partners. Your activities must not interfere with the contract or grant.

Then make sure you understand the specific State and local policies and procedures on:

- Partnerships and the types of activities that partners can do
- Use of volunteers
- Posting of information on the Web sites of other organizations
- Working with media
- Working with businesses or retailers
- Provision of translation services
- Use of administrative funds to conduct outreach
- Contracting requirements



Does your State have an optional outreach plan?

Find out if your State has an optional plan for food stamp outreach. Such a plan may already involve grants or contracts to local organizations that you might consider as partners. Your potential partner may already have FSP funds to design, develop, and/or print materials or conduct outreach activities.

If your State doesn't already have a plan, you may want to explore this as a possible funding source for your partnership. If the partnership is funded through the optional State outreach plan, your State grant or contract rules, such as rules regarding sole source awards, competition, and monitoring, among other things, will apply.

STEP 2 | **ASSESS YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Make sure there are no customer service barriers when potential customers contact your office. Take a look around your office and imagine how your customers might view it. Assess your service procedures to see if any changes might be needed as you implement your new outreach project. Consider the following:

- Does your office offer extended hours of operation?
- Is there a child care area in the waiting room?
- How long is your application form? What languages is it in? Is it easily available? Is there a person available to help the applicant fill out the form?
- Do you have a 24-hour drop-off box for applications and verification documents to make it easy for applicants to return information after normal business hours? The drop-off box also saves time, as an applicant does not need to wait to see a receptionist or eligibility worker.

STEP 3 | **SELECT A TARGET AUDIENCE**

Next, figure out what populations you want to reach through your partnership. National FSP data shows that the most hard-to-reach and underserved populations are seniors (age 60 and older), immigrants, and the working poor. But the target audience for your community may be different. For example, your community may have a large number of homeless individuals or unemployed people. You can:

- Talk to others in your office about which groups in your community tend to be underserved.
- Work with your State office to review State- or community-specific information on underserved populations.



STEP 4 | DETERMINE WHICH PARTNER GROUPS WILL MOST EFFECTIVELY REACH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

To decide whom to choose as partners, brainstorm and make a list of organizations that your [target audience](#) trusts and uses. Seek advice from others:

USING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are enthusiastic and eager to help. If your plans call for the use of volunteers, be sure you discuss these issues with your partner as well:

- How will you train volunteers to let them know what they can or can't do? For example, they can schedule appointments and fill out application forms, but they cannot certify households for food stamp benefits.
- How will you educate volunteers about the FSP?
- How will you handle volunteer turnover?
- How will you thank your volunteers?

- Ask staff in your office which organizations they work with on a regular basis.
- Take advantage of any advisory groups or county boards that work with your local agency to find out more about how best to reach the target group.
- Ask existing partners for input about other groups that should be involved in community outreach.
- Ask customers during the intake process for the names of groups with whom they come into contact and how they learned about the Food Stamp Program.

See page **B|10** for a list of [potential partners](#).



STEP 5

RESEARCH AND GET PREPARED

Increase your chances of success by being prepared before you contact your prospective partner.

RESEARCH

Take some time to learn as much as you can about your prospective partner. Make sure you understand the role the organization plays in the community and whom the organization serves. Following are some ways you can do this:

- Ask others in your office what they know about the prospective partner.
- Ask if anyone in your office has the name of a contact.
- Study the organization’s web site.

GET PREPARED

Collect your ideas. Be prepared for questions your partner may ask. Be sure you can:

- Provide a brief overview of your organization.
- For community partners, promote the health and economic [benefits](#) of the Food Stamp Program. (See the “Introduction” section for a Food Stamp Program fact sheet.)
- Present the partnership as a “win-win” situation for all parties.
- Explain the role partners can play to assist potentially eligible people in accessing the Food Stamp Program. (See page **B|11** for a list of ideas.)
- Discuss the importance of the project and why a potential partner should work with you to help their customers learn about and apply for food stamp benefits.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Although local businesses have a genuine interest in helping out the needy in their community and will most likely have a formal community relations staff member, they also are driven by profit motivation and will have to think about their bottom line. If you plan to approach a local business or retailer about partnership, you may have to emphasize the economic arguments for participation expansion more than others. (See page **B|17**) Be sure you can tell retailers how food stamp participation helps their business thrive. Be sure you can tell employers how participation in the Food Stamp Program will help their employees.

See end of this section for a list of activities for outreach partnerships.



STEP 6 | CONTACT YOUR PROSPECTIVE PARTNER

As you approach [potential partners](#), remember that enthusiasm goes a long way. But if a potential partner says “no” to your ideas, do not get discouraged. Your ideas might not fit into their schedule right now. There will be other partnership opportunities. Try the next organization on your list.



CALL

First, call the potential partner to start the ball rolling and gauge his or her interest. Here are some tips for making this initial call:

- **Practice** the talking points in advance. Do this regardless of whether you are talking to an acquaintance or someone you don't know.
- **When speaking**, use a conversational tone.
- **Be respectful** of your contact's time; ask if it is a good time for a conversation.
- **Offer to schedule** an appointment to conduct a meeting in person.
- **Invite** him or her to your offices for a tour and a brief overview of the food stamp application process.



WRITE

If you can't reach your contact by phone, send an e-mail or letter. The following are some tips on composing your e-mail or letter:

- **Personalize and localize** the information as much as possible. Your partner will want to know why you selected his or her group and what role you will want it to play in the project. (See the [sample partner letter](#) on page **B|15** at the end of this section.)
- **Keep the letter short** and to the point.
- **Proofread** your letter before sending it out.
- **Promise to follow up.** Don't wait for a call. Post a reminder on your calendar and call back in a few days.



MEET

If you have scheduled a meeting with your partner, here are some helpful tips for a successful meeting:

- **Confirm the meeting** date, time, and equipment a day or two before the scheduled meeting.
- **Consider sending** your partner an agenda and some informational materials by e-mail or mail that he or she can review before the meeting.
- **Tailor your presentation** to your audience. Take along materials from this toolkit or your agency that are appropriate to your audience, and leave materials for the partner to review after the meeting.
- **Provide your partner with information** about the food stamp application process. If you are talking with a local food stamp office, discuss how your organization will submit the application forms. Clear procedures are needed to protect the date the application was filed.
- **Be clear about your role** in this project.
- **Be clear and direct** about how you would like your partner to be involved.
- **Be clear on funding.** If there is no funding available, be sure that is understood.
- **Bring your partnership ideas** to the table.
- **Listen to the ideas** your future partner has.
- **Look professional**, be on time, and be respectful of your partner's time.



STEP 7 | JOINTLY DETERMINE YOUR OUTREACH PLAN

Once you and your partner have agreed to work together, take some time to jointly establish a plan for your outreach. Discuss your goals and what strategies or activities you will use to reach those goals.

Examples of outreach goals:

- Educate people about the nutrition [benefits](#) of the Food Stamp Program.
- Increase the number of applicants who fill out and file an application form for food stamp benefits at locations other than the food stamp office.
- Increase the number of individuals prescreened for food stamp benefits.
- Increase the number of callers to your toll-free number.
- Develop a local web site that will contain community resources or other information.
- Increase the number of hits to your web site.
- Promote the web site location containing the food stamp application form or prescreening tool, if applicable.
- Distribute application forms at locations such as food banks.
- Promote the EBT card to possible participants as a confidential way to receive benefits.
- Promote extended hours.

You will also want to discuss the following issues with your new partner:

- How many people do you want to reach?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of each partner?
- How will funding be handled?
- How will you evaluate your work?
- How will problems be resolved?

STEP 8 | CONFIRM PARTNERSHIP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN WRITING

Confirm your partnership arrangements in writing by sending a [letter](#) or e-mail to your new partner. If the partnership is straightforward, this document can be simple. Just list the details of the partnership. You may want to include a summary of the roles and responsibilities of each partner. For an example, go to the end of this section.



STEP 9 | STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR PARTNER

Once your partnership is established and outreach is underway, keep your partner informed and involved.

Here are some suggestions to help maintain your partnership:

- Update your partner on activities. Be sure to call or meet periodically to check in on how things are going.
- Send periodic thank you notes to the partner and volunteers. Let them know how many new people are getting the [benefits](#) of the FSP as a result of their efforts.
- Offer to include your partner in promotional activities like a newsletter or an event.



KEYS TO:

Establishing
and Maintaining
a Strong
Partnership

- ➔ **Present** the partnership as a “win-win” situation for all parties.
- ➔ **Agree** on goals and objectives.
- ➔ **Develop** clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- ➔ **Practice** clear and frequent communications.
- ➔ **Show** appreciation through recognition.

STEP 10 | EVALUATE YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Although partnerships can be time-consuming, they can also be a valuable part of your work. It is important to track the value of these collaborations so that you can find out if you met your goals, and what did and didn't work. You can use either process measures, outcome measures, or both, depending on the nature of your partnership.

PARTNERSHIP PROCESS MEASURES

- Has the number of partnerships you have developed increased since you began your alliance-building program?
- When you established your partnerships, you began with a clear list of expectations. Are those expectations being met?
- Do staff who are working on the partnerships feel they are proceeding well? For example, if a partner is filling out application forms, are these forms filled out properly or must State or local staff redo them?
- Do your partners approach you with new and creative ideas for working together?
- Have your partners provided you with new information and expertise?



PARTNERSHIP OUTCOME MEASURES

- Have you seen an increase in calls to your local number?
- When clients call or come into your office, ask how they learned about the Food Stamp Program. If these individuals were a part of your project, are they better prepared (for instance, form filled out, verification documents in hand) for the certification interview?
- Maintain a referral tracking document. Assign a code (like color, label, number) for your partner(s) and place the code on applications that will be distributed by them. When those applications are submitted, you will be able to see where the applicant picked up the information and track the number of referrals from that particular relationship.
- Has your ability to reach the [target audience](#) improved? Have more people from the target audience called or come into your office as a result of a partnership?
- If you host an event, such as prescreening at a grocery store, keep track of the number of people in attendance and the number of applicants prescreened for food stamp benefits.
- If certification interviews are conducted, keep track of how many.
- If informational materials were distributed, keep track of what materials were used and how many were given out.
- Did your partners help generate media coverage that increased the awareness of food stamp [benefits](#)?

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Once you have been able to demonstrate success, do not forget to share it! By sharing your partnership successes, other organizations will clearly see the value and benefits of joining in the outreach effort. You can:

- Mention your current partners when you are at meetings and conferences.
- Write up your success and submit it on the Food Stamp Program's [Promising Outreach Practices](#) web page. (See the Promising Practices section of the toolkit for more information.)



POTENTIAL PARTNERS

OTHER STATE, COUNTY OR CITY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES	
(Tip: Do you have the same commissioner or director? If so, start with those groups.)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local health department Employment assistance offices, including one-stop career centers Schools Department of Motor Vehicles Property tax offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mayor or city or county officials Housing projects Corrections departments (for prisoners with imminent release) Local Social Security office Local military bases or installations Local or regional IRS offices
FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Churches Temples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mosques Synagogues
COMMUNITY SERVICE GROUPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food banks and pantries Community action agencies Homeless shelters and soup kitchens Family support centers (e.g., day care, domestic violence shelters, literacy, utility assistance programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal Aid Salvation Army Goodwill Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations
BUSINESS AND LABOR	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers Grocery stores Local unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transit providers Utility companies
MEDICAL COMMUNITY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doctors Hospitals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pharmacies Community Health Centers
SENIORS' GROUPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisted living facilities Area Agencies on Aging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AARP chapters Meals-on-Wheels program
IMMIGRANT GROUPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local consulates Clubes de Oriundos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immigrant service organizations (e.g., the Michoacan Federation, Lao American Community Service)
MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio TV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newspapers Internet



ACTIVITIES FOR POTENTIAL OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS

Community groups/agencies/other organizations can:

- Conduct food stamp eligibility prescreening.
- Provide application assistance. Distribute food stamp application forms and help potential clients fill out the forms. Explain to potential applicants what types of information and documentation the local food stamp office will need to complete the application process.
- Provide translation services, when appropriate.
- Include information about the nutrition and health benefits of the Food Stamp Program in newsletters or other local outreach materials.
- Post posters or flyers in lobbies, waiting areas, employee break areas, health clinic checkout areas, nutrition education rooms, etc.
- Post information on their web site and link to Step 1, the FNS eligibility prescreening tool.
- Provide food stamp information or giveaways at community events such as health or county fairs.
- Host a "nutrition/health fair" to promote food stamp benefits.

Retailers/grocers can:

- Play PSAs on in-store public address audio or video systems.
- Include flyers and brochures in mailings and weekly circulars.
- Include food stamp benefit information on store receipts and in grocery bags.
- Print FSP information on grocery or produce bags. Make it lively—a grocery bag image containing the national toll-free number is available from USDA. (Graphic is included on CD-ROM in this toolkit.) Advertise food stamp information on grocery carts.
- Design, produce, and post promotional materials about food stamp benefits in the store — posters, banners, floor graphics, recipe cards, etc. (Logos for graphic design are included on the CD-ROM in this toolkit.)
- Provide food stamp information in the checkout display area.
- Underwrite paid advertising on local media.
- Underwrite printing of outreach materials.
- Host prescreening or certification interviews in the store.

more >



ACTIVITIES FOR POTENTIAL OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS

Pharmacies can:

- Include FSP information on the patient information forms stapled to prescription drugs.
- Include contact information for the local food stamp office in circulars.
- Play PSAs on in-store public address audio or video systems.
- Advertise food stamp information on shopping carts.
- Post Food Stamp Program nutrition information on pharmacy Web sites.
- Sponsor health fairs where prescreening or certification interviews can take place.

Employers can:

- Include FSP information in new employee packets, newsletters, job training programs, etc.
- Put a notice about a local or national toll-free number on check stubs.
- Make periodic announcements about the FSP over the intercom system.
- Allow eligibility workers to prescreen or conduct food stamp certification interviews on-site.
- Post FSP information such as posters or flyers on bulletin boards or Web sites.

Transit companies can:

- Provide free advertising space on bus shelters, buses, and subways/light rail.
- Include flyers and brochures in mailings.

Utility companies can:

- Put food stamp benefits information in newsletters.
- Print information on utility bills.
- Enclose insert along with invoice.
- Allow organizations to give out informational materials or prescreen for food stamp benefits on site.



GET INVOLVED!

PARTNERS WITH A COMMON GOAL

Community and faith-based groups, retailers, and antihunger advocacy groups across the country have a common goal to reduce hunger and improve nutrition.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

By coming together in partnership, we can advance our efforts to inform individuals and families in our communities about the FSP, ensuring that everyone can eat right, even when money's tight.

RAISING AWARENESS

There are a number of ways you can help inform members of your community about the nutrition [benefits](#) of the Food Stamp Program.

WAYS TO INFORM MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY

- Order and hang free “Food Stamps Make America Stronger” posters or flyers on bulletin boards in offices, lobbies, or lunch/break rooms.
- Provide free Food Stamp Program [resources](#) including USDA’s free trifold brochures and bookmarks (available in English and Spanish) for waiting rooms, health fairs, libraries, and community centers.
- Insert free Food Stamp Program materials in grocery bags, informational packets, new employee materials, etc.
- Include the Food Stamp Program toll-free number or web site (www.fns.usda.gov/fsp) on promotional pieces such as posters, flyers, milk or egg cartons, paper or plastic bags, store receipts, and in-store displays.
- Include information about Step 1, the FSP’s online prescreening tool, in promotional pieces or make arrangements with employers or senior groups to allow individuals to use the prescreening tool to learn their possible [eligibility](#) for food stamp benefits.
- Publish an article about the nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program in your employee or group newsletters and magazines.
- Broadcast Food Stamp Program public service announcements (PSAs) at your store or company or use your contacts to get donated time at radio stations. PSAs can be downloaded from www.fns.usda.gov/cga/radio.htm.
- Add a link to www.usda.gov/fsp from your web page.
- Host a special food stamp prescreening event, cooking demonstration, or information fair.
- Volunteer at an activity to raise awareness about the Food Stamp Program (options could include helping at a food pantry or food bank, soup kitchen, or prescreening event).
- Subscribe to the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition listserv and learn about other outreach efforts taking place across the country. To join, send an e-mail to fsoc@fns.usda.gov.



PARTNER LETTER TEMPLATE

[DATE]

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP CODE]

Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger. On behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME], I am writing to invite you to lend your support to [STATE/CITY/TOWN'S] food stamp outreach effort by *[Describe the request — an activity you would like the organization to participate in, such as: hosting a health fair or prescreening event; volunteering; distributing informational flyers; promoting events; etc.].*

The goal of this outreach effort is to ensure that everyone who is eligible for the Food Stamp Program knows about the program and is able to access benefits.

[provide local information on what your organization is doing, who you plan to target in your campaign, and the need in your community (number of potentially eligible individuals that are not being served for this type of effort.)]

We hope you will join us in supporting our outreach efforts; we would be honored to work with you. With your support, we are confident that we can reach more of [CITY/STATE'S] individuals and families not yet enrolled in the Food Stamp Program. By participating, *[List benefits to organization such as: reinforces position as community leader; provides opportunity for positive media exposure; offers community service opportunities; etc.].*

I will contact you in the next few days to further discuss the vital role you can play in helping our community. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at [PHONE NUMBER] should you have any questions. I have also enclosed additional information on food stamp benefits for your review.

Again, we hope you can join us in supporting this important effort, and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

Enclosures

How can I initiate a partnership? If a relationship is not currently in place, a good way to initiate a partnership is by sending a letter to a community relations, marketing, or communications contact. Your letter should outline your outreach effort, provide background information on your organization and the Food Stamp Program, and describe the nature of your partnership request. Following is a template letter that you can use.

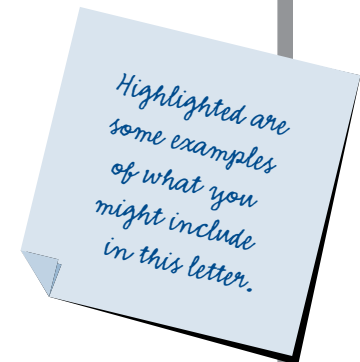
**FIND THIS
TEMPLATE
on the
accompanying
disc!**



PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT LETTER TEMPLATE

[DATE]

[NAME]
 [TITLE]
 [BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION]
 [ADDRESS]
 [CITY], [STATE] [ZIP CODE]



Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:

Thank you so much for agreeing to partner with [NAME OF YOUR ORGANIZATION] to help us reach those low-income individuals and families in our community who can benefit from the Food Stamp Program. Our partnership is part of a larger national effort to ensure that everyone who is eligible for food stamp benefits receives them.

Below is an outline of the partnership specifics we discussed:

In-Kind Donations

- Financial contribution for production of materials such as pamphlets, bus/subway ads, bus/subway shelter ads, pot holders, recipe cards, etc.
- In-store space to conduct nutrition events, prescreenings, etc.
- Placement of PSA or donated print advertisement space, etc.
- Personnel support to help fill out food stamp application forms, obtain verification documents, etc.

Promotional Opportunities

- Appearance of company name in food stamp media materials.

Visibility–Advertising, Media and Event Signage

- Your company’s logo on food stamp signage and in outreach materials.
- Opportunity for a company representative to attend/participate at event(s).

We’re so glad you see the value of partnering on such an important outreach effort. Please feel free to call me at [PHONE NUMBER] with any questions. Thank you once again.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
 [TITLE]

Within your community, there may be a host of [potential partners](#) interested in joining your effort to boost Food Stamp Program enrollment and inform people of the nutrition [benefits](#) of the program. Retailers, businesses, community-based organizations, and government entities can all play a vital role in food stamp outreach.

**FIND THIS
 TEMPLATE
 on the
 accompanying
 disc!**



10 IDEAS FOR RETAILER FOOD STAMP PROGRAM OUTREACH

Help your customers learn about the nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program. Food stamp benefits bring Federal funds into your community that can increase sales at your store. With food stamps, your low-income customers can purchase more healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods, and dairy products. As a retailer, you can:

1. DISPLAY food stamp posters, flyers, magnets, and other materials. Go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fjsp/outreach/default.htm> for free USDA materials and promotional items.

2. INVITE local groups such as food banks, antihunger groups, or other community or faith-based groups to staff an information table to give out food stamp information or prescreen customers for eligibility.

3. PUT FOOD stamp information, such as national or local food stamp toll-free numbers, on grocery bags and in weekly circulars and bulletins.

4. PUBLISH food stamp materials in languages spoken in your community.

5. PRINT food stamp promotional messages on store receipts.

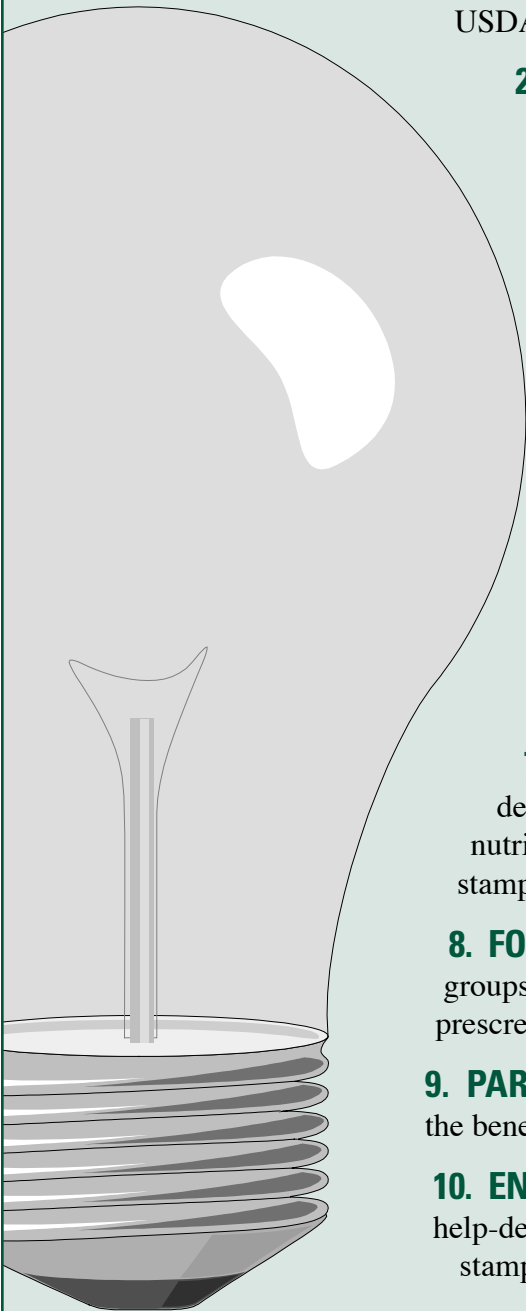
6. BROADCAST Food Stamp Program public service announcements in the store.

7. HOST nutritious food tastings or cooking demonstrations. Give out recipe cards that contain nutrition information and the national or local food stamp toll-free number.

8. FORM partnerships with local community and advocacy groups. Host a “health fair” to conduct food stamp eligibility prescreenings. Invite local media to the event.

9. PARTNER with EBT processors to educate cashiers about the benefits of the Food Stamp Program.

10. ENCOURAGE EBT processors to add recorded messages to help-desk numbers promoting the nutrition benefits of food stamps and encouraging food stamp clients to “tell a friend.”



FOOD STAMPS MAKE AMERICA STRONGER: THE BENEFITS OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP)

The Program Helps Low-Income Families:



- **Stretch food dollars.** Those receiving food stamp benefits spend more money on food than other low-income households.
- **Fight obesity through education.** Nutrition educators teach food stamp participants the importance of a quality diet, how to prepare healthy foods, and how to make healthy choices.
- **Put food on the table for their children.** Food stamp benefits are an investment in our future. Nearly 50 percent of participants are children.
- **Keep elderly family members independent.** For the elderly, participation can help improve nutritional status and well-being and increase independence. Nine percent of food stamp recipients are age 60 or older.
- **Make the transition to self-sufficiency.** The FSP helps participants become financially stable and provides needed support as they transition to self-sufficiency. Half of all new participants will leave the program within nine months.

The Program Helps States and Local Communities:



- **Support local food retailers.** The average monthly food stamp benefit is approximately \$214, which is spent in local grocery stores.
- **Generate economic activity.** Every \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates a total of \$9.20 in community spending.
- **Support farms.** On average, \$1 billion of retail food demand by food stamp recipients generates 3,300 farm jobs.
- **Leverage Federal funds.** Food stamp benefits are Federal funds. By increasing the number of people in the FSP, communities can bring Federal money into their States and communities.

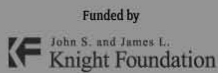
The Program Helps Businesses and Workers:



- **Achieve optimal performance.** Employees whose food needs are met at home may have higher productivity and take fewer sick days for themselves and their children.
- **Attain self-sufficiency.** Food stamp benefits supplement the food budgets of low-income workers so they can stay independent and work toward self-sufficiency.



SAMPLE FLYER: GREATER MIAMI PROSPERITY CAMPAIGN FRONT



JOIN THE GREATER MIAMI PROSPERITY CAMPAIGN. HELP OUR COMMUNITY PROSPER.

The Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign can bring millions of dollars into the local economy and add substantial income to thousands of entry-level working families in Miami Dade County. The Campaign consists of three "Economic Benefits Programs", with more to be added.

- **The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),**
- **Florida KidCare**
- **Food Stamps**

Increase your employee's income at no cost to you. All you have to do is let your employees know about these programs. This is a **WIN for you as an employer**, because you can help your employees put more money in their pockets without any cost to you.

It is a **WIN for your EMPLOYEES**, because they can substantially increase their income. And it is a **WIN for our COMMUNITY**, because eligible low-income workers can bring hundreds of millions of federal dollars into Miami-Dade County's Economy.

The Human Services Coalition of Dade County has been awarded grants by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the US Department of Agriculture, State of Florida Department of Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to coordinate the Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign in partnership with the Mayors of Miami and Miami-Dade County; the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Miami Dade and The South Florida Workforce. The Internal Revenue Service, The Federal Reserve and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are also members of the task force that is coordinating the campaign.



SAMPLE FLYER: GREATER MIAMI PROSPERITY CAMPAIGN BACK

MIAMI-DADE MAYOR
ALEX PENELAS

"We want to make sure that low- and moderate-income taxpayers apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit and get all the end-of-the-year tax deductions and benefits they are entitled to. Greater tax returns will not only help those families but will also have a positive multiplier effect on the economy of Miami-Dade County."

MIAMI MAYOR
MANNY DIAZ

"This program will put a substantial amount of money into the hands of the people who need and deserve it the most: the people who work every day at modest wages to support their families. That's money that goes to buy groceries, clothing for their children, or to pay rent."

PETER W. ROULHAC,
CHAIR ELECT OF THE GREATER
MIAMI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT, WACHOVIA
NATIONAL BANK, N.A.

"We want everybody in our community who is entitled to the Earned Income Tax Credit to have it in their bank account where it belongs, not left on the table in Washington, D.C. The EITC is in the best interest of every business in the county, because the money will be recycled here when people use it to build a better future – by paying college tuition, buying a car to get to work or by putting a down payment on a home."

DANIELLA LEVINE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HUMAN SERVICES COALITION

"Miami-Dade County has an unacceptably high rate of poverty. In the 2000 Census, Miami was identified as the poorest large city in the United States. This is not a #1 position that any of us wants to have. Hard working people are finding it difficult to raise their families and meet basic needs. This is bad for families, bad for business and bad for our community."

The goal of the campaign is to build community prosperity and make a difference in the lives of low-income workers. The business community is taking the lead by spreading the word:

Florida KidCare provides free or low-cost health insurance for children living in low-income families. Families enroll by filling out a one-page application and mailing it to Tallahassee.

Federal Earned Income Tax Credit a refundable tax credit of up to \$4,140 per year for a family earning up to \$33,178. Families claim the EITC on their federal income tax return or through their payroll.

Food Stamps allows debit cards to be used for food purchases that supplement the earnings of entry-level workers.

The Human Services Coalition can help employees apply for each program and calculate the amount of benefits for which they qualify.

Employers who want to assist their employees in obtaining Economic Benefits Programs may contact us at (305) 576- 5001:

Joe Grimes (EITC) ext. 33
Christine Irwin (Florida KidCare) ext. 16
Loren Daniel (Food Stamps) ext. 30

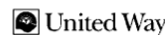
Individuals interested in getting involved with the Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign with volunteer time or sponsorship assistance may contact us. The campaign needs and welcomes assistance in this effort to bring prosperity to the entire community.

WIN, WIN, WIN!



The Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign is a project of the Human Services Coalition, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

In partnership with:



Flyers produced thanks to Metro Miami Action Plan



SAMPLE MAILER INSERTS: PROJECT BREAD
ENGLISH AND SPANISH

Know someone struggling to put food on the table?

For information about food stamps and other free and low-cost food resources, call:

Monday - Friday
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Project Bread 
FoodSource Hotline
1-800-645-8333

The FoodSource Hotline is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

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Para español vea el reverso.

Para más información sobre cupones de alimentos y otros recursos alimenticios tanto gratuitos como de bajo costo llame al

De lunes a viernes
Desde las 8 a.m. a las 5 p.m.

Project Bread 
FoodSource Hotline
1-800-645-8333

La línea directa y gratuita FoodSource es financiada por el Departamento de Asistencia Transitoria de Massachusetts

Sp/05



CULTURAL COMPETENCY:
A DASH
OF DIVERSITY, A MEDLEY OF OUTREACH IDEAS



CULTURAL COMPETENCY A DASH OF DIVERSITY, A MEDLEY OF OUTREACH IDEAS

Section I. The Right Thing: The Importance of Effective Food Stamp Outreach Across Cultures

What Is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence refers to how well people understand and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. 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.

While there are many definitions of cultural competence, we have chosen to use the following as the foundation for this section of the Outreach Toolkit:

Cultural Competence

is the capacity of an individual or an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively and to convey information in a manner that is easily understood by and tailored for diverse audiences.

What Does This Section Hope To Accomplish?

This section of the toolkit provides suggestions and practical tips, planning tools, and real-life examples of how to make Food Stamp Program (FSP) outreach more culturally competent. It is not, however, intended to provide specific strategies and tactics for reaching individuals of distinct races, ethnicities, cultures, or other demographic groups.

Why Should Outreach Workers Care About Being Culturally Competent?

By using language and materials that are tailored for specific target groups, outreach workers improve communication with clients for better customer service. Ultimately, their jobs are easier, more productive, and more fulfilling. Culturally competent communication allows outreach workers to:

- Spend more time providing services and less time trying to clarify confusing or misunderstood information.
- Decrease the level of stress and anxiety for themselves and clients.
- Reduce the likelihood of errors on applications and other important paperwork.
- Increase the level of trust with clients and improve overall satisfaction with the FSP.



Why Is Cultural Competence Important for FSP Outreach?

The need to reach diverse audiences is greater now than ever before. The U.S. population is changing, and communities today are more racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically different. By the year 2030, the Census Bureau reports that 40 percent of the U.S. population will describe themselves as members of racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic and White.

A recent report on participation rates by various demographic characteristics shows that more than half of all individuals receiving food stamps are non-White:

- More than 33 percent or one-third of participants are Black or African-American.
- Nineteen percent are Hispanic.
- Another 4 percent belong to other races or ethnic groups.

Still, not everyone who is eligible for food stamps takes part in the program. Participation among target populations continues to be low. This is especially true among Hispanics and the elderly:

- About 51 percent of the eligible Hispanic population participate in the FSP.
- Only 30 percent of the elderly who are eligible for the FSP actually participate.

What Are the Implications of Not Being Culturally Competent?

Given the current and projected demographic changes in the United States, outreach providers must take the Nation's increasingly diverse and complex backgrounds into account when conducting food stamp outreach in order to be effective in reaching as many eligible people as possible.

Outreach workers who are not culturally competent are less effective or successful when conducting outreach due to potential miscommunications and misunderstandings. A small amount of time invested up front in learning to communicate effectively with diverse groups, especially those groups that the office serves frequently, will pay off with more efficient time management, better customer relations, and improved participation in the FSP.

The FSP is a nutrition assistance program that enables families to supplement their food budget so that they can buy more healthful food, such as vegetables and fruits. A healthy diet and physical exercise are important. An increasing number of studies and reports, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2010 (www.healthypeople.gov), cite poor nutrition as a leading contributor to diseases that disproportionately affect minorities and low-income populations. Consider these other facts:

- Obesity among low-income Americans is linked to having limited or uncertain access to nutritious and safe foods.
- People living in rural areas are more likely to be older, poorer, and less healthy than people living in urban areas.
- Obesity continues to be higher for African-American and Mexican-American women than for non-Hispanic and White women.
- The prevalence of high blood pressure in African-Americans is among the highest in the world.



Myths About the Food Stamp Program

Myth: “I work every day. Food stamps are for people who are unemployed or who can’t work.”

Fact: Many food stamp users are employed full-time yet need extra help to afford more nutritious foods.

Myth: “I can’t buy the types of food my family eats with food stamps.”

Fact: Most grocery store chains and even some small specialty or “corner” stores and farmers markets accept food stamps. What’s most important is that there are very few foods that you cannot purchase with food stamps; examples of items that may not be purchased are alcohol, pet food, and hot, prepared foods.

Myth: “I refuse to be on welfare. Only welfare recipients receive food stamps.”

Fact: The FSP is a nutrition assistance program, which is not the same as welfare. Participants do not have to receive welfare to be eligible for food stamps.

Section II. Getting To Know Your Community: How To Conduct a Needs Assessment

What Is a Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is the process of gathering and examining information to get a clearer and more accurate picture of an issue, challenge, or environment. In this case, the needs assessment will help you better understand the diverse community in which you want to conduct food stamp outreach. This information is gathered through a series of carefully crafted questions that will likely be asked of individuals inside and outside of your organization so that you can get a number of different opinions. The results can be presented as a formal report or an informal document—the key is to summarize the findings accurately.

Reaching Diverse Audiences: You Know You Are Being Effective When...

- Your staff reflects your client population, or target client population, in racial and cultural makeup and language.
- Your staff is aware of and demonstrates the behaviors, attitudes, and skills that enable them to work well across cultures.
- You work with organizations that are directly involved with the diverse communities you need to reach.
- You have relationships with ethnic or minority media in your community.
- Your outreach includes varied approaches to sharing information with individuals with disabilities.
- You use translation and interpretive services to meet the language needs of your clients.
- Print materials are easy to read and meet the sixth grade literacy level. Print materials include picture and symbol format, as needed.
- Materials are available in different formats, such as video and audiotape and enlarged print.



Why Is a Needs Assessment an Important Part of Food Stamp Program Community Outreach?

A needs assessment will help you better understand the challenges facing underserved communities and the barriers that potential clients face in applying for food stamps. It allows for a more in-depth and unbiased look at the problem from a wide range of people. This information can provide new insights and answer questions you may have, such as:

- What do we know about the local needs for food stamp outreach?
- Are we reaching out to the neediest groups?
- Which organizations in our community are conducting food stamp outreach, what services do they provide, and how are these services funded?
- Do various groups understand who is eligible for food stamps?
- Which media are most credible among our target populations?
- How do we establish and maintain trust?
- How can we strengthen the effectiveness of current community outreach activities?
- Do our materials appeal to multicultural audiences?
- Are our materials in the appropriate languages? At the sixth grade reading level?
- Are we maximizing relationships with influential people and organizations to reach diverse communities?

Having the facts in hand enables you to set specific goals, develop tailored plans of action, and determine the best use of limited resources. Once you know and understand your audience, it is easier to develop strategies to reach them.

Reasons To Conduct a Needs Assessment

- To learn how other organizations, such as community-based groups or your local food stamp office, might support your outreach efforts.
- To get tried-and-true suggestions that worked with other programs.
- To get insight into what your target audience really thinks and believes about food stamps.
- To help set goals and measure success.
- To understand basic statistical and other information about the needs in your community and the gaps between services and needs in order to identify appropriate strategies to address them.



*How Do I Get Started?***STEP 1****CONFIRM/IDENTIFY THE COMMUNITY FOR WHICH YOU WANT TO CONDUCT THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT.**

Through your day-to-day activities, you may have a clear understanding of the population in your community.

If you are new to your position and are not sure which groups to reach, there are many sources that can help you create profiles of key populations in your area to identify which group(s) you want to conduct the needs assessment on, starting with your State FSP agency and your city's web site.

How To Identify the Community You Want To Reach

Start with your State FSP agency. They may have population profiles of your community. You can find your State FSP agency at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact_info/state-contacts.htm.

Other sources include:

- The Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>)
- The U.S. Department of Labor (<http://www.dol.gov>)

When using demographic information or statistics, be mindful that numbers change. Check yearly or frequently for updates.

- Visit your city's web site. Here, you'll likely find demographic information on the racial and ethnic groups in your community and average household incomes. If it's not readily available on the web site, make a few quick phone calls to city agencies requesting the data you want.
- Contact your city's Office on Aging. The Office on Aging should be able to help identify the number of low-income seniors in your community, along with ZIP Code data on where they might reside.
- Contact the local department of education to request schools in your community where large numbers of students receive free or reduced-price lunches. In many cases, they can also provide a profile of the students—their racial/ethnic backgrounds and languages that are spoken.
- Contact the local health department and department of social services. Because both of these agencies have specific programs for low-income residents, they can also provide information

Could This Happen at Your Organization?

Real life Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions.

Ms. G. speaks very little English. She knows she could qualify for social services, such as food stamps and WIC, but finds it very difficult to communicate over the telephone, and is frustrated when she shows up in person because she usually must wait until the only bilingual person in the office is free to assist her. Thus, Ms. G. has to ask a friend or one of her older children to make the call or go with her to the office.

A fixed appointment with a bilingual person is one way to help someone like Ms. G. This way she would avoid long waits, which are often difficult when coordinating schedules with others. The office could also arrange to have its bilingual staff person call Ms. G at home at a scheduled time. This is an opportunity to review the application and identify documents Ms. G would need to provide.



on underserved groups in your community—where they reside and programs are already in place to serve them.

- Contact your local United Way, whose mission is to help identify community needs and provide funding to support these efforts. The United Way may be willing to share research and other data that it has collected from and about local groups.
- Contact professors or research institutes in local colleges and universities that may be collecting data or conducting research with your target population.

After compiling this information, a careful review should help you confirm the community/communities you want to assess and reach out to.

STEP 2 | REVIEW WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW.

After choosing the population you want to reach, you may find that you already know something about how to reach them with information about the FSP. In fact, you may be aware of many possible solutions. But it's important to go through the process. Ask yourself:

- What other organizations have similar goals and might be willing to work with us to address this need? Don't forget to include your local food stamp office.
- What resources (staff, in-language support, materials) do we have but may not be fully using?
- Has any research been conducted that highlights effective ways of reaching the target population within the community? Can we rely on other work to give us insight and answers?

STEP 3 | DRAFT THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO ASK.

Asking the right questions is the key to getting the information for your needs assessment. Accurate information helps you develop the most effective and culturally competent outreach plan. This is an important step, so take your time to think broadly about the type of information you need. You may want to invite other groups to join you, including members of the communities you wish to target and representatives from culturally specific organizations, to help draft or to review your list of questions. Ask if someone has already done a needs assessment—you may want to build upon their model. While your questions may be tailored to meet local needs, the following list of questions can act as a guide.

You may wish to have more than one person in your organization complete the questions to get different opinions and a range of responses.



Questions To Get the Ball Rolling on a Needs Assessment

1. Which group(s) are you most interested in reaching and why?

2. How many food stamp offices are in your area? Where are they located, and does the location pose a potential barrier (e.g., is it accessible by public transportation)?

3. Are there any linguistic or cultural barriers that prevent individuals from participating in the FSP? What community resources are available to help minimize these barriers?

4. What is happening with your outreach efforts vs. what you would like to happen?

5. What groups are already successfully reaching the population you want to access?

6. Which of their initiatives have been particularly effective and why?



7. Where does the majority of the target population live? Are they clustered in one area or spread out?

8. What local organizations and individuals have the greatest influence with the population?

9. Do the grocers/farmers markets they patronize accept food stamps? Are they served by public transportation?

10. Is public transportation easily accessible in their community? Do public transportation routes reach the local food stamp office and grocery stores? If no, how do people access the FSP and grocery stores?

11. Are there existing community events and activities that attract the people you're interested in reaching? Is there a Diabetes Support Group meeting nearby? Is there an annual Cinco de Mayo celebration coming up? What events or activities are popular with your target group?

12. What media outlets does this group prefer?

13. Is the "word on the street" about food stamps positive or negative? What are the positives and negatives?



14. What types of partnerships would help achieve the outreach objectives?
-
-
-
15. Would these partners be able and willing to provide volunteer outreach workers? If yes, what services will the volunteers provide; what type of training will they need; and how often will be they available?
-
-
-
16. What outreach activities might motivate your audiences to seek more information?
-
-
-
17. How can media and community channels be used most effectively?
-
-
-
18. Are there any other barriers that prevent potentially eligible individuals of this community from enrolling in the FSP? What are the barriers? What can your organization do to help eliminate the barriers?
-
-
-

STEP 4 | IDENTIFY WHOM YOU ARE GOING TO TALK TO.

Once you've created a profile of the group(s) you intend to target and gathered the necessary background information, it's time to speak directly to individuals in the "field." It's these "primary sources" that will help you fine-tune your outreach strategies, avoid potential pitfalls and, hopefully, provide ongoing support. While there are a wide range of people who can participate in the needs

Could This Happen at Your Organization?

Real life Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions.

Mr. M. is an independent, 23-year-old young man with a hearing impairment who uses sign language. He also participates in the Food Stamp Program. He is able to communicate effectively in most day-to-day situations, but one of his parents or an interpreter usually goes with him on appointments to the doctor, or the Medicaid or Food Stamp Program office, because staff cannot communicate with him. Recently, he had an appointment at the Food Stamp Program office, but work emergencies prohibited either parent from accompanying him. To make matters worse, it was too late to get an interpreter. Mr. M arrived at the office during an extremely busy time—several clients were already waiting for assistance. Realizing that an interpreter was not available and believing that helping Mr. M would be a lengthy process, the staff immediately brushed him off and asked him to come back later when an interpreter was available.

Unfortunately, no one took the time to ask if Mr. M was comfortable communicating in writing, which he was. Sometimes people assume that individuals with physical disabilities are also developmentally delayed or have limited literacy skills. In addition, if an outreach worker had taken the time to ask if there was someone they could call to help interpret, Mr. T would not have had to make another trip. The night before, he had role-played with his parents on how best to respond to any communication problems. Therefore, a quick telephone call to either parent would have enabled Mr. T to get the information he needed.



assessment, you will want to identify those who will provide the most useful information. Once you've identified the people you want to talk to, revisit the questions to make sure they are appropriate for each group. You may need to reword some questions or eliminate one or two for a specific group.

Examples of influential people:

- Religious leaders
- Representatives of faith-based and community-based organizations
- Business leaders
- Doctors, nurses, and nutrition educators
- State or County food stamp workers
- City, County, State, or Federal workers
- Elected officials at the State and community level
- Schools, teachers, and coaches
- Leaders of age- or race-based or culturally specific organizations that advocate for those groups
- Current food stamp participants
- Opinion/trusted leaders in the identified communities such as promotoras
- People in the community you want to reach, including potentially eligible nonparticipants

STEP 5 | DECIDE HOW YOU WILL COLLECT INFORMATION.

Some common and effective methods for gathering information include:

- **One-on-one interviews** with influential community members. These are useful if you are working with a small budget and are already knowledgeable in the area.
- **Written questionnaires** conducted with influential community members and members of the community at large. While it might be a little more time-consuming to collect and tabulate the data, there are online tools, such as www.surveymonkey.com, that make drafting a well-crafted research instrument easy for the beginner and experienced researcher alike. Graduate students in survey research courses may be willing to help you design, collect, and/or analyze information. Establish relationships with professors in local colleges and universities who could help you with this project.



Additional Techniques for a More Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Your organization's resources will likely dictate the complexity of your needs assessment. With additional staffing and budget, focus groups and/or literature reviews can help fill in remaining information gaps. If you have the budget but not the time, market research firms can help you; www.greenbook.org provides an extensive listing of market research firms.

- *Focus Groups.* These are sessions held with small groups of the target audience. A facilitator, who speaks the same language as the participants, will ask specific questions and the responses will be recorded for later analysis. However, getting individuals to participate in a focus group can take time and may require some sort of incentive for participation, such as meals, transportation costs, or childcare expenses. Your partners can play an important role in helping you stay within your budget by locating facilitators and focus group participants. Focus groups with current participants and eligible nonparticipants can help you get a sense of what community members know and feel about the FSP, as well as resources, barriers, and possible solutions. With current FSP participants, you can explore their motivations for enrolling and where they received information about the program. In contrast, potential participants may be able to share what they've heard about food stamps, any concerns they have, and outreach methods that might be effective.
- *Literature Review.* Review existing research about the population of interest and their behaviors, habits, or preferences as they relate to nutrition and/or nutrition programs. The reference desk at your public library may conduct a search for you—free or for very little cost. Of course, many of the documents you're looking for may be found online. Another idea is to seek volunteers at your local university. Often graduate students are looking for research projects to enhance their coursework or gain real-world experience. Another good starting point is the bibliography at the end of this section.

Regardless of the methods you use, the most important part is to listen and respect the insights of people who have access to and understand the populations you want to reach. In the end, your needs assessment will not only ring with a richness that only a diverse, multifaceted group can provide, but will also provide a blueprint for enhancing culturally competent food stamp outreach.

Free or Low-Cost Sources of Information

- Local food stamp office or State food stamp agency
- Local or college library
- Local Census Bureau or Census Bureau web site (www.census.gov)
- City/County/State health department web sites and community clinics



Tips for Maintaining Relationships With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Partners

- Share information and resources that could support one another's efforts.
- Recognize and respect cultural differences in expressing opinions and in the decisionmaking process.
- Be flexible. Meeting times and locations may need to support childcare arrangements and/or attendance by family members or children.
- Rotate meetings to visit groups located in ethnic and rural communities.
- Be sensitive to the fact that the level of formality associated with meetings, meeting times, conference calls, or other group endeavors may reflect differences in racial, ethnic, or cultural habits, customs, and traditions.
- If hosting meetings, be prepared to provide interpretation and translation services for participants with limited English proficiency or who need accommodations due to disability.
- If chairing a committee, consider including a food stamp participant representing each of the diverse communities you want to reach.

- Local United Way or other community funding sources
 - Professors in local colleges and universities who conduct research with your target population
 - Race-, ethnic-, and/or culturally specific business associations
 - Race-, ethnic-, culture-, disability-, and hunger-related advocacy groups
- ▶ The Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Research, Nutrition, and Analysis (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/research.htm>)



Section III. The Right Messengers: Breaking Down Barriers With Community Partners

How Can Community Partners Help Us Reach Diverse Audiences?

One of the key elements of reaching out to diverse audiences about the benefits of the FSP is working with your community partners. Outreach providers who reach diverse groups must extend their reach beyond the walls of their own organizations to other programs with similar missions and services. Community partners can offer substantive and long-lasting benefits to your organization and to the health of the community. They can:

- Provide cultural perspectives.
- Bring credibility to your efforts.
- Bring expertise in working with the groups you want to target. For instance, they may have knowledge of health and nutrition beliefs and practices, and preferred sources of information and distribution channels.
- Offer help with providing translation and interpretive services or allowing your organization to conduct FSP prescreening at their offices.
- Bring community resources to support your efforts; for example, access to media, community opinion leaders, or financial and/or in-kind support for costly services such as translation and interpretive assistance.
- Discuss new ways of doing business.
- Assist in efforts to select focus group participants or “pretest” materials (see Section IV, The Right Materials for Diverse Audiences).

Lastly, some community partners can become ambassadors for your organization within the target communities. Those partners who will be most effective at conveying your program messages will be ones who are already trusted messengers within those communities.

Thinking of Forming a Community Coalition?

Where To Look for Members



Could This Happen at Your Organization?

Real life Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions.

Ms. B. takes great pride in her appearance and frequently receives compliments on her choice of clothing and jewelry. On this day, Ms. B walks into the Food Stamp Office to apply for benefits. She sits down with a caseworker who immediately compliments Ms. B on her outfit. The caseworker goes on to remark how she can't believe someone so well-dressed would need food stamps. Although Ms. B finished her appointment, she left feeling insulted. She could not believe that anyone, especially a caseworker, would stereotype the way food stamp recipients dress. The next day, Ms. B. called the county grievance office to lodge a complaint.

There's an old adage that's well known but not practiced nearly enough: "Don't judge a book by its cover." Always avoid making assumptions or snap judgments about people based on outward appearance, or even a few moments of conversation. The USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs, including FSP outreach activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or disability. In this scenario, the caseworker should have refrained from making remarks related to Ms. B's outfit or outward appearance. In Ms. B's case, this was not only a wrong assumption, but one based on stereotypes about race and income. Instead, the case worker should have followed the federally mandated guidelines for outreach as outlined by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

How Do I Identify Community Partners?

STEP 1 | ASSESS THE GAPS IN YOUR PROGRAM.

Are you in regular contact with anyone who works with or has ties to the communities you need to reach? If not, then you'll want to look specifically for partners who are linked to those communities.

STEP 2 | ASK YOUR COLLEAGUES.

Some names of community partners may surface through the needs assessment process. In addition, coworkers, food stamp workers, advisory groups, board members, or other professional colleagues, particularly ones who work with the communities you want to target or are focused on access to health and nutrition information, are good sources for information about possible partners.

STEP 3 | DON'T FORGET YOUR CLIENTS.

Your food stamp clients can be the best source for identifying good community partners. Informally poll several clients about whom they trust for information about issues that matter in the community and, more specifically, about issues such as health and nutrition.

STEP 4 | BROADEN YOUR THINKING.

You'll want to make sure that you are not limiting your potential partnership pool to those organizations or individuals you know or with whom your organization has had a previous relationship. Other reliable sources to check for suitable partners include:

- Internet, including news search engines to see what organizations are quoted in the media
- Nonprofit or charity directories (available at your local library)
- Community and faith-based organizations
- United Way



- Schools
- Local age-, cultural-, or ethnic-specific businesses or professional organizations, such as local Office on Aging; local Office of Asian and Pacific Islanders; or local in-language newspapers (most staff speak English)

More on identifying valuable community partners can be found in the Partnership section of the Food Stamp Program Outreach Toolkit:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/4_partners_partnerships.pdf

http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/office/4_offices_partnerships.pdf

“Community-based organizations can ask partners, such as local or State food stamp agencies, to help develop, copy, or print materials.”

How Do I Reach Out to Community Partners?

- Send a letter to potential partners to introduce yourself and your program. For a sample partner letter, see page **B14**. Acknowledge their work in the community, and identify the specific audience you need to reach. State your desire to discuss how you might work together. Make sure to include what you want them to respond to or your planned followup to the correspondence.

“Please call me if you are interested in discussing how we might work together...” or
“I will call you next week to discuss how we might work together....”

- Telephone potential partners and schedule a convenient time to discuss your suggestions and requests.
- If the potential partner is referred by a colleague, ask him or her to facilitate an introduction.

What Is the Difference Between a Partnership and a Coalition, and What Can One Do That the Other Cannot?

There is strength in numbers. Sometimes that strength lies with just two or three people and other times it comes with 10 or 12. A partnership – typically defined as two or three individuals or organizations coming together to work toward a common goal – is ideal for many organizations. Partnerships are more likely than coalitions to include members who are of like mind and mission. They tend to be much easier to manage. Finally, they reach decisions more quickly and are more likely to stay on point and focused toward reaching a single goal. On the other hand, because of the limited number of individuals, a partnership may not offer a broad representation of ideas. Depending on the project, the workload could be quite heavy.

Because coalitions are more structured and tend to meet more regularly, there’s a greater opportunity to share ideas, lessons, and resources. Because coalitions often function as work groups, you are also more likely to get in on the ground floor when planning culturally specific activities and events.



“ Among diverse populations, surveys consistently reveal that word of mouth, phone calls, or face-to-face communication are the most desired forms of communication. ”

Challenges in Working With Coalition Partners

Anytime you are working with a large group, there are bound to be challenges. While the benefits of coalitions certainly outweigh the negatives, you should be aware of the following:

- Larger, better-funded organizations tend to have more experience conducting meetings and outreach and may talk more than those with less experience. Make an effort to engage everyone equally and focus on your topic and goals to maintain control of your meetings.
- People may have had previous bad experiences with other members of the coalition. Encourage participants to focus on the business issues being discussed rather than personal issues.
- Group decisionmaking may require a longer approval process. Propose and agree on an approach for achieving consensus.
- You may have to compromise on some issues. Determine which issues or positions you are willing to compromise on before negotiations.
- Additional workload, meetings, and outside activities can be time-consuming. Consider the members' time and interests when organizing events.



Ways To Ensure Outreach Materials Are Appropriate

Materials Are Culturally Competent When They...

- Show respect for the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the intended audiences both in content and graphics.
- Contain straightforward messages and are free from idioms, clichés, and colloquialisms that the intended audience may not be familiar with or understand.
- Convey the intended concept in a manner that is meaningful to the target audience. Some words or ideas are more difficult than others to get across, especially in translation. For instance, in other languages the concept of food stamps must be conveyed, rather than translating the actual words. Use your community partners or a translation service, if needed, to make sure that the message you are trying to convey is on target.
- Do not lay blame or use guilt or negative stereotypes to get the point across.
- Are readily available in the preferred language or medium of the target audience.
- If appropriate, use pictures and symbols to simplify messages for low-literate audiences.
- Use large and/or bold type for seniors or people who are visually impaired.
- Depict the family and community as primary systems of support and intervention. To achieve greater efficiency, use pictures of persons and families that reflect the community you are trying to reach. If you are depicting activities, illustrate an activity that your target group is familiar with and enjoys.

In general, organizations that make ideal partners are ones that have been in the community for a while, providing services or offering programs to similar populations. Selecting appropriate partners is important as it improves the likelihood that there will be shared vision, as well as desire and appreciation for ensuring cultural and linguistic competence and success.

What Groups or Individuals Should I Consider for Potential Partners?

The needs assessment process should provide guidance here, as well as the Partnership section of the Food Stamp Outreach Toolkit. Consider:

- Local food stamp office or State food stamp agency
- Schools or colleges
- Fraternities and sororities
- Disease-specific organizations or age-specific organizations at senior centers



- Faith communities. Many religious institutions have specific programs designed to meet community needs, such as health-related ministries, soup kitchens, or senior services.
- Community-based organizations, such as the local job training center, adult education and/or English as a Second Language program, health clinic or recreation center
- Local or national ethnic/minority media outlets including in-language cable television and radio
- Ethnic business associations, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Black Chamber of Commerce

Promising Practices/Examples of Partnerships

Partnerships can be extremely effective, even among groups that don't agree on some issues; our common points are far more numerous and powerful than our differences.

Larry Goolsby, American Public Human Services Association

We have quite a few helpful volunteers from local credit unions. Their customer service skills are great, and they're used to helping people complete applications.

Teresa Kunze, FNS Outreach Grantee

Catholic Charities of Wichita, Kansas

Faith-based groups sometimes get church volunteers to go door-to-door talking to those they imagine could use a service or program.

Jean Beil, Catholic Charities USA

Tips for Success When Working With Minority Media

- Use statistics about the FSP that are relevant to your target audience.
- Be prepared with FSP information and other supporting materials. Minority media often work with much smaller staffs and may ask you to provide photographs and background materials.
- Check with each media outlet on whether or not they need information in English or translated. Some will translate for you, but not always.
- Identify and offer culturally appropriate spokespersons, including community leaders and trusted people such as religious leaders. Don't forget about the director of your local food stamp office.
- Include tips and educational information about how to use the program.

We partner with the traditional organizations, like senior centers. But we also work with grocery stores and apartment complex managers. We make it a priority to free up our outreach workers so they can attend community meetings, whenever they happen.

Ana Paguaga, FNS Outreach Grantee
Greater Waterbury Interfaith Ministries, Waterbury, CT

Give partnerships a chance to work; invest time to develop trust.

Nicole Christensen, FNS Outreach Grantee
Food Change, New York City

Fostering of partnerships is difficult, however, vitally important. Partnerships are beneficial for agencies, especially to underserved populations and community organizations that work with these populations. As for Vietnamese Social Services, it has a positive effect and brings growth to our Somali, Vietnamese, and Burmese immigrants and refugees.

Thao Dao, FNS Outreach Grantee
Vietnamese Social Services

The best tool is the power of the relationship.

Jose Humphreys
Esperanza USA

Section IV. The Right Materials for Diverse Audiences

How Are Materials Important in Food Stamp Program Outreach?

Once you have identified your target audience and have community partners on board to help you, one of the next steps is to make sure you have the materials to conduct outreach. Your materials must tell the story—that there is a program that can help individuals and their families with their unique nutrition needs.

What Culturally Competent Materials Already Exist?

A wealth of translated FSP information—from forms and brochures, to flyers and fact sheets—is available on the FNS web site. To view translations and to print out the materials, visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm>. Also, be sure to check out your local food stamp office to see what materials are available.



How Do I Go About Creating My Own Culturally Competent Materials?

Materials should be tailored to reflect the demographics and cultural backgrounds of the intended audience. This should be evident in how they look, what they say, and the manner in which actions and people are depicted. As a rule of thumb, keep information simple and be sure to provide a description of the program, how to get it, where to ask for help, and where to use the benefits.

Is There a Way To Test Materials To Make Sure They Are Culturally Competent Before I Use Resources for Reproduction and Distribution?

Yes. That's where your community partners can help! Call on their expertise and ask them to review draft materials and point out areas that could be problematic given the intended audience. Also, partners can assist by helping to assemble small groups of the intended audience to test materials for unbiased feedback. This may seem a bit time-consuming on the front end, but it can go a long way in mitigating costs associated with "fixing" inappropriate materials later on. Keep in mind that some feedback about the materials may have more to do with preferences than possible barriers. For example, while paper quality or brochure colors are important considerations, your goal in testing for cultural competence is to identify wording, graphics, or other content that could be a barrier to someone understanding or taking part in your program.

How Can I Find Good, Reliable Translation Services on a Shoe-String Budget?

If you are trying to reach a certain segment of the population because of their predominance in the community and need for service, chances are other organizations and programs are, too. Local universities and colleges, community partners, and other neighborhood programs and services are all good resources for obtaining low-cost translation and interpretive services.

What Is the Best Way To Ensure That My Materials Reach the Intended Audience?

The importance of the mode of delivery cannot be overstated when communicating health messages to certain audiences. Through your needs assessment, you identified trusted messengers or sources of information about food and nutrition. In your community, these sources could be peers, elders, spiritual leaders, business leaders, or medical professionals. They can help distribute materials or steer you toward appropriate distribution points. Grassroots outreach through faith-based organizations may also play a critical role in reaching intended audiences, particularly in African-American, Asian, and Hispanic communities, where churches and related organizations often play a central role.

Knowing the preferred language will help you decide whether or not to *transcreate* or adapt your materials or to provide information in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, or video.



What Are Some Other Ways of Reaching My Target Audience?

Don't rely solely on written materials to get the word out! Printed materials are the least preferred mode of communication—and that goes for most Americans today. Among diverse populations, surveys consistently reveal that word of mouth, phone calls, or face-to-face and peer-to-peer communications are the most desired forms of communication. Consider asking volunteers from partnering organizations to help spread the word. Public service announcements (PSAs) are another way to get free publicity for your program. Most stations will run a select number of PSAs at no cost; however, there is stiff competition for airtime. There is no guarantee that your ad will be chosen and, if it is, that it will air during a time when your target audience(s) is listening or watching. Generally, paid advertisements are run during the most desirable time slots.

- By participating in community events, such as health fairs, supermarket openings, or anniversary promotions, your chances of reaching large numbers of people are pretty good. But you'll still need to check beforehand to make sure that the event reaches the population you want to connect with, and that it is usually well-attended and conducive to disseminating food stamp information. A block party or festival with loud music might be popular with the intended audience and well-attended, but at the end of the day, you'll probably find most of your materials on the ground or in the trash. Look to your community partners, clients, and even event organizers for help to identify the most worthwhile events.
- Another way to personally touch clients and individuals who are potentially eligible for food stamps is by using the promotora model. Promotora, the Spanish word for "promoter," is a model for outreach that uses a lay worker who lives in the targeted community to educate residents. Their expertise? The knowledge they have of the community rather than their formal education, and the established level of trust they have with residents—something an "outsider" would have difficulty gaining—coupled with some basic training in a specific health issue or food stamp outreach. The promotora model can use both male and female outreach workers, depending on the target population, and can be successful in reaching all minority communities, particularly immigrants.

Could This Happen at Your Organization?

Real life Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions.

For the past 2 years at the Henson Community Health Fair, Maria has talked with Mr. Williams, who stops by her table with his son to talk about the Food Stamp Program and whether or not she thinks he might be eligible. Each year, Maria invites Mr. Williams to have a seat at her table, where she gives him an application and asks him to read and complete it to get the process started. But Mr. Williams says he's in a hurry--his son has football practice--and that he doesn't have time to do it right here, but that he'll fill it out at home and mail it back to the office in the next few days. Maria never hears back from Mr. Williams, that is, until the next year's health fair where he hangs around her table asking for the same information.

Reluctance in filling out paperwork or signing documents can be a sign that an individual may have difficulties with reading, writing, or comprehension. This can be hard to spot because often they will go to great lengths to avoid the embarrassment of asking for assistance. For instance, Mr. Williams was trying to find out as much information as he could without having to read anything, and he had a good excuse for not filling out the application onsite, where his problem might have become apparent. Some people even carry around newspapers and magazines to throw off anyone who might be suspicious.

To help the individual, and most importantly avoid causing embarrassment, outreach workers can acknowledge that the process can get overwhelming and offer to go over a brochure with the person—point by point—or read through the application—question by question—and write the answers, if necessary. This presents a win-win situation—it meets the goals of both the outreach worker and the individual, in an efficient, professional, and respectful manner.



Section V. Getting to the Root of It: How To Work With Minority Media

What Are Minority Media?

Today there is an abundance of media outlets that specifically target one or more ethnic populations, races of people, or age groups. Local demographics typically will drive the need for and preponderance of minority media in a given geographic area. In the case of media that target African-Americans and Hispanics, there are well-established outlets in most big cities and urban areas across the country. Asian media are emerging in those same areas, as well. Building relationships with media that specifically target your audience can be important to communicating the benefits of the FSP.

Why Is it Important To Use Minority Media?

Minority media are another trusted messenger for reaching diverse audiences about the FSP. Minority media highlight news and events of particular importance to their audience. In addition, in-language media provide an invaluable service for those who do not speak English. Further, minority media personalities tend to be well-respected and credible sources on issues that affect their community. Minority media are also more likely to use public service advertising and news that target their audience. Topics concerning health and education are of primary importance for the audience as well as the media.

I Know Radio and Television Are Popular Media, but What About Newspapers and Magazines?

Print outlets, like newspapers and magazines, are still a very popular medium for older people across all racial and ethnic groups. For some cultures, newspapers are also a link to the community and to the country of origin and serve as a resource guide. Print also allows for further explanation of topics that cannot be fully covered on radio or television.

How Should Facts and Figures Be Presented to Minority and Targeted Media?

It's okay to use statistics, but do not rely on facts and figures alone to tell your story. Prove your story's relevance to your target audience. Make sure your statistics and data focus on the target audience, as well. Keep in mind that sources and spokespeople should be credible with groups you are trying to reach. If possible, bring statements from community leaders as testimonials for your story and consider including real-life examples of how the program can be used.

Beyond Sending Out Materials Regularly to Media, How Else Can I Build Relationships With Minority Media in My Area?

You may find that editors and staff at many minority media outlets are actively involved in the community and sit on numerous committees and local boards. In short, they make great advocates for your organization beyond today's story.

How Can I Find the Minority Media in My Area?

To ensure that your media contact list is up-to-date on minority or targeted media in your area, go to your local library or check online for media directories, such as Bacon's, or do a general Internet search. It's also worthwhile to go into the communities you want to reach and check out what free papers are available—ethnic supermarkets and restaurants are a good place to pick up a few—or visit a local newsstand for a broad range of local media. Chambers of Commerce may also have information about local media.



Steps for Working With Minority Media

STEP 1 | IDENTIFY MEDIA OUTLETS

Outlets should be those with readers or listeners who represent your target audience.

STEP 2 | UNDERSTAND WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY

Stories that are newsworthy to minority media will have a sense of immediacy and offer fresh, new information that will impact their audience's lives.

STEP 3 | DEVELOP STORY ANGLES

One story can be presented from different perspectives, which will make it more appealing to the media and their audiences.

STEP 4 | PITCH YOUR STORY TO REPORTERS

Decide how best to present your story—in a press release or letter. For examples of both, look at the Outreach Toolkit at:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/partners/4_partners_partnerships.pdf.

STEP 5 | FOLLOW UP!

This is an important step to getting your story covered in mainstream or minority media given the amount of information most media outlets receive and the ever decreasing number of reporters available to cover stories.

Kernels of Wisdom:

I participate on a weekly talk show for the Haitian community. It's a 20-minute question- and-answer, call-in show that has a cultural theme each week. My job is to tie that theme into a nutrition-focused topic.

Food Stamp Outreach Grantee

We cover everything that affects and benefits the Hispanic community. We are always interested in initiatives that benefit the Hispanic community. Personally, I prefer receiving information via e-mail. And we always appreciate good quality photos.

Mary Aviles, Hispanic editor, EFE News Service (national news agency)



Recently, we've been covering stories about how Hispanics are the minority group that's been able to overcome poverty the fastest, according to studies. I think there needs to be more education on the program. There are families that qualify for food stamps, and yet don't take advantage of it. Others don't take advantage of their right because they're scared they'd draw criticism and that they'd be labeled as lazy and as irresponsibly having too many kids.

Jose Carrera, El Dia (Houston)

Our biggest pet peeve is old news. We also don't like it when we are given little time before an event. We value information that affects the Hispanic community: education, crime, etc. Sometimes we get information that is unrelated to Chicago or to Hispanics.

Arely Padilla, reporter, La Raza (Chicago)

Almost all our reporters are native Chinese speakers, and some may not speak English well or at all. Therefore, we prefer translated, in-language fact sheets and releases.

Emerson Chu, Southern Chinese Daily News (Houston)

If organizations have big presence in our communities, then we are more likely to cover news about that organization. By participating in our events and supporting our communities, they will appear credible, trustworthy, and recognizable in our particular ethnic community. Consequently, our community will be more interested in their news.

Yunju Choi, News Korea (Dallas)

A story doesn't have to apply exclusively to Asian communities to be relevant to our publications. It can be a story that affects populations regardless of ethnicity, but if it is somehow relevant to our ethnic communities, our readers may well be interested.

Abelardo Mogica, Philippine Mabuhay News (National City)

While we cover news that is relevant to the Asian community, we prefer to get news that is specifically relevant to our target nationality group. As a Japanese publication, our ideal news relates to the Japanese population specifically.

Jacob Marolies, Yomiuri Shimbun, (New York City)



Section VI. Culturally Competent + Customer Service: Two Peas in a Pod

The focus of this toolkit is on outreach, but really that is only the first step in ensuring that more diverse audiences participate in the FSP. Outreach efforts can be undone in a matter of seconds with a negative encounter at the first point of contact with the FSP. If individuals or families are met with insensitivity, lack of courtesy and respect, bias, or even discrimination, we may lose a potential participant.

After a negative encounter, clients may experience:

- Feelings of being unwelcome, unwanted, and not valued
- Fear of further contact with the office or agency
- Fear that complaining about negative experiences with staff will compromise service or benefits
- Anger, frustration, and insult. Thus, they may refuse to initiate further contact.
- Confusion about completing paperwork, following instructions or next steps because clients did not understand acronyms used by an eligibility worker.

After a negative encounter, organizations may experience:

- Loss in time and resources due to missed appointments or errors on paperwork
- Loss of clients due to negative first impressions or word-of-mouth
- Frustrated staff due to lack of training and knowledge of appropriate ways to handle certain situations
- Possible filing of a grievance or report of discrimination based on a bad experience with a first point of contact

Steps for Being Culturally Sensitive in the Application Process

- Support and obtain professional development and training for frontline and eligibility staff on diversity and cultural and linguistic competence. Share articles and other materials that will help in this effort.
- Emphasize customer service and courtesy. Accurate information should be provided in a respectful and timely manner.
- Ensure that everyone is aware of outside resources that may exist, and how and when it is appropriate to access those resources.
- Develop written guidelines for handling situations that are procedural in nature, such as accessing TTY or language-line services and interpreters.



- Train and retrain frontline workers on your agency’s policies and procedures regarding communication issues, such as serving individuals who speak little or no English.
- Identify bilingual staff or those who have an affinity with other cultures in your agency who can make a connection with individuals whose primary language is not English.
- Train and retrain frontline workers on how to serve individuals who have special communication challenges, such as a limited literacy level.
- Do not assume that supervisors are knowledgeable about the behaviors, attitudes, and skill sets necessary to work effectively with diverse populations. They may also need training.
- Consider cross-training with an organization that can teach you about a specific culture. In return, you can teach them about the food stamp application process so they can relay this information to their constituents.

Quick Tips for Communicating With Clients and Families

At the heart of cultural competence is learning to communicate effectively with individuals and their families. Here are a few tried and true suggestions:

- When working with people different from yourself, it’s important to put your own personal biases aside. Keep an open mind and don’t jump to conclusions. Because a person speaks with an accent does not mean they are not a native-born citizen. Take time to learn about the person you are speaking with, which demonstrates respect and an understanding of cultural competency.
- Establish rapport. In many cultures, it is important to establish some type of relationship before discussing business. Taking a few extra moments to ask questions and learn more about an individual and his/her family often makes an enormous difference in the long run.
- While developing rapport, refrain from discussing topics, such as personal relationships, or behaviors that may be misinterpreted. As a practice, avoid making jokes or displaying questionable posters or artwork in your office or workspace.
- If you don’t know what their native language is, use the “I Speak” document available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm>, which lists, in 34 different languages, the words “I Speak.” Give this document to your clients so they can point out for you which language they speak when they spot it.
- Respect personal space. When you first meet with potential clients, ask them to sit where they feel the most comfortable. This will allow people to choose the personal distance that makes them most comfortable. Similarly, refrain from casually tapping or touching someone, which in some cultures can be perceived as being too familiar.
- Identify the decisionmaker. Find out who the influential parties are and how they make decisions.



It may be important to ask, “Do you want to discuss the FSP with other members of your family?”

- Send a message through children but do not use children as interpreters. For many parents who don’t speak English well, their children often serve as conduits for information. They can take home what they received in school—for instance, information on summer programs or the FSP. However, some caution must be taken if a parent brings a child to a meeting to serve as an interpreter. Children may be able to informally convey casual conversation points. However, eligibility for a government program is different. Children may not understand the meaning of technical words such as income and resources. Also, parents may not feel comfortable discussing certain information such as household income in front of their children.
- Ask questions and listen to the answers. Asking questions shows that you really are interested in what a person has to say and his or her perspectives. But pay attention. Do not interrupt your client or try to put words in his or her mouth.
- Check for understanding. In some cultures, people are reluctant to ask questions of authority figures. Explain that asking for clarification is acceptable—then ask follow up questions to determine whether they correctly understood you. Ask open-ended questions to ensure the information has been adequately understood.
- Learn greetings and titles of respect in other languages that you commonly encounter.
- Write numbers down. People easily confuse numbers spoken in a new language.

Eight Common Mistakes To Avoid

1. Disrupting home and work schedules when conducting education and outreach activities.
2. Dismissing cultural preferences, customs, and traditions when discussing health and nutrition.
3. Assuming others perceive things the same way you do.
4. Getting “right down to business.” In many cultures, socializing is an important first step before discussing business or personal matters.
5. Conducting interviews or discussing personal information in an open setting. Receiving assistance from outside agencies is an embarrassment in some cultures, and may be better discussed behind closed doors.
6. Misreading silence for confusion or lack of knowledge. Allow for a short period of silence or reflection. Rather than asking if the person understood what was discussed, ask open-ended questions as you probe for understanding.



7. Ignoring the importance of such factors as age, gender, or position in family when asking for decisions.
8. Making assumptions based on stereotypes. Examples:
 - Ms. L. has a Hispanic surname and speaks with an accent. She arrives for a community-sponsored workshop on how to apply for food stamps. When she approaches the sign-in table and gives her name to the staff person, she is promptly asked to step to the side and wait a moment. The staff person speaks slowly and in a loud voice. Ms. L immediately knows that the staff person assumes she cannot speak English, and has gone to get someone who is bilingual to help out. Although she is pleased that they are making the effort to provide translators for individuals who require this level of language assistance, she wishes they had asked about her specific needs.
 - Ms. T is African-American. She stops by the FSP booth at a citywide festival and asks where in her community she can find out more about applying for food stamps. She notices that instead of asking where she lives, the outreach worker assumes she lives in a predominately African-American section of town and immediately refers her to a location in that area. This infuriates Ms. T because she does not live in that area and must point that out before receiving the correct information.



4

PLANT THE SEEDS
REAP THE
BENEFITS



PROMISING PRACTICES

What is a promising practice?

“Promising practices” are everywhere. New ideas or refinements of existing ideas are continuously being implemented by State and local programs to educate and help individuals access their programs. Promising practices may involve big or little changes to existing projects to improve service delivery. They may or may not have evidence of positive results from evaluations; in fact, they might just have a general intuitive appeal rather than a proven effect. Promising practices sometimes prompt completely different ideas. Sometimes, promising practices are those “A-ha!” moments — something that makes sense but you did not think significant right away. Unfortunately, practical knowledge in one community that could lead to significant improvements in another often goes unshared.

Who is compiling our promising practices?

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is compiling promising practices to assist States, local agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and others to share their best ideas.

Why is the FSP sharing the practices?

FSP’s collection of promising practices is an effort to find and share outreach or customer service models that can help increase participation in the FSP. Through this collection of promising practices, timely information on program and policy innovations is disseminated so that all stakeholders may benefit from the experiences of their peers across the country. The sharing of ideas can stimulate program changes, spark creative exchanges, and serve as a launching pad for the next generation of program innovations. It can inspire a dynamic examination of ways to improve service delivery systems for people eligible for, applying for, and participating in the FSP.

Whom can I contact for more information?

The project’s name and a contact person are listed by each promising practice. The FSP has developed an informal process of collecting promising practices. We encourage you to get in touch with the listed contact people for more details. The web site is updated continually so check back often.

PROMISING PRACTICES ARE ONLINE

Go to: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach and click on “Promising Practices.”

? ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW IDEA?

On the web site, you will find information that you can use in your own project. You can learn about promising practices from around the country as well as from other programs.

? WHO CAN USE THE WEB SITE?

The web site is for State and local food stamp agencies as well as Federal/State program staff, volunteers, community members, policymakers, funders, researchers, or anyone else who wants to develop a project or improve the quality of their existing programs.



How can I share my promising practice?

Submit your practice to us through the FNS web site. Tell us about something new you did or how you put an innovative twist on an existing idea. Go ahead and brag about the response you received — from your co-workers, managers, or your customers. This is an opportunity to shine while you give others ideas to improve or develop their projects. Worried that your idea may not be new? Not to worry; something that is “old hat” to some may be a complete revelation to others.

SOME EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICES

MEDIA OUTREACH

Vermont – Partnering with Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger and Vermont Grocer’s Association, the State food stamp agency held a press conference at a supermarket to announce changes in the FSP that make it easier to apply.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

California – In partnership with the local food bank, Alameda County Social Services facilitated periodic Food Stamp Program outreach trainings for organizations interested in helping their own clients apply for food stamps. Participants received a training manual complete with tools and resources to help them get started in their own food stamp outreach efforts.

California – Alameda County Food Bank provided on-site “Food Stamp Enrollment Clinics” for clients of other community-based organizations. Bilingual staff from the food bank prescreened clients for potential eligibility and assisted them in completing the application.

Connecticut – The State agency sent mailings to soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters to ask them to make food stamp applications and information available to their customers.

New York – The Korean Grocers Association in New York City published food stamp information in Korean.

Pennsylvania – Pathmark grocery stores in underserved areas of Philadelphia hosted eligibility prescreening events.

Virginia – Americorps volunteers in rural counties of the State went door to door to provide information on FSP. They talked to people about food stamp benefits while grocery shopping, hosted outreach gatherings, prescreened for potential eligibility, and helped complete application forms.

USING PSAS

California – The Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties aired television ads to market the nutrition and health benefits of the FSP.

California – The Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties developed a 5-minute video in English and Spanish that answers 12 commonly asked questions about food stamp benefits. The video was distributed to health and social service agencies on California’s central coast.



DISASTER OUTREACH:

THE HEAT IS ON

– REACHING OUT AFTER A DISASTER



DISASTER OUTREACH

OUTREACH FOR THE DISASTER FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

What is the Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP) and how does it operate?

After a natural or man-made disaster occurs and a Presidential declaration of disaster with a provision for individual assistance has been made, State agencies can request approval from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to operate a DFSP to provide temporary food assistance to households. FNS approves operation of the DFSP once grocery stores are operational and telecommunications and electricity have been restored, as DFSP benefits are delivered on Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards, which require telephone and electricity for redemption. Generally, States request and FNS approves operation of the DFSP a week or more after a disaster has occurred.

The DFSP helps people buy food when they are experiencing economic hardships as a result of the disaster (loss of jobs, loss of food because of power outages, damages to home and personal possessions, etc.). Although every State agency maintains a general DFSP Plan for use in time of disaster, State agencies do tailor DFSP policies and procedures to fit the community's specific needs following each disaster, so every DFSP is unique.

“ Although every State agency maintains a general DFSP Plan for use in time of disaster, State agencies do tailor DFSP policies and procedures to fit the community's specific needs following the each disaster, so every DFSP is unique. ”

How does the DFSP differ from the Food Stamp Program (FSP)?

The DFSP is different from the FSP in some important ways:

- Families who are not normally eligible for the

FSP may be eligible for the DFSP. During the eligibility process for the DFSP, a household's short-term, disaster-related expenses are considered.

- Students, strikers, noncitizens, and persons subject to work requirements are not barred from the DFSP as they are from the FSP.
- Rules surrounding verification, income, and resources are relaxed.
- Recipients receive the maximum food stamp benefit for their household size.
- The period to apply for the DFSP is short, generally 1 week.
- State agencies may operate mass application

sites at fairgrounds, stadiums, or other easily accessible locations that can serve large populations. For very small disasters, State agencies may operate the DFSP out of social services offices. All applications for the DFSP are distributed to prospective clients and collected at these sites. Applications generally are not distributed throughout the community, as they are for the regular FSP.

How are ongoing FSP participants aided in a DFSP?

Aid to FSP participants will depend upon the disaster. Ongoing participants may be eligible to receive replacement benefits for lost or damaged food. Additionally, a supplement or additional benefits may be provided to ensure participants receive the maximum level of benefits for their household size. Sometimes these benefits



are paid automatically – in other cases, participants may be asked by the State worker to complete an affidavit attesting to disaster losses in order to qualify.

Why should my organization conduct outreach during disasters?

During times of disaster, the agency that administers the DFSP in your state will conduct informational activities, often through the media, to inform the public of the DFSP, the eligibility requirements, and the application process. Because the days following a disaster are often chaotic, news about the DFSP might be overshadowed by other disaster-related issues, misinformation might be circulated, and local disaster victims will urgently

turn to trusted organizations, such as yours, for information and guidance.

Because the eligibility rules for the DFSP are different than those of the regular FSP and applications are accepted for a short time (about 1 week), many potential applicants will not realize they may qualify for benefits. Also, participants in the FSP might not know they may be entitled to replacement or supplemental benefits. As a trusted messenger in your community, you have a unique opportunity to connect your clients with benefits from the DFSP.

Why should my organization partner with State/local food stamp offices?

Partnering with State/local food stamp offices helps your organization provide your clients with accurate, timely information.

Some of your clients might be food stamp participants. They will need information about replacement or supplemental benefits and what actions to take, if necessary, to prove individual loss to claim these benefits.

By collaborating with your State agency on DFSP outreach, you will be able to provide your clients with answers to these and other questions.

How can my organization involve the State/local FSP office in our disaster preparedness discussions?

Convene a “get-ready” meeting before a disaster occurs. Invite State/local food stamp offices, grocers, EBT industry representatives, and other community and faith-based organizations to the meeting. At this meeting, consider conducting a needs

QUESTIONS YOUR CLIENTS MIGHT HAVE

- ? AM I ELIGIBLE FOR THE DFSP?**
- ? WHERE DO I GO TO APPLY?**
- ? WHEN CAN I APPLY?**
- ? WHAT SHOULD I BRING WITH ME?**
- ? WHEN AND HOW WILL I RECEIVE THE BENEFITS?**
- ? HOW LONG WILL I BE ABLE TO RECEIVE THE BENEFITS?**
- ? WHERE CAN I USE THE BENEFITS?**



assessment. A needs assessment will identify existing outreach services and resources in your community. It will also provide your organization with a better understanding of the number and nature of diverse groups in your community. In addition, it will help you identify geographic areas most prone to disasters, or communities, locations, and neighborhoods that may need unique assistance, such as language assistance, in the aftermath of a disaster. Information identified in the needs assessment not only will help you effectively prepare to coordinate outreach efforts during a disaster, but will also reinforce cooperation for ongoing outreach.

Can my State agency include a DFSP contingency plan in its State outreach plan?

Yes. A State outreach plan may include contingency plans for food stamp outreach during a disaster. Preparation is critical to adequate disaster response. It enables a State to quickly implement activities that have been carefully planned. Talk to your State agency to find out if it has a State outreach plan and if it includes a contingency outreach plan for the DFSP. Discuss how you can participate in such activities if they are available or how you can assist in the development of such documents if they are not.

During a DFSP, what outreach activities can be reimbursed by FNS?

All DFSP outreach activities must be approved in advance by the State agency in order to be eligible for reimbursement. Allowable outreach activities during a disaster may include:

- Distributing information about the provisions of the DFSP to disaster victims,
- Funding a toll-free number,
- Distributing information to media outlets,
- Greeting applicants at DFSP application entrances and directing them to appropriate areas,
- Translating DFSP outreach materials into other languages,
- Distributing and helping applicants fill out DFSP application forms at disaster sites, and/or
- Prescreening activities that do not involve accessing the State eligibility system or existing client case files.

How can I learn more about the DFSP?

For more information on how a State might operate the DFSP, please see the Disaster Food Stamp Program Guidance on the FNS Web site: http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/response/DFSP_Handbook/handbook.htm.



BEFORE A DISASTER STRIKES

10 STEPS
TO PLAN FOR
DFSP OUTREACHSTEP 1 | DEVELOP
A PLAN

Convene or participate in a “get-ready” meeting with State / local food stamp offices.

- Explain how community and faith-based partners can help the DFSP provide food assistance to those adversely affected by disasters, whether man-made or due to natural causes.
- Explain how community and faith-based partners can assist disaster victims already enrolled in the regular FSP with replacement benefits.
- Discuss strengths and needs of each partner in terms of disaster response.
- Discuss what your organization’s staff can and cannot do during a disaster.
- Plan and document how you will work together to prepare for potential future disasters. Be very specific about the best ways to get the word out, how that can be done in an emergency, and who will do it.
- Develop a contact list of participating members, with multiple ways of reaching each party in the event of a disaster.
- Discuss what resources, such as toll-free numbers or Web sites, can be shared in the event of a disaster.

STEP 2 | DEVELOP OR UPDATE
A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- If your community has not conducted a needs assessment, take steps to complete one. Discuss who will take the lead to complete the needs assessment.
- If your community has previously conducted a needs assessment, reevaluate the findings and update corresponding next steps.
- Identify existing outreach services and resources in your community.
- Identify partners with special expertise, such as ethnic media contacts or translators.
- Identify vulnerable populations in your community, such as those in certain geographic areas or those with particular language needs, who may be most affected by potential disasters or who will need extra support accessing help following the disaster.
- Each community organization may also want to take this opportunity to examine its own disaster plans. Each organization must be sure that it can adequately account for its employees and mobilize them quickly with the right tools and materials to implement the response plan as agreed with other partners.

- 1 Develop a plan
- 2 Develop or update a needs assessment
- 3 Add language to State Outreach plan
- 4 Encourage your State to include your organization in its State DSFP plan
- 5 Plan for media activities
- 6 Maintain good relationships with all partners
- 7 Implement activities in your outreach plan
- 8 Develop new partnerships
- 9 Connect DSFP victims to FSP
- 10 Thank staff and partners and share lessons learned



STEP 3 | ADD LANGUAGE TO THE STATE OUTREACH PLAN

- Encourage your State to develop an outreach plan with a contingency plan for the DFSP.
- If your State has an outreach plan, encourage the development of a contingency section for the DFSP.
- In the plan, include a list of allowable activities and identify which agency will handle each activity. Advanced planning improves your disaster response. Knowing you have the tools and resources in place will reduce stress and improve your ability to react and respond to a disaster, when or if it occurs.
- Maintain a hard copy of the contingency plan in a secure offsite location. If there is a disaster, you might not have access to a computer or your office.
- Include draft or template materials that your organization might use as part of your media response.

STEP 4 | ENCOURAGE YOUR STATE TO INCLUDE YOUR ORGANIZATION IN ITS STATE DFSP PLAN

- Describe what outreach activities you can perform and encourage your State to include them in the State DFSP Plan.
- Maintain a hard copy of the plan in a secure offsite location. If there is a disaster, you might not have access to a computer or your office.

STEP 5 | PLAN FOR MEDIA ACTIVITIES DURING A DISASTER

- Develop a list of media outlets (television, radio, or print) for the DFSP and share your list with your State partners. Include phone numbers, fax numbers, and addresses so that you or your partners have multiple ways to reach the media.

STEP 6 | MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALL PARTNERS

- Keep in touch with your community and faith-based partners. Check with them periodically to confirm their roles and responsibilities and to update your contact lists.
- Know your State agency liaison and how to initiate contact.
- Consider holding a practice drill, role-playing game, or table-top exercise to practice what you will do in the event of a real disaster.



WHEN A DISASTER STRIKES

STEP 7 | IMPLEMENT ACTIVITIES IN YOUR OUTREACH PLAN

- Make contact with State/local food stamp offices and other partners to implement your outreach plan.
- Provide accurate and consistent messages to your clients using your toll-free number or Web site.
- Stay informed. As the DFSP application process changes, provide updates to your clients and other partners.

STEP 8 | DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS OR CONDUCT ADDITIONAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- Initiate partnerships with new organizations to meet unanticipated needs.
- If your State has an outreach plan, expand outreach activities, if needed. Don't feel limited. Your organization may conduct allowable and reasonable outreach activities to get the word out about the DFSP.

WHEN THE DISASTER IS OVER

STEP 9 | CONNECT DFSP VICTIMS TO THE REGULAR FSP

- Conduct outreach to connect those DFSP victims eligible for the regular FSP to those benefits. DFSP recipients who wish to apply for the regular FSP will need to follow the normal food stamp application process. These households may need assistance in understanding FSP requirements.
- Let the media and other opinion leaders know how the DFSP and regular FSP responded to the needs of families and the broader community.

STEP 10 | THANK STAFF AND PARTNERS FOR THEIR EFFORTS AND SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

- Recognize employees and partners for a job well done.
- Make changes to your outreach and disaster plans based on what worked and what didn't work.
- Visit the FNS Web site and prepare promising disaster outreach practices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/promising/Default.htm>



10 IDEAS FOR DFSP OUTREACH

- 1 **Inform the media.** Use the media to spread messages about the availability of the DFSP. Be sure the identified spokesperson has the timely and correct information and an updated media list. Be sure to follow your State's procedures.
- 2 **Coordinate with other responders.** Identify the liaison to other first (disaster) responders in the community. Be sure that they have the correct information about your DFSP and can share it with disaster victims they serve.
- 3 **Engage grocery store partners.** Provide information to grocers to post, distribute in grocery bags, or announce in stores.
- 4 **Enlist faith- and community-based partners.** Enlist the help of your partners to distribute information (who can apply, when, where) about the DFSP or to perform other duties as described in your State Disaster or State Outreach Plan(s).
- 5 **Use community volunteers.** Engage volunteers to perform activities such as answering the State/local toll-free number, distributing informational materials at grocery stores, and monitoring food stamp lines to make sure potential applicants are in the correct line at disaster sites.
- 6 **Enlist community translators.** Work with community translators to translate news releases for ethnic media and informational materials and to serve as interpreters during food stamp interviews.
- 7 **Provide a toll-free number.** Set up cellular phones to use as DFSP informational numbers if land lines are not working.
- 8 **Use the remote telephone feature.** Use the remote message feature of your telephone system, if available, to announce DFSP information. If this is not available, contact FNS to ask about using the national toll-free number remote messaging feature and/or contact your State FSP EBT provider to ask if a message can be added to the customer service phone line.
- 9 **Post information on your Web site.** Post DFSP information on your Web site. Provide basic information, such as who may qualify, where and when to apply, and types of verification documents, if needed.
- 10 **Develop new outreach partnerships.** Develop new outreach partnerships to provide DFSP information to disaster victims, based on what is occurring in your community.



WEB-BASED RESOURCES

FNS Disaster Assistance Home Page	http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm
FSP Disaster Handbook	http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/response/DFSP_Handbook/handbook.htm
Outreach State Plan Guidance	http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm
Partnership Section in State Toolkit	http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/tool-kits_state.htm
FNS press releases	http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/PressReleases.htm
FRAC Disaster Handbook	http://www.frac.org/pdf/dfsp05.pdf
Louisiana press releases	http://www.dss.state.la.us/departments/dss/Press_Releases.html



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

[Date]

*[Name of Appropriate Contact]
[Area Code and Phone Number]
[Cell Phone]*

Disaster Victims Now Eligible for Food Stamp Assistance

[City, State] – Many victims of *[disaster]* are now eligible for benefits from the Disaster Food Stamp Program.

[Quote about significance of nutrition assistance following a disaster,] said [State official.]

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service has approved a Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP) to allow victims of *[disaster]* in *[eligible geographic area]* to receive nutrition assistance. Eligible households will receive an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to use to purchase food at retail locations. Eligibility criteria for the DFSP are different than for the regular Food Stamp Program (FSP.) Residents who have experienced *[describe unique disaster elements that may make residents eligible for the DFSP]* may be eligible. Other eligibility factors include *[list eligibility criteria.]*

Applications for the DFSP will be accepted until *[date.]* Residents of *[eligible geographic locations]* can apply for disaster food stamp benefits at the following locations and times:

Location: *[address]*
Hours of Operation: *[hours]*

Those seeking to apply for benefits from the DFSP are encouraged to bring verification of identity and residency, if possible, with them when they apply. If the applicant’s documents have been lost in the disaster, DFSP staff can provide guidance on how applicants can prove their identity. *[List other documents that should be available at application or other information about needed verifications.]*

More information about the DFSP is available on *[Web site address and toll-free number.]*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

[Date]

*[Name of Appropriate Contact]
[Area Code and Phone Number]
[Cell Phone]*

Deadline To Apply for Disaster Food Stamp Program Is *[add when]*

[City, State] – Victims of *[disaster]* are reminded that they have until *[deadline]* to apply for nutrition assistance from the Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP). The DFSP enables those who have experienced loss, such as *[list criteria]*, as a result of the *[disaster]* to receive food stamp benefits on an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to purchase food at retail stores.

[Quote about the importance of applying before time runs out.] said *[State official]*. *[Quote about how many benefits have been issued to date.]*

Residents of *[geographic location]* may be eligible for nutrition assistance from the DFSP. Provisions of the DFSP are different from the regular FSP, so those affected by *[disaster]* in the designated locations are encouraged to apply to find out if they may be eligible for benefits under this program.

Applications will be accepted at the following locations until *[deadline.]*

Location: *[address]*
Hours of Operation: *[hours]*

Those seeking to apply for benefits from the DFSP are encouraged to bring verification of identity and residency, if possible, with them when they apply. If the applicant’s documents have been lost in the disaster, DFSP staff can provide guidance on how applicants can prove their identity. *[List other documents that should be available at application or other information about needed verifications.]*

More information about the DFSP is available on *[Web site address and toll-free number.]*

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6

A BUNDLE OF RESOURCES

AND INFORMATION



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP) OUTREACH MATERIALS FROM USDA

Informational Food Stamp Program Resources Translated into 35 Languages

Five basic FSP documents have been translated into 35 languages and are easily downloadable for simple copying and distribution. An “I Speak” document is also available which allows a person to indicate to a caseworker or advocate what language he or she speaks so that accommodations can be made.

The following documents are available:

- **“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” (Questions and Answers About Getting and Using Food Stamps)**, *FNS-313* – A brochure that provides useful information about the FSP.
 - **“Public Charge”** – A notice to reassure immigrants that receiving food stamps will not make them public charges, so that it will not affect their immigration status.
 - **“Immigrant Eligibility Questions and Answers”** – A series of facts of interest to immigrants about eligibility for food stamp benefits, based on changes in the 2002 Farm Bill.
 - **“Documents Needed to Apply for Food Stamps”** – A list (in English and the target language) of documents that may be needed to prove eligibility for food stamp benefits.
 - **“Fact Sheet on Eligibility”** – Ten facts about the FSP for elderly (60 and older) and disabled persons.
- ▶ View and download at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm



“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” (Questions and Answers about the Food Stamp Program)

A basic brochure about FSP benefits, this resource highlights eligibility requirements and how to apply. Available in 35 languages.

- ▶ Download at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm> (English version) or www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm (in other languages)
- ▶ Order printed copies (English and Spanish only) online at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>; document number FNS-313.
- ▶ This publication is also included (in English and Spanish) on the enclosed disc.





“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” Posters

Colorful posters featuring the theme “Food Stamps Make America Stronger” are available free via online order form. The posters direct people to the FSP national toll-free information line and are targeted to diverse audiences. Materials available in Spanish are identified.

- ▶ View and download PDF versions at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>
- ▶ Order copies online at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/order-form.htm.
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

Document number FNS-333 (Crowd); FNS-335 (Girl); FNS-351 (Girl – in Spanish); FNS-337 (Senior Man); FNS-339 (Woman/Girl); FNS-341 (Black Male); FNS-343 (Senior Woman – in Spanish); FNS-345 (Hispanic Male – in Spanish); FNS-347 (Woman in Wheelchair); and FNS-349 (Veteran).

“10 Steps to Help You Fill Your Grocery Bag Through the Food Stamp Program”

This low-literacy flyer outlines 10 steps to follow to apply for food stamp benefits.

- ▶ View and download PDF version at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/applicant_recipients/10steps.pdf.
- ▶ The flyer is also included on the enclosed disc.

“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” Flyers

The “Food Stamps Make America Stronger” theme and FSP national toll-free information line are prominently displayed on these flyers, available free via online order form. Similar to the posters, these flyers are directed to diverse audiences. Materials available in Spanish are identified.

- ▶ View and download at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/info.htm.
- ▶ Order printed copies (English and Spanish only) online at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

Document number FNS-334 (Crowd); FNS-336 (Girl); FNS-352 (Girl – in Spanish); FNS-338 (Senior Man); FNS-340 (Woman/Girl); FNS-342 (Black Male); FNS-344 (Senior Woman – in Spanish); FNS-346 (Hispanic Male – in Spanish); FNS-348 (Woman in Wheelchair); and FNS-350 (Veteran).

“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” Bookmark

Vibrant in color, this bookmark promotes the FSP on-line prescreening tool and national toll-free information line in English on one side, and Spanish on the other.

- ▶ View and download at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/general.htm.
- ▶ Order copies online at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/order-form.htm.
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

Document number FSP-16.



Food Stamp Application Envelope

Help potential recipients compile all of the necessary materials to apply for benefits with this handy envelope featuring a checklist of verification documents.

- ▶ Order copies online at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/order-form.htm.
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

Document number FSP-02 (comes with FSP-01, “10 Steps to Help You Fill Your Grocery Bag Through the Food Stamp Program.”)

“Food Stamps Can Help You Now” Flyer

Featuring basic information about the immigrant eligibility restorations as a result of the 2002 Farm Bill, this flyer includes the national toll-free number and is available in English and Spanish.

- ▶ Order printed copies (English and Spanish only) online at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

“Common Food Stamp Myths Concerning Elderly Households” Flyer

This flyer features 10 common myths about food stamp benefits and the elderly and refutes them with simple facts about the FSP.

- ▶ Download at: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/Translations/English/10mythsp1.pdf.
- ▶ Also included on the enclosed disc.

“Food Stamps Make America Stronger” Magnet

This magnet can be placed on a refrigerator to serve as a reminder about the nutrition benefits of food stamps. A maximum of 200 can be ordered at one time.

- ▶ Order copies online at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/order-form.htm.

Document number FNS-367.

Food Stamp Program Photo Library

Groups are encouraged to download photographs for use in communicating FSP nutrition education and outreach messages. FNS requests that these pictures be used only for promotion, informational, and educational purposes of a nonprofit nature.

- ▶ Download at www.grande.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp_album.php.
- ▶ Order print-quality files by contacting FNS directly.

“Community Hunger Champions—Helping People Eat Right When Money’s Tight” Video

This eight-minute video introduces influencers at the regional, State and local level to the Food Stamp Program Media Campaign, familiarizes viewers with campaign messages, and showcases the important role eligibility workers play in ensuring eligible individuals obtain the benefits of the Food Stamp Program. This video is a companion piece to the toolkit and will help eligibility workers and community partners understand how they can work together and utilize the outreach materials developed by FNS.

- ▶ The video is available through FNS in VHS and/or DVD format.



FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP) WEB RESOURCES

GENERAL INFORMATION

Main Food Stamp Program Web Page

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/

A starting point for general information about the FSP.

History of the Food Stamp Program

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Legislation/history.htm

Provides a brief history of the FSP from 1939 to the present.

Legislation, Rules, Waivers, and Certification Policy

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/government/legislation_rules_cert.htm

Includes a waiver database showing which States have received waivers of sections of FSP rules for specific purposes or to accommodate local conditions.

USDA Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

www.usda.gov/fbc/index.html

Background information about USDA's initiatives for faith-based and community organizations.

HealthierUS

www.healthierus.gov

A central gateway to credible, accurate information to help people lead healthier lives.

GENERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM OUTREACH RESOURCES

Main Food Stamp Outreach Web Page

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm

A starting point for information about food stamp outreach including information about developing and submitting an optional State food stamp outreach plan for FNS approval; the food stamp outreach coalition; and promising outreach practices.

Food Stamp Program Radio PSAs

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

A compilation of USDA's FSP public service announcements (PSAs). Also included on the enclosed DVD.

Food Stamp Outreach Coalition Information

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

A core group of national antihunger advocacy groups, and other groups interested in promoting the health and nutrition benefits of the FSP. These organizations work to end hunger and improve nutrition at the national level through both advocacy and outreach to local antihunger projects.

Hunger Champions Information and Applications

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

Established to honor local offices that provide exemplary service in assisting eligible clients to obtain food stamps.

USDA Grant Information

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/grants.htm

Information about past and future research grants given by USDA to nonprofit organizations and others to improve access to the Food Stamp Program by low-income persons and families.

PRESCREENING AND APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

FNS Prescreening Tool (Step 1)

www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov

This simple, low-literacy online prescreening tool enables users to input their information privately and, based on their information, tells them if they might be eligible for food stamp benefits and how much they might receive.

Links to Downloadable Food Stamp Applications and Local Office Locators

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/>

Features a United States map. Click on a State to find links to that State's downloadable food stamp application, links to local office locators, and list of outreach providers.



RESEARCH, DATA, AND STATISTICS

Food Stamp Program Participation Data

www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/Participation.htm

Features data and studies about participation in the FSP and the characteristics of households receiving food stamp benefits. Also includes evaluation reports for past FNS outreach grant programs from 1993-1994 (see “Food Stamp Client Enrollment Assistance Demonstration Projects: Final Evaluation Report, July 1999”) and 2001 (see “Research Grants to Improve Food Stamp Program Access Through Partnerships and Technology: 2001 Program Evaluation Summary – September 2004”).

Economic Impact of Food Stamp Benefits

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/researchers/ers_reports.htm
www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/
www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/GeneralEconomy/linkages.htm

Links to studies about the economic benefits of food stamps. The research was conducted by USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS), which is USDA’s main source of economic information.

Impact of Food Assistance on Nutrition and Health

www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr19%2D3/
 A comprehensive review that compiles and synthesizes published research about the impact of domestic food assistance programs on participants’ nutrition and health outcomes. There are several volumes to the report.

United States Census Bureau

www.census.gov

Vast amounts of data on income and poverty levels, including data by county and State.

INFORMATION FOR RETAILERS

General FSP Information for Food Retailers

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/retailers/default.htm

Main source of information about the FSP for food retailers including information about how to become an authorized retailer, frequently asked questions, and tips for food retailers about outreach.

Food Stamp Notes

www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/retailers/information.htm

Periodic newsletter (click on food stamp mailer) for authorized retailers participating in the FSP.

NUTRITION EDUCATION

Food Stamp Nutrition Connection

www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/

Features resources related to food stamp nutrition education including lists of State and local food stamp nutrition education cooperators (“State Gates”).

Eat Smart. Play Hard.™

www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard/About/overview.html

FNS campaign to motivate children to be active and eat healthy. Features fun activities for kids and information for caregivers. Free materials available.

Nutrition Education Resources

www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/National_FSNE.html

Links to national food stamp nutrition education resources including guidance for developing an optional State nutrition education plan and submitting it for FNS approval.



FOOTNOTES FROM INTRODUCTION

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²Hanson, Kenneth, and Elise Golan (2002). Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures Across the U.S. Economy. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/fanrr26-6.pdf>. Note: The economic effect of increasing food stamp benefits was measured for the whole U.S. economy and may vary by location.

³Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs and the General Economy: Links to the General Economy and Agriculture (2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/GeneralEconomy/linkages.htm>. Note Even though recipients spend all food stamps on food, the food stamps allow them to shift some of their previous cash expenditures on food to alternative uses.

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Research Service, USDA, 2004. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr19%2D3/>.

⁹U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2003, FSP-04-CHAR, by Karen Cunnygham and Beth Brown. Project Officer, Kate Fink. Alexandria, VA: 2004. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/2003Characteristics.pdf>.

¹⁰Gleason, Phillip, Peter Schochet, and Robert Moffit (1998). The Dynamics of Food Stamp Program Participation in the Early 1990s. Alexandria, VA: U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/DYNAMICS.PDF>.

¹¹Rosenbaum, Dorothy and David Super (2005). The Food Stamp Program: Working Smarter for Working Families. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Available at <http://www.cbpp.org/3-15-05fa.htm>.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Gleason P, Rangarajan A, Olson C. Dietary Intake and Dietary Attitudes Among Food Stamp Participants and Other Low-Income Individuals. Report prepared for the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, September 2000. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/Nutrition-Education/Files/FSPDiet.pdf>.

¹⁴Obesity Costs States Billions in Medical Expenses. Press Release. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, January 21, 2004. http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/press/archive/state_obesity_1_2004.htm.

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Programs on Nutrition and Health, Volume 3, Literature Review. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr19%2D3/>.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2003, FSP-04-CHAR, by Karen Cunyngham and Beth Brown. Project Officer, Kate Fink. Alexandria, VA: 2004. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/2003Characteristics.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ibid.



NATIONAL & REGIONAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM OUTREACH AND MEDIA CONTACTS

NATIONAL	
National Headquarters 3101 Park Center Drive Alexandria, VA 22314	Laura Griffin <i>Food Stamp Outreach Coordinator</i> Laura.Griffin@fns.usda.gov
	Dawn Washington <i>Outreach Coalition Coordinator</i> Dawn.Washington@fns.usda.gov
	Pat Seward <i>FSP Media Contract Coordinator</i> Pat.Seward@fns.usda.gov
	National FSP Media Inquiries Call: 703-305-2286
NORTHEAST REGION (ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY):	
Northeast Regional Office 10 Causeway Street, Room 501 Boston, MA 02222-1069	Jane DiBiasio <i>Outreach Contact</i> Jane.DiBiasio@fns.usda.gov
	Charles DeJulius <i>Public Affairs Director</i> Charles.DeJulius@fns.usda.gov
MID-ATLANTIC REGION (PA, MD, DE, NJ, PR, VA, VI, WV):	
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office Mercer Corporate Park 300 Corporate Blvd. Robbinsville, NJ 08691-1598	Marian Wig <i>Outreach Contact</i> Marian.Wig@fns.usda.gov
	Margarita Maisterrena <i>Public Affairs Director</i> Margarita.Maisterrena@fns.usda.gov
MIDWEST REGION (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI):	
Midwest Regional Office 77 West Jackson Blvd., 20th floor Chicago, IL 60604-3507	Ann Eubank <i>Outreach Contact</i> Ann.Eubank@fns.usda.gov
	Lawrence Rudmann <i>Public Affairs Director</i> Lawrence.Rudmann@fns.usda.gov



SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE (AL, FL, GA, KY, MI, NC, SC, TN):

Southeast Regional Office
61 Forsyth St. SW, Room 8-T-36
Atlanta, GA 30303-3415

John Wiggins
Outreach Contact
John.Wiggins@fns.usda.gov

Karen Dean
Public Affairs Director
Karen.Dean@fns.usda.gov

MOUNTAIN PLAINS REGION (CO, IA, KS, MO, MT, NE, ND, SD, UT, WY):

Mountain Plains Regional Office
1244 Speer Blvd., Suite 903
Denver, CO 80204-3581

Elizabeth Kielian
Outreach Contact
Elizabeth.Kielian@fns.usda.gov

Craig Forman
Public Affairs Director
Craig.Forman@fns.usda.gov

SOUTHWEST REGION (AR, LA, TX, NM, OK):

Southwest Regional Office
1100 Commerce St., Room 5-C-30
Dallas, TX 75242-9800

Anne Snell
Outreach Contact
Anne.Snell@fns.usda.gov

Patricia Mancha
Public Affairs Director
Patricia.Mancha@fns.usda.gov

WESTERN REGION (AZ, CA, OR, WA, AK, HI, ID, NV, GUAM, MARIANA ISLANDS, AMER. SAMOA):

Western Regional Office
550 Kearny St., Rm 400
San Francisco, CA 94108-2518

Melissa Daigle
Outreach Contact
Melissa.Daigle@fns.usda.gov

Cordelia Fox
Public Affairs Director
Cordelia.Fox@fns.usda.gov



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INDIVIDUALS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ellen Vollinger, Food Research and Action Center, Washington, DC • Abby Hughes Holsclaw, National League of Cities, Washington, DC • Bill Bolling, Atlanta Community Food Bank, Atlanta, GA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniella Levine, Human Services Coalition of Dade County, Inc., Miami, FL • George Matics, Cardenas Markets, Inc., Ontario, CA • Rich Savner, Pathmark Stores, Inc., Carteret, NJ • Dennis Barrett, Hunger Fellow, 2005 • Laura Tatum, Hunger Fellow, 2005
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www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach.htm