



# SNAP E&T Data Capture, Measurement & Reporting

POLICY BRIEF 7

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## Introduction

More than ever, States need to improve their capacity to collect and report high quality data for their SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs. Such forces as new federal reporting requirements, an expanded focus on program accountability, and a growing number of third-party partnerships all create a need for more and better SNAP E&T outcome data. This brief will address:

- Why States should collect and analyze data;
- What States must collect and what additional data they may find useful to collect;
- What resources are available to States to support data collection and reporting; and
- Examples of how States are capturing, measuring, and reporting data.

This policy brief does not cover use of labor market information in SNAP E&T programs as that is the subject of a previous brief.<sup>1</sup>

## Why Collect and Analyze Data?

SNAP E&T programs should track participant outcomes for two primary reasons:

### 1. To meet federal reporting requirements

The 2014 Agricultural Act modified the 2008 Food and Nutrition Act to add requirements around reporting on SNAP E&T participants. The March 26, 2016 interim final rule, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) Program Monitoring, Oversight and Reporting Measures, did the following:

- Established national outcome reporting measures;
- Required States to develop component-specific outcome measures;
- Added reporting measures for pledge States; and
- Provided FNS authority to require modifications if outcomes are inadequate.

## 2. To continuously improve and expand the program

Data on participant outcomes can be used to make data-driven decisions and communicate about how the program is working. Later in the brief we provide details of SNAP E&T national reporting measures and commonly used workforce development outcome metrics; below are a few illustrative examples of how data can answer the following types of questions that are useful for program management:

<p><b>How is the program working overall?</b></p>	<p><b>Outcome data might include—</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What percentage of participants completed each step in the program, and what percentage moved on to the next step (e.g., from referral to orientation, assessment, first activity, second activity, employment)? Such data can help show where attrition is occurring in the client flow and point toward processes or services that need improvement.</li> <li>• What percentage of SNAP E&amp;T participants, across all service components, became employed? How many are still working post-placement, e.g. six months, one year, or several years later?</li> <li>• What were hourly wages at placement for participants? Quarterly earnings over time? Wage gains?</li> <li>• What percentage of similar SNAP recipients received no E&amp;T services? Of that population, how many found jobs? Quarterly earnings over time?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are specific services producing expected results?</b></p>	<p><b>Outcome data for training, for example, might include—</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What percentage of participants enrolled in education or training?</li> <li>• What percentage completed interim steps, such as earning a high school equivalency diploma?</li> <li>• What percentage completed job training?</li> <li>• What percentage earned industry-recognized credentials such as a professional license?</li> <li>• What percentage were placed in jobs after completing training? Of those, what share were employed in their field of study?</li> </ul>

**What services pay off for which kinds of participants over time?**

Answering these kinds of questions will require States to tap into longitudinal data, such as wage records, and to disaggregate data by such variables as services received and demographic information.

**Outcome data might include—**

- Which of the services received show the largest earnings payoff in the short-run? Which paid off most in three years? Five years?
- Which subgroups—broken out by educational attainment, work experience, race, gender or other factors—benefitted most from which types of services in the short-run? In the long-run?

Data on SNAP E&T participant outcomes can help State agencies tell compelling stories about their programs, such as how individuals served by the program fare over time and whether this varies by participant or service characteristics. For example, Texas makes such data available online as easily digestible dashboards that can be customized to view certain programs, types of services within programs, local Workforce Development Areas, specific populations or cohorts and other categories, with three years of follow-up data available on employment and earnings. Longitudinal data like this is critical for understanding the payoff to education and training as the full impact of these services takes longer to become apparent than for quick employment services such as job search or job club. Being able to tell the story of how investments in skills pay off over time can help build support for E&T services among policymakers and practitioners, and attract the kinds of partners needed to grow an effective program.

States can also use SNAP E&T service and outcome data to make data-driven decisions about E&T partnerships and providers. Collecting and analyzing data with E&T education and training partners can help States make data-driven decisions about where to invest E&T funds. States can also use data to drive improvements in program quality. This can be especially important for managing and growing third-party partnerships.

For example, Oregon's Community College Consortium SNAP E&T 50-50 project worked with partners to identify outcome-based data elements that align with indicators of high quality career pathways, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance metrics and SNAP E&T outcome reporting measures. Their career pathway metrics include a range of outcomes such as basic skills gains and high school completion; attainment of occupational certificates and degrees and industry certifications; and, various types of job placements (regular employment, on-the-job training, internships, work/study, etc.). These metrics reflect incremental gains that are critical for demonstrating the progress that participants make over time. The metrics supplement—not replace—broader SNAP E&T metrics about participation, completion, employment and earnings.

## What Data Should States Collect?

Beginning in 2018, States must report data to USDA on their SNAP E&T programs. In addition to required measures established by USDA, States may also decide to collect and report on additional data. Below is a description of the national reporting measures, State reporting measures, and able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) measures for which States are responsible.

### National Reporting Measures

Federal rules establish five national SNAP E&T reporting measures for which all States must track and report annual data. By January 1st each year, States must submit data on the following:



The number and percent of current and former participants in **unsubsidized employment** during the **2nd quarter** after completion of participation in SNAP E&T.



The **median quarterly earnings** of current and former participants in unsubsidized employment during the **2nd quarter** after completion of participation in SNAP E&T.



The number and percent of current and former participants in **unsubsidized employment** during the **4th quarter** after completion of participation in SNAP E&T.



The number and percent of current and former participants who **completed a training, educational or work experience, or an on-the-job training component.**



The number and percent of current and former participants who:

- Are voluntary or mandatory participants;
- Have received a high school degree (or high school equivalency) prior to being provided with E&T services;
- Are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs);
- Speak English as a second language;
- Are male or female; or
- Are within each of the following age ranges: 16-17, 18-35, 36-49, 50-59, 60+.



In addition to reporting aggregate data on these measures, the first four measures must also be disaggregated by whether or not participants:

- Are voluntary or mandatory;
- Have received a high school degree (or high school equivalency) prior to being provided with E&T services; or
- Are ABAWDS.

### State Measures

Beyond the national reporting measures common to all States, States are also required to report on components unique to their SNAP E&T programs. States must establish outcome measures for each of their program components in their State E&T plan, which are approved by FNS annually. Data must be reported for each component that is expected to serve 100 participants or more in a fiscal year. States have broad flexibility to choose component measures useful for their own purposes; however, the Agricultural Act of 2014 suggested possible State component measures, such as employment, credential attainment, and skills gains.

### ABAWD Measures

Finally, States that pledge to serve all at-risk ABAWDs facing time limits (“pledge States”) are required to report a few additional measures, including:

#### Guidance for Tracking and Reporting on Required Measures

- A “participant” is an individual who is placed in and begins an E&T activity. An individual who attends an orientation and/or undergoes an assessment, but does not begin an additional E&T activity, is considered a participant.
- A SNAP E&T participant is considered to have “completed” participation when the individual has not received services for 90 consecutive days. If an individual receives services again after a 90 day break, this is considered a second period of participation and must be tracked separately.
- National measures for component completion are reported as duplicated counts, so if an individual completes education and on-the-job training, both activities would be counted.
- Participant characteristics are recorded at the time of initial enrollment.
- State measures on components are reported as unduplicated annual totals.



The monthly average number of individuals who are:

- At-risk ABAWDs;
- Offered a spot in a qualifying E&T activity or workfare program; and
- Participate in a qualifying E&T activity or workfare program.



A description of the types of employment and training programs offered to ABAWDs and their availability throughout the State.

## Commonly Used Workforce Program Metrics

Workforce development programs commonly use four types of metrics to measure progress and success. States might consider adopting some of these, either for their component-specific outcome measures, to more fully capture what their programs are achieving, or to gather outcome data to improve program planning and management.

### 1. Program completion and short-term employment and earnings

**Why?** The SNAP E&T national reporting measures are examples of these type of metrics, which typically track whether participants completed a program and their employment and earnings for the first year after completion. They are essential for answering basic questions about whether or not a State's program is accomplishing its goals. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) also includes these kinds of measures.

**How?** These outcomes can often be measured easily and inexpensively by matching SNAP E&T data with State Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage data. Twenty-eight States already have data matching agreements in place for workforce programs, and another 17 are making progress toward that goal, according to the Workforce Data Quality Campaign (WDQC).<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Intermediate- and long-term employment and earnings

**Why?** Employment and earnings outcomes can take time to materialize and grow substantially over time. Measuring these outcomes at intervals longer than one year allows States to more fully capture the effects of employment and training programs, especially services to boost skills and credentials.

**How?** As with short-term measures of employment and earnings, long-term measures can also be measured with State UI wage data.

### 3. Credential attainment

**Why?** Measuring credential attainment helps States understand the performance of education and training services, predict future earnings of participants, and determine which credentials pay off most for participants over time.

**How?** Credential attainment can be tracked by matching SNAP E&T data with State longitudinal education data or State administrative data for specific programs and systems, like adult education or community and technical colleges. The National Student Clearinghouse, which allows for tracking of postsecondary enrollment and completion across State lines and does so for certificates and degrees, provides another option. Industry-recognized credentials, like certifications, also have labor market value, but they may be harder to track.

### 4. Interim measures of education, training, and employment progress

**Why?** Depending on their past work experience and skill levels on entering E&T, some participants may need more education and training than others to qualify for jobs that lead to self-sufficiency. Interim measures of progress ensure that programs receive credit for helping participants make progress toward completing education and training and becoming employed during the period that they are enrolled in services.

**How?** Interim progress can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, States could measure progress for individuals with low basic skills or limited English proficiency enrolled in adult basic education by examining data providers typically already collect on skills gains on recognized tests. All community colleges and other postsecondary institutions have “satisfactory progress” criteria in place for student aid eligibility purposes; data on those same measures could be used to track interim progress for SNAP participants enrolled in postsecondary programs. Both WIOA and the Agricultural Act of 2014 include interim progress measures.

### Best Practices for Developing Data Metrics

- **Think about the use of data, then decide what to collect.**  
States should first think about how they will use data to improve program services, and then decide what to collect. They should ask how data collection will support their broader SNAP E&T program objectives.
- **Align with existing metrics from partners’ systems.**  
States should seek to align the SNAP E&T metrics with other metrics already being used by education and workforce partners in the State. This will reduce the reporting burden on providers and may also facilitate use of existing State data clearinghouses and longitudinal data systems.
- **Connect to existing data systems.**  
Connect to existing State data clearinghouses and longitudinal data systems for education and workforce services. In addition to the State workforce council, initiatives such as the Workforce Data Quality Campaign and the federal Department of Labor’s Workforce Data Quality Initiative are ready sources of information on each State’s efforts to collect and use workforce data, including the types of data already available.
- **Disaggregate results.**  
States should disaggregate results by participant characteristics and SNAP E&T component(s) for all metrics. This will help States determine which services work best for whom.
- **Create an outcome evaluation plan.**  
An Outcome Evaluation Plan describes a State’s overall SNAP E&T program objectives and how these will be supported by data tracking, reporting and analysis. It might also include the specific program outcomes that will be tracked, the infrastructure and resources that will be used and/or developed to track and evaluate data, and any relevant policies and procedures. This plan could be included as part of the State’s SNAP E&T Implementation Plan or Strategic Plan, or separately. The plan should be developed in collaboration with partners, such as State agencies and third-party partners, and updated throughout the life of the program.



## What Resources Are Available to States?

The following resources may be available to States to help them develop SNAP E&T data reporting systems and procedures:

**SNAP E&T 100 Percent Funds.** Given the importance of data for program success, States should consider repurposing a portion of their 100 percent funds to develop data reporting systems.

**Data from Other State Agencies.** As mentioned above, States may be able to cross-match SNAP E&T participant data with the State's Unemployment Insurance (UI) data, State data clearinghouses, and/or longitudinal data systems maintained by their State workforce boards and postsecondary education systems.

Descriptions of workforce data available in each State can be found through the [Workforce Data Quality Campaign](#) and the federal Department of Labor's [Workforce Data Quality Initiative](#). To support data sharing, States should consider developing partnerships early on with their State workforce, labor/employment security, and postsecondary education agencies, perhaps through a no-cost memorandum of understanding (MOU). Existing partnerships (e.g., a partnership to support TANF outcomes reporting) can be expanded to include SNAP E&T.

**Management Information System (MIS).** A State may already be operating an MIS that will allow for many participant outcomes to be tracked by its staff and/or by third-party partners using unique contractor codes and participant identifiers. The MIS may need to be adapted specifically for SNAP E&T. This can be supported by SNAP E&T 100 percent funds and by 50-50 funds.

**Data from Third-Party Partners.** For States operating SNAP E&T programs using third-party partnerships, outcomes data may be available directly from partners. Community colleges likely have data on a range of student achievement outcomes and may have an existing UI wage cross-match agreement in place that could be expanded to support SNAP E&T. In order to report outcomes to their funders, community-based organizations may have data on enrollment and completion of SNAP E&T activities, employment, and wages. States can require that this data be reported through third-party contracts.

### Examples of State Data Systems and Processes

In 2015, Tennessee replaced its manual system for reporting local SNAP E&T participant activity and outcomes with an automated system through its Virtual One Stop (VOS) System on the Jobs4TN portal. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development's VOS system includes Adult Education, WIOA Title I, and the Job Service, which handles local E&T processes. VOS also interfaces with the MIS for the Department of Human Services. Local E&T staff input data into VOS to record such activity as referral and entry into program components, referrals to jobs, and employment.

VOS allows staff to view and update SNAP agency referrals to E&T, generate appointment letters, log case management activities, enroll individuals in E&T components, and record outcomes. Other State and local agency partners can also access data in VOS to facilitate referrals, view individuals' activities across systems, and reduce data entry burdens. Third-party partners cannot access the system directly but can work with Job Service staff to record activity in it. VOS is able to generate a variety of reports for local and State program management and reporting. At the State level several data sharing MOU's are in place to help track E&T activity and outcomes with other Tennessee State agencies (such as P-20 education and the Department of Human Services) and with numerous other States (to access wage data through the Wage Records Interstate System (WRIS)).

Missouri has adapted GeoSol software to create a new MIS called MoJobs, an integrated MIS for all of the programs included in its combined WIOA State plan: SkillUP (SNAP E&T) and WIOA programs. The State seeks to use MoJobs to ease data entry, streamline procedures for following WIOA regulations, allow for integrated case management, and generate static and ad hoc reports. Like Tennessee's VOS, it is web-based and user-friendly. Staff can use MoJobs to do intake, schedule appointments, track case management, enroll participants in services, track participant expenditures, and track activities and outcomes.



### **Working with State Unemployment Insurance Agencies**

Federal regulations require State Unemployment Insurance (UI) agencies to disclose information that can be used to determine program eligibility to certain State agencies, including SNAP agencies. Further, regulations allow the use of UI wage records for the purposes of outcome reporting. State SNAP agencies should have a data sharing agreement in place with State UI agencies to obtain this kind of data. This does not cover data sharing for SNAP E&T outcome reporting purposes. To obtain this data, SNAP agencies will have to either set up a new agreement or amend the existing agreement. If the SNAP agency is one of multiple State agencies party to the agreement, then the SNAP agency will probably have to set up a new agreement with the UI agency to access data for outcome reporting. However, if the UI agency has an individual agreement with the SNAP agency, then the agreement can simply be amended for outcome reporting purposes.

### **Conclusion**

States that improve their SNAP E&T data collection and reporting capacity will find they are better able to meet new federal reporting requirements and to expand and improve the program over time. Stronger data capacity will allow them to better make data-driven decisions—such as which services and third-party partnerships are most effective for which individuals—and to tell compelling stories about the difference SNAP E&T makes in the lives of its participants. The experiences of other workforce development programs provide useful insights into what kinds of metrics to focus on and the data available for tracking them. States have a number of resources available to them for strengthening their data capacity, including building on the work of other SNAP E&T State agencies, existing MIS systems in their own States, and data from third party partners.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Building an Employer-Driven SNAP E&T Program by Utilizing Labor Market Information. U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 2017. [https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2017-04/LMI%20Brief\\_FINAL\\_508.pdf](https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2017-04/LMI%20Brief_FINAL_508.pdf)
- 2 2016: Mastering the Blueprint. November 2016. Washington, DC: Workforce Data Quality Campaign.



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