American Public Human Services Association

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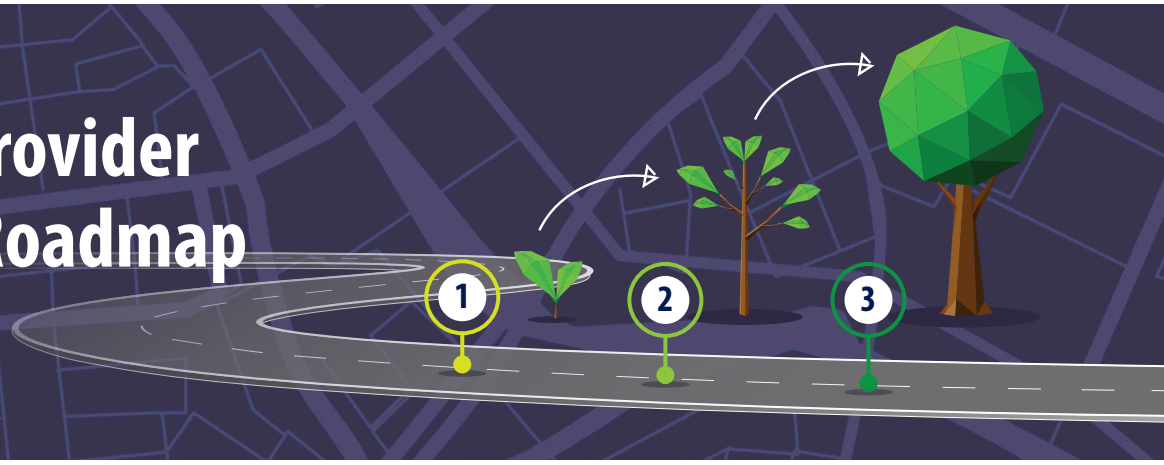
SNAP E&T Provider Readiness Roadmap
Part 2



Applying to Become a SNAP E&T Provider and Onboarding As a New Partner

This guide is the second in a three-part series designed to help potential third-party providers understand their readiness to become a provider, outline the steps to move forward in the process, and, if onboarded, to expand their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program. Part 1 is designed to provide a framework for the individual process of understanding the optimal SNAP E&T role for your program.

Part 2 of the Provider Readiness Roadmap lays out key steps for Community Action Agencies and community-based organizations to take in applying to SNAP E&T and once selected as a SNAP E&T provider, important areas of preparation for getting started. Read Part 1 Here.

Applying to Become a SNAP E&T Provider

Application

The provider application process will vary depending on your local SNAP E&T program. When selecting SNAP E&T third-party partners, some states are required to follow standard formal procurement policies and procedures whereas others take a less formal approach. Some SNAP E&T programs require applications to be completed during a specific time frame, while

This resource was developed with the expertise of Seattle Jobs Initiative. SJI helps organizations to build, grow, and optimize workforce, education, and public benefit programs. This includes working with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, more than 30 States as well as Counties and providers to implement and grow high-quality SNAP E&T programs. Learn more about how SJI can help you with SNAP E&T at https://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/consulting/

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others are more flexible and allow new providers to apply throughout the year. The following approaches are the most common methods states and counties use in the provider selection process:

- **Most Formal:** RFP/RFQ: this process can range from very formal to less formal.
- **Less Formal:** General application.
- **Least Formal:** Provider Survey: structured so the potential partner answers basic SNAP E&T alignment questions and probably provides a short narrative description of their planned services.

Whatever the method, application processes will typically ask for general information common to most funding solicitations as well as information relevant to SNAP E&T, including the following:

What E&T services do you plan to offer? Refer to the services identified through any internal feasibility assessments you have conducted as well as preliminary conversations with the SNAP E&T agency to determine how your services align with the services they offer in their SNAP E&T programs. Be sure to describe how you plan to provide case management in conjunction with those services. Also, describe the types of support services or participant reimbursements you plan to offer.

The people your organization serves. Describe specific characteristics or population groups you target, such as youth or reentry, and how many you anticipate will be SNAP eligible and not receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance.

The nonfederal fund sources you plan to have available to cover E&T expenses.

Your capacity. Be ready to describe your administrative infrastructure, experience managing funding streams, and your ability to collect fiscal and program data.

- **Be prepared to describe and potentially provide resumes for key staff** who will be involved in your SNAP E&T program, such as:
  - Fiscal or contract staff: highlighting their ability or capacity to track expenses and provide internal oversight and advice about compliance.
  - Program staff: highlighting their ability to effectively provide your planned E&T services such as case management, skills training, and career coaching.
  - Program leadership.

Initial SNAP E&T budget. Depending on the scope and size of the proposal, you may or may not be asked to submit a budget at this stage.

- If a budget is required, submit your budget on the specific budget template provided by the SNAP E&T agency. The budget will probably include:
  - Allowable SNAP E&T expenses, including personnel, operating costs, direct program expenses, and indirect or overhead costs.
  - Expenses are broken out by the SNAP E&T components you intend to offer.
  - Estimated number of participants to be served under each component.

Be sure to follow basic best practices for any proposal, including describing the need for this contract or program. Be specific about how your program is uniquely effective at meeting this need.

For providers applying under an intermediary or lead agency. **Some states contract with agencies that serve as intermediaries to administer SNAP E&T to third-party partners. Intermediaries could be workforce development boards, community-based organizations, or lead organizations that roll multiple SNAP E&T partnerships into one contract that goes to the state. If an intermediary is involved, the same guidelines will apply and will be important for the provider to consider while working closely with the lead agency.**

What Is Next If You Are Not Selected?

If your proposal or application is not selected and your organization is not invited to start a SNAP E&T contract, the SNAP E&T agency may or may not provide a reason for their decision. You are likely to have a chance to apply again in the future. Now is a good time to reach out to the SNAP E&T agency to request feedback to understand better why your proposal was not selected. Common reasons include:

- **Incomplete application or missing information.** Check to see if there was anything missing from your application or if you did not follow the steps or timeline. SNAP E&T programs are often faced with tight timelines as well and might not be able to accommodate late submissions or corrections.
- **Capacity.** It is possible that the SNAP E&T agency only has the capacity to add a minimal number of new providers. In this case, it can be helpful to inquire when the SNAP E&T agency anticipates adding more providers.
- **Alignment.** Ideally, any considerations about alignment, such as whether the SNAP E&T agency is interested in bringing on specific types of partners or is focusing on specific populations, will be worked out prior to the application process. If your organization is not selected, for this reason, it is a good opportunity to consider future opportunities and seek any feedback regarding how your program could be better aligned with the current goals and strategy of the SNAP agency.

Contracting

Often, the process for onboarding as a SNAP E&T partner will begin completely after the SNAP E&T agency's State Plan is approved and your contract is finalized. The level of guidance you receive in this process can vary based on your local program. It can be helpful if you are ready with specific questions or topic areas to discuss with your SNAP E&T agency, such as:

- The process for SNAP E&T referrals, especially how the SNAP E&T agency will want you to do reverse referrals (providers communicating with the SNAP agency to verify eligibility and request a referral into SNAP E&T).
- The process for eligibility verification. This will be included in the reverse referral process, but it also will be required to verify the eligibility of participants at the time of billing to ensure that all invoiced expenses are tied to eligible participants.
- The process for tracking SNAP E&T components.
- The process for invoicing.
- Expectations and process for data collection and reporting.

Ideally, your SNAP E&T agency will have a handbook or other written guidance for how these operations will take place—the level of guidance provided upfront will vary based on your location. If available, you can refer to your local SNAP E&T handbook. If a handbook is not available, seek other potential written guidance or follow up with the SNAP E&T agency to ensure that you are prepared to onboard. View the Provider Onboarding Checklist.

Once you have successfully onboarded, in the first program year, especially in the first few months, it is important to maintain good communication with the SNAP E&T agency to receive feedback and support to ensure that you are meeting program requirements, specifically in the following areas:

- **Making referrals correctly.** The SNAP E&T agency will provide the method and expectations for how to communicate to verify eligibility so that the SNAP E&T referral can occur. In the initial months of your SNAP E&T contract, it will be important to monitor this process to ensure that information is being transmitted accurately and responses regarding SNAP E&T referral status and eligibility verification are provided on time.
- **Tracking progress correctly (component enrollment information, job placement information).** Whether

this process is through the SNAP E&T agency's MIS or via shared spreadsheets, expect to get feedback and, potentially, requests for clarification regarding how this information is tracked, especially for how to accurately track component end dates and details about the exit, such as successful completion due to job placement, incomplete participation, or attrition. Expect some back-and-forth communication with the SNAP E&T agency to make sure you are on the same page about how this information is tracked.

- **Completing invoices properly.** This is often one of the most common areas where providers end up going back and forth with the SNAP E&T agency. It is common to make errors in how expenses have been tracked or whether billed expenses reflect budgets. It is important to engage with your fiscal staff to make sure they fully understand the expectations and process for invoicing. Utilize your lines of communication with the SNAP E&T agency, ask questions, and seek guidance when policies or expectations are unclear.
- **Meeting your performance goals, including enrollment or employment outcomes and spending.** Estimating your first-year budget and performance is often the most challenging because it is your best guess, and there are no other previous years from which to inform budgets and expected outcomes. It is helpful to track spending, SNAP E&T enrollments, and performance closely and to continue to maintain a dialog with the SNAP E&T agency. This way, you can take advantage of any opportunity to correct your course if needed. For example, if you projected lower enrollments and spending up front and you are on track to use up your budget before the end of the year, the SNAP E&T agency might consider amending your contract and increasing your budget. This can happen when states project to have funds left over from their full SNAP E&T budgets. Underspending by other providers or a plan to amend the State Plan may allow additional funds for your budget. At the very least, tracking your spending and performance closely will help you be able to strategically plan your contract for the upcoming year.

For more information and resources on SNAP E&T, please visit the SNAP E&T Third-Party Partnerships Resource Clearinghouse.

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Provider Onboarding Checklist

This checklist can be used by providers to help prepare for the SNAP E&T partner onboarding process. SNAP E&T administering agencies are likely to have a process in place to address most of these items, and many guidelines will be included in their provider handbooks—if they have one. Often onboarding will not occur until the SNAP E&T administering agency has finalized their annual SNAP E&T state plan and can finalize contracts with third-party partners.

For each of these items, check to see:

1. **If it is covered in a provider handbook.**
2. **If there is no handbook, is it covered in other written guidance offered by the SNAP E&T administering agency.**
3. **If unsure about written guidance, plan to inquire with the SNAP E&T administering agency about any items at the time of onboarding.**

- ☐ **Referral Process: How will the SNAP E&T agency handle referrals?**
  - ☐ **Reverse Referral:** Process for communication back to state agency to verify eligibility, refer to apply for SNAP, and initiate SNAP E&T enrollment.
  - ☐ **Direct Referrals:** Process for directing E&T referrals to provider, then a method for provider to initiate SNAP E&T enrollment.
- ☐ **Eligibility Verification**
  - ☐ What is the method for requesting eligibility verification?
    - ☐ Format
    - ☐ Means of communication (fax, email, MIS, etc.)
    - ☐ Turnaround time expectations (state agency and provider)
    - ☐ Points in time when this occurs (front end at enrollment; time of invoicing)
- ☐ **Employment Plans and Participant Assessments**
  - ☐ Determine the SNAP E&T administering agency's expectations for employment plans (e.g., Do they require use of a specific form or provide minimum criteria for your assessments?)
- ☐ **Client Files**
  - ☐ Understand what format is acceptable for client files (electronic or paper)
  - ☐ Understand what documents are required to be present in client files
- ☐ **Participant Reimbursements**
  - ☐ Understand the criteria for documenting participant reimbursements, including:
    - ☐ Specific forms needed for recording participant reimbursements that are issued
    - ☐ Receipts and other documents that verify the expenditure
- ☐ **Additional Contractual Compliance**
  - ☐ What other compliance is required in the contract, such as:
    - ☐ Civil Rights training
    - ☐ Nondisclosure/confidentiality
    - ☐ Mandatory reporting (if applicable)
    - ☐ Data security
    - ☐ Any other items
- ☐ **Invoicing**
  - ☐ Understand what documents you need to submit with invoice. The following are documents that you will probably need to provide with each invoice:
    - ☐ 50/50 certification—this certifies that your agency had nonfederal funds available at the time of SNAP E&T expenditures sufficient to cover those expenditures
    - ☐ Invoice form specific for the state or county
    - ☐ Other supporting documents (billing roster, participant reimbursement receipts, other documentation if needed)
- ☐ **Fiscal**
  - ☐ Guidelines for cost-allocation methodology
  - ☐ Guidelines for appropriate audit trail
- ☐ **Reporting Requirements:**
  - ☐ Understand expectations for reporting participant outcomes, including
    - ☐ Schedule for reporting
    - ☐ Method for submitting reports (spreadsheets, MIS, etc.)
    - ☐ Specific measures required for reporting