Engaging Special Populations

Engaging Special Populations

Cultural Competency

Find practical explanations as to the importance of effective SNAP outreach across cultures. This section also includes tips and tools for getting to know those in your community as well as resources for working effectively with minority media.

Trusted Messengers

Explores the role of community health workers, promotoras, and other trusted messengers, and how they can be used to help spread the word about SNAP.

Senior Outreach

Whether you are doing outreach to Baby Boomers or the Silent Generation, seniors are a priority audience. This section will build your understanding of this demographic as well as provide guidance on how to customize events and outreach for seniors.

Cultural Competency

Section I. The Right Thing: The Importance of Effective SNAP 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 SNAP 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 SNAP.

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 cultural competence important for snap 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 SNAP benefits 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 SNAP 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 SNAP.
- Only 30 percent of the elderly who are eligible for SNAP 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 SNAP 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 SNAP.

SNAP 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 SNAP

Myth
"I work every day. SNAP benefits are for people who are unemployed or who can't work."

Fact
Many SNAP 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 SNAP benefits."

Fact
Most grocery store chains and even some small specialty or "corner" stores and farmers markets accept SNAP benefits. What's most important is that there are very few foods that you cannot purchase with SNAP benefits; 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 SNAP benefits."

Fact
SNAP is a nutrition assistance program, which is not the same as welfare. Participants do not have to receive welfare to be eligible for SNAP benefits.

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 SNAP 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.

Why is a needs assessment an important part of snap 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 SNAP benefits. It allows for a more indepth 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 SNAP outreach?
- Are we reaching out to the neediest groups?
- Which organizations in our community are conducting SNAP outreach, what services do they provide, and how are these services funded?
- Do various groups understand who is eligible for SNAP benefits?
- 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 SNAP 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 SNAP benefits.
- 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 Identify The Community

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 SNAP agency and your city's Web site.

How To Identify the Community You Want To Reach

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

Other sources include:

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

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

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

Step 3 Draft Questions

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 maybe tailored to meet local needs, the following list of questions can act as a guide.

Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions

Could this happen at your organization?

Ms. G. speaks very little English. She knows she could qualify for social services, such as SNAP 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 could 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.

Sample Questions for a Needs Assessment

- Which group(s) are you most interested in reaching and why?
- How many SNAP 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)?
- Are there any linguistic or cultural barriers that prevent individuals from participating in SNAP?
- What community resources are available to help minimize these barriers?
- What is happening with your outreach efforts vs. what you would like to happen?
- What groups are already successfully reaching the population you want to access?
- Which of their initiatives have been particularly effective and why?
- Where does the majority of the target population live? Are they clustered in one area or spread out?
- What local organizations and individuals have the greatest influence with the population?
- Do the grocers/farmers markets they patronize accept SNAP benefits? Are they served by public transportation?
- Is public transportation easily accessible in their community? Do public transportation routes reach the local SNAP office and grocery stores? If no, how do people access SNAP and grocery stores?
- 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?
- What media outlets does this group prefer?
- Is the "word on the street" about SNAP positive or negative? What are the positives and negatives?
- What types of partnerships would help achieve the outreach objectives?
- 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?
- What outreach activities might motivate your audiences to seek more information?
- How can media and community channels be used most effectively?
- Are there any other barriers that prevent potentially eligible individuals of this community from enrolling in SNAP? What are the barriers? What can your organization do to help eliminate the barriers?

Step 4 Identify Who 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 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 SNAP 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 SNAP 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 to Collect Info

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.

Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions

Could this happen at your organization?

Mr. M. is an independent, 23-year-old young man with a hearing impairment who uses sign language. He also participates in SNAP. 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 SNAP office, because staff cannot communicate with him. Recently, he had an appointment at a SNAP 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. M 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. M to get the information he needed.

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 SNAP, as well as resources, barriers, and possible solutions. With current SNAP 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 SNAP, 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 SNAP outreach.

Free or Low-Cost Sources of Information

- The Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Research, Nutrition, and Analysis (*http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/research.htm*)
- Local SNAP office or State SNAP 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
- 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

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 SNAP 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 SNAP prescreenings 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.

Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions

Could this happen at your organization?

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 SNAP 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 SNAP benefits. Although Ms. B finished her appointment, she left feeling insulted. She could not believe that anyone, especially a caseworker, would stereotype the way SNAP 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 judgments about people based on outward appearance, or even a few moments of conversation. The USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs, including SNAP 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 federall mandated SNAP policy (*www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/policy.htm*)

How do i identify community partners?

Step 1 Assess The Gaps

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, SNAP 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 SNAP 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 SNAP Outreach Toolkit.

Maintaining Relationships Diverse Partners

- Share information and resources that could support one another's efforts.
- Recognize and respect cultural differences in expressing opinions and in the decision making 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 SNAP participant representing each of the diverse communities you want to reach.

How do i reach out to community partners?

Send a letter to potential partners to introduce yourself and your program. 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 follow up 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.

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 decision making 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 SNAP benefits 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.

Section IV. The Right Materials for Diverse Audiences

How are materials important in SNAP 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 SNAP information–from forms and brochures, to fliers 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/snap/outreach/translations.htm. Also, be sure to check out your local SNAP 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 money to produce and distribute them?

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 SNAP 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 SNAP benefits 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 SNAP 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.

Stories of Culturally Incompetent Interactions

Could this happen at your organization?

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 SNAP 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 SNAP.

Why is it important to use minority media?

Minority media are another trusted messenger for reaching diverse audiences about SNAP. 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.

Step 1 Identify Media Outlets

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

Step 2 Know 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

Decide how best to present your story–in a press release or letter. For examples of both, look at the Media Outreach and Media Relations section of this toolkit.

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.

Tools & Tips

Tips for Success When Working With Minority Media

- Use statistics about SNAP that are relevant to your target audience.
- Be prepared with SNAP 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 spokespeople, including community leaders and trusted people such as religious leaders. Don't forget about the director of your local SNAP office.
- Include tips and educational information about how to use the program

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 SNAP. Outreach efforts can be undone in a matter of seconds with a negative encounter at the first point of contact with SNAP. 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

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 SNAP application process so they can relay this information to their constituents.

Tips for Communicating With Clients & 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/snap/outreach/translations.htm, which lists, in 36 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 decision maker. Find out who the influential parties are and how they make decisions. It may be important to ask, "Do you want to discuss SNAP 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 SNAP. 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 SNAP. 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 SNAP booth at a citywide festival and asks where in her community she can find out more about applying for SNAP. 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.

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.

SNAP 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 email. 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 SNAP, 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 may 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)

Kernels of Wisdom

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.

AbelardoMogica,PhilippineMabuhayNews(NationalCity)

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)

Kernels of Wisdom: 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

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

Kernels of Wisdom: Partnerships

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

Trusted Messengers

Enlisting Community Health Workers and Other Trusted Messengers in SNAP Outreach

This chapter introduces community- and faith-based organizations to a valuable community resource: Community Health Workers (CHWs) who are those trusted messengers in the community who effectively communicate with our target audience. Also included in this chapter is a step-by-step guide on how to do SNAP outreach using CHWs and tips to secure funding for your project.

Who are CHWs?

CHWs are individuals who are trusted members of their communities. They can help with your organization's outreach efforts. Depending on where you reside, CHWs may be known as trusted messengers, barefoot doctors, health promoters, health agents, village health workers, public benefits coordinators, aging service coordinators, or promotores/promotoras (typically used among Spanish-speaking audiences). For the purposes of this chapter, "community health workers" or "CHWs" will refer to all trained and trusted messengers including those individuals known only as volunteers.

CHWs often act as connectors between community residents and social service systems, and some may be trained as paraprofessionals to provide limited health care. They typically serve low-income populations and are either volunteers or receive a small stipend for their services through community-based organizations. CHWs usually obtain train-the-trainer instruction through community organizations or health clinics.

What types of services do CHWs provide?

A CHW can perform multiprogram outreach and help educate community residents about various programs such as SNAP. Individuals and families often are not aware of all of the programs offered in their communities or may be confused about program requirements or intimidated about applying. CHWs can help provide accurate information to the people they live among.

A CHW can also offer interpretation and translation services, help people receive care they need, and provide culturally appropriate health and nutrition materials and information.

Why is it important to enlist CHWs in SNAP outreach efforts?

Because CHWs help bridge social and cultural barriers between community members and health or social service systems, they can be especially effective in conducting outreach to low-income, minority, and urban and rural communities.

Tools & Tips

When considering a CHW, think of a trusted member of the community who:

- Understands the needs of the community
- Helps educate hard-to-reach populations about various programs
- Can link SNAP offices with hard-to-reach populations
- Knows how to reach community members and is familiar with where they gather
- Provides information and conducts culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach

If my organization's CHWs expand their outreach efforts to include SNAP, how do I involve my local SNAP office with our project?

Begin by making an appointment with the local office to discuss your project. State or local SNAP representatives should be able to provide you with SNAP data showing areas with low participation. They can also tell you what other organizations may be doing and where they could use your help. They can also let you know if any community organizations are conducting outreach through the State outreach plan.

For the SNAP office to be of assistance, it's important that they understand your project. It is also important to establish a point of contact at the local office who can help develop your project. As with any project, it will operate more efficiently if protocols and procedures are established and followed.

Of course, the amount of local office involvement will depend on what activities your CHWs will be performing. The more complex the activities (e.g., filling out application forms or prescreening for eligibility), the more involved the local office may want to be. If your project will have CHWs filling out application forms, they need to understand the questions on the form as well as the process to submit completed applications.

How do I identify and locate CHW volunteers?

You may wish to talk to other community partners such as faith-based organizations and grassroots groups such as community service organizations about their volunteer networks. Ask them to help identify people that the community turns to for information. Other sources of volunteers might be national organizations such as Area Agencies on Aging that have local chapters. Contact them or check their Web sites to find out more about their volunteer networks at the local level.

How do I determine which CHW outreach activities might be right for my community?

A community needs assessment can help you learn about unmet needs, identify available resources, meet new partners, and find good opportunities to collaborate on projects. You may be able to work with other community groups to conduct the assessment.

What do I do if other groups are performing the SNAP outreach activities that I would like to do?

Talk to the groups who are conducting SNAP outreach in your community. Ask if your organization can help with their existing outreach efforts. If your community has not done a needs assessment, suggest it.

If you find that existing outreach efforts already cover an area that you had targeted or duplicate what you are planning, you may decide to work in a different part of your county or State or take on other aspects of outreach that complement existing efforts.

Recipe for Success

"Promotoras have a natural ability to relate and speak to the people with whom they share a common neighborhood. Trust is the basis for their successful and efficient community labor."

Maria Lemus, Executive Director
Vision y Compromiso

Tools & Tips

When coordinating with other groups or volunteer networks, consider using a map to assign separate areas in a community for SNAP outreach efforts.

What reporting process should I set up with CHWs during the outreach project?

It will depend on your project. With any project, if information is being collected, it is important to develop appropriate documents and procedures. Documents that must be completed by CHWs should be developed prior to training and explained at your training session.

During initial training, ensure that CHWs have a good understanding of their role in the project, what documents they need to maintain, and the reasons why. Outreach strategies may vary from county to county, so you may need to customize your reporting documents.

Are there templates that I can use?

Yes, there are templates you can use to help facilitate your train-the-trainer session. You can find them under the main toolkit Web site page.

Templates include:

- Sample curriculum
- SNAP verification check list
- English-language card with SNAP eligibility information
- Spanish-language card with SNAP eligibility information
- "Release of Information" form
- Monthly reporting template to report progress or to help with project evaluation
- Certificate for completion of training
- Budget template

What is a good way to train CHW volunteers?

A train-the-trainer model is an effective way to teach processes, procedures, and expectations to your volunteers. In this model, you can start by locating and training 5 to 10 people who show leadership skills, and they in turn train others.

Since CHWs may have preferences on what types of SNAP outreach activities they will perform, you must decide prior to screening them whether you will allow some flexibility.

After lead CHWs have been trained, what should my next steps be?

To strengthen and expand your volunteer network of CHWs, lead CHWs should recruit additional trusted messengers who are willing to do SNAP outreach. The things that volunteers are willing to do may vary for a number of reasons, such as available time or willingness to ask personal questions about a household's income or assets.

What are some activities lead CHWs can perform?

In order to have a number of CHWs involved with your project, it is important to negotiate each CHWs role. To get you started with ideas, some activities include:

- Find and train other CHWs to assist with outreach.
- Coordinate information sessions with their fellow CHWs, community leaders, and volunteers to further disseminate information about SNAP among the target population.
- Report back to your organization about efforts to obtain new volunteers.
- Plan and schedule trainings for new CHWs and refresher training, as needed.
- Maintain a database of trained volunteers, what work they are trained to perform, and time spent on project work.
- Compile information to evaluate projects.
- Respond to policy questions or coordinate them with designated individuals at local SNAP offices.
- Conduct outreach to potential clients and make any necessary referrals.

How can my organization promote my outreach project?

Local talk show hosts welcome community news, especially if it is a public service. Utilize radio or television community events shows; advertise in community newspapers, church bulletins, fliers, and brochures. You may also ask other organizations to include information in their newsletters, on Web sites, or in their brochures. To get organizations to use your message to promote your project, develop talking points. These can also be used for radio announcements, inserted into speeches, or provided to individuals such as pastors or business leaders who may be discussing your project.

If you have a funding source, you may wish to purchase advertising. If there is no funding for paid advertising, public service messages can help spread the word.

Planning and Implementation of Your Project

Are you ready to enlist CHWs in your program's community outreach efforts? If so, read through the following 10-step guide on developing a SNAP outreach project.

Step 1 Describe your project.

Take time to decide what activities will take place. You can start by expanding existing activities. You can also include new activities such as SNAP prescreening.

If you plan to obtain funding, you should include local data to show the need for this project. It is important to present your business case to potential funders.

As you meet with others, your project description will probably change.

Tools & Tips

The time required to develop your project will depend on the complexity of your activities and funding sources. For example, if you need to obtain funding for stipends, travel, or other expenses, develop your timeline with this in mind.

Step 2 Meet with SNAP offices.

Once you have a general idea of your project, contact your local SNAP representatives to schedule a meeting. To find your local SNAP office, please visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/map.htm. Be prepared to discuss your plans and answer questions. You may wish to include other partners involved with your project in this meeting. If they are not able to join you, you may want to present letters of support.

Below are some questions that you may wish to ask your local or State SNAP office, depending on the nature of your project:

- Has your office participated in the development of a community needs assessment? If yes, can I obtain a copy or speak with someone who worked on the needs assessment?
- Are there any organizations receiving funding through your State outreach or nutrition education plans? If yes, what services are they performing and do you have contact information?
- How could our project complement current SNAP outreach activities conducted by your office or other outreach organizations?
- Have other organizations or volunteer networks contacted your office? Are you currently working with other organizations? If yes, how does their project fit in with what my organization is proposing? Can you share your experiences working with organizations like mine – what worked or didn't work on these projects?
- Are you aware of any organizations that might be interested in helping us with this project?
- What challenges do you face when working with our community?
- Can you provide data that highlight the greatest areas of need in the community? Can you identify areas that need additional outreach efforts?
- Would a SNAP representative be willing to be a primary contact for our program's outreach efforts?
- Would you be able to provide training to our outreach workers on SNAP requirements and procedures?

Tools & Tips

Maintain a close partnership with your local SNAP office. Your SNAP office is a key partner to the success of your project. Assure your SNAP contact that you will keep him or her posted and updated during the development and implementation of your project and training. Exchange contact information.

- Will you be able to provide training materials/modules/lesson plans for our use in training outreach workers (such as those you use for your own workers)?
- What local materials do you have that my organization can use? Can you provide us with a quantity of these materials or, if not, do you have a sample we might use to create our own materials?
- Do you maintain a list of volunteers or know of any organizations that use volunteers?
- Can you identify trusted spokespersons in the community that may be able to help with our project?
- Can your office help collect data to use for evaluation by tracking number of calls after an event, number of applications filed, number approved, or number denied?

Tools & Tips

Resolving project issues is important to the success of any partnership. Make sure to have steps in place to identify and correct problems, such as if a CHW is not correctly filling out a SNAP application form. Let your SNAP contact know how the problem was resolved. As projects evolve, problems often occur and procedures may need to be revised.

Communication
Keep each other informed of project changes, SNAP events that may increase calls or visits to the local office, and lessons learned. Flexibility is a must!

Step 3 Establish a staffing base.

Contact nonprofit organizations in your local community to identify CHWs who can be recruited and trained for SNAP outreach. Here are some community action areas where you might find a diversified group of CHWs:

- Education (preschools, English Language Learners programs, school boards)
- Health (community clinics, hospitals, school nurses)
- Leadership (community-based organizations and labor groups)
- Housing (neighborhood associations)
- Area Agencies on Aging (community-based organizations)

Tools & Tips

Many national organizations have local chapters throughout the country. Contact these national organizations to find their local chapter to ask about their local volunteer networks. A sample list of national organizations can be found on page 11 of this chapter.

Step 4 Materials and meetings.

Materials designed to capture the attention of potential CHWs can be distributed at various offices, meetings, or conferences. Be sure to provide contact information and explain the need for your project (business case), and various roles individuals and groups can play.

After any meeting, follow up with a letter thanking those who participated and explain next steps. A next step may be to schedule one-on-one meetings with interested CHWs.

Step 5 Training and approvals.

After you have prepared your curriculum, develop your training materials based on the activities that CHWs will be performing. Make sure you develop them around local and State policies. States differ in how they run their programs and these differences can affect how eligibility is calculated. SNAP offices may also be willing to share training materials or prescreening tools used to train their own employees and may be willing to participate in your training sessions.

Your training materials should include written project procedures, such as:

- How to submit signed and dated applications to the SNAP office
- How to obtain SNAP policy clarifications
- How to communicate lessons learned on what is working and not working
- What data must be collected and reported for the project evaluation

Before you begin training, ask your local SNAP office to look over your curriculum and SNAP materials. Other participating partners may also want an opportunity to provide feedback on materials. If your local office makes any changes to your materials, make sure you understand why the changes were made.

Tools & Tips

If you want your project to be successful, adequate training must be provided to outreach providers. Because of the complexity of SNAP regulations, miscalculating a benefit amount during a prescreening can make the certification interview more challenging for the eligibility worker who must explain the discrepancy to the client who trusted you to provide correct information.

When possible, use State/local SNAP information and training materials because they are more precise. This means less development and preparation time, which can cut project costs.

You may wish to work with your local office and partners to establish a formalized training program for CHWs. Some States, like Texas, offer a certification program through colleges.

Step 6 Conduct training sessions.

Train CHWs to become qualified SNAP outreach providers. Since not all CHWs will speak English, some training will need to occur in their native language. To help them, make sure bilingual partners who understand the material are present at your training sessions. It is also important to have your local SNAP contact present for SNAP eligibility discussions. That way, the contact can respond to technical questions about eligibility requirements and the application process.

Your training sessions might include:

- Basic information about SNAP
- Clarifying the myths surrounding SNAP benefits and the process
- Emphasizing nutrition benefits of SNAP
- Basic interviewing strategies
- Information and practice on conducting an eligibility prescreening
- How to fill out the SNAP application form; practice sessions to understand what questions mean
- Verification documents required for application
- Outreach strategies that work
- Outlining specific procedures to submit completed (signed and dated by applicant) SNAP application forms
- Discussion of who will handle policy and procedural questions
- Reporting requirements, including information and data that need to be reported for project evaluation

Tools & Tips

Remember CHWs know their communities. Focus on getting their feedback about community outreach ideas that are practical, acceptable to their audience, simple, and meaningful.

Refine and modify the curriculum as needed after the train-the-trainer sessions. Lessons learned can strengthen your presentation and better prepare your audience.

Providing on-the-job training will strengthen and add credibility to your project. Assign a mentor to work with CHWs for a certain number of hours before awarding the certificate. This will demonstrate to your local office that your CHWs have the skills required to do the job.

Participants attending training should receive a packet of information to reinforce what they learned. The packet might include:

- A binder or folder containing the curriculum, PowerPoint presentation(s), procedures, and reporting materials
- Blank SNAP application forms for training purposes, if available
- Web site locations; this is especially important if applications are filed electronically
- An electronic disk containing the PowerPoint presentation and curriculum

Step 7 Award training certificates.

Upon successful completion of the training program, CHWs should receive a certificate.

Step 8 Provide resources.

When CHWs successfully complete training, provide them with appropriate resources and tools for SNAP community outreach. Some items you may wish to provide are:

- Presentation cards/name tags to identify them as CHWs from your organization
- Office supplies such as clips, staplers, staples, pens, clip boards, etc.
- A binder with contact information, PowerPoint presentation, SNAP application form or Web site location for an online application; supporting information on how to fill out the application form; reporting forms; and instructions for filing or following up on submitted applications.
- "Release of Information" documents. CHWs will provide this document to local SNAP offices showing that the client authorizes the worker to disclose such information as case status and reasons for processing delays or denials.
- Verification envelopes. Verification envelopes list the documents applicants need to obtain in order to get certified for SNAP benefits. Since some documents like rent receipts can easily get lost, the envelope is a good place to store materials and keep them organized.
- Resources available for the project such as flip charts, handouts, or chalk or white boards. Will laptop computers be loaned out? If yes, CHWs may need to sign them out.

Tools & Tips

Establish a database of trained volunteers. This enables local SNAP workers to contact CHWs when applicants need their assistance.

Partnerships benefit everyone.
Local SNAP workers benefit from the assistance provided by CHWs, CHWs benefit because their clients are receiving nutrition assistance, and applicants benefit by receiving excellent customer service.

Step 9 Publicize the project.

People in your community need to know who you are, what you plan to do, and how to contact you. Can these individuals be directed to a toll-free number or Web site address? Ask partners if you can obtain copies of their materials to which you might add a sticker with additional information on your project. Use your community contacts such as radio or television celebrities. Check out the media section of this toolkit for other ideas.

Step 10 Evaluate the Project.

Find out what is effective in your project. Your budget and activities will determine what evaluation techniques might be needed. See the evaluation section of this toolkit for ideas on how to measure success.

Quick Guide To Prepare a Plan for Funding

A well-written plan can provide the basis for funding requests as well as for any nonmonetary support you are seeking. If your organization intends to request funding from a foundation or other sources, the following are some items you might want to include. These will give a potential funder a clear understanding on how your organization will spend its dollars. These topics should also be covered when seeking partnerships, collaborations, and nonmonetary support.

- Project description. Explain who you are targeting and why this project is needed, supporting your description with data. Explain the outreach activities that will be conducted and where these will occur (e.g., schools, homes, clinics, etc.). Note the locality of your planned activities. Describe any current efforts and how the new activities will fit in.
- Training. Describe the training needed and frequency of training. For example: "Training will be conducted as needed to update CHWs on new policies, and periodic training will occur every 3 months for new volunteers." State what role the SNAP local agency might have in the training.
- Description of roles and responsibilities. Describe all positions and identify those that will be funded under your project. Document if some CHWs will be donating their time to the project. Also, identify the person with management oversight of your project, and who will resolve issues or disputes. Identify who will screen, select, supervise, train, schedule, and provide recognition for volunteers and other staff. Explain whether volunteers will receive any reimbursements for travel, supplies, etc.
- Partnerships. Describe existing partnerships and how they fit in with your project. You may also want to describe efforts to expand your partnership base. If you are conducting a SNAP project, discuss your partnership with your local office.
- Publicity. Describe how you will publicize your project. If there are costs for printing or paid advertising, be sure to include them in your budget.
- Evaluation of activities. Describe the information you will collect and use to evaluate the project, such as number of project applications submitted, approved, or denied. Explain how this information will be collected and who will collect it. Will it be a paid consultant, a volunteer from a local college or university, or an employee from your organization? Describe the local SNAP office's role in data collection, if any.
- Project organization. Describe how the project fits in with your existing organization. A good way to do this is to modify your group's organization chart to include your project. Work flow may be important to some funders.
- Time table or task table. It should show activities, start and end dates, and person who is responsible for each activity.
- Funding sources. Mention the source of any funding for other aspects of your project, and what that funding covers. Identify what the new funding you are seeking will cover. You want to assure the funder that its resources will be used to pay for new, as yet unfunded activities.
- Budget and budget description. If you are requesting funding, you should develop your budget. You should also explain how you arrived at the figures by providing a list of assumptions. Funders want confirmation that dollars provided for your project are used for that project.

Tools & Tips

If you are applying for a grant, carefully read through the grant request to make sure you understand the requirements. Submit questions as directed, and follow the instructions. If there are evaluation criteria, be sure to adequately explain how you will meet each criterion. Allow yourself adequate time to put the package together.

It's always a good idea to let someone proof your proposal to make sure you covered everything and that there are no grammar errors or typos.

List of National Organizations for Possible Partners

African American

100 Black Men of America

National Association for Advancement of Colored People

National Association of Black Social Workers

National Council of Negro Women, Inc.

National Urban League

United Negro College Fund

Asian American

Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, Inc.

Chinese American Citizens Alliance

National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies

National Korean American Service & Education Consortium

National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development

Hispanic

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

League of United Latin American Citizens

Labor Council of Latin American Advancement

National Alliance for Hispanic Health

National Council of La Raza

National Hispanic Council on Aging

Native American

National Congress of American Indians

National Council of Urban Indian Health

National Indian Child Welfare Association

National Indian Council on Aging

National Indian Education Association

National Indian Health Board

Rural

National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health

National Rural Funders Collaborative

National Rural Health Association

National Rural Housing Coalition

Rural Community College Alliance

The National Rural Network

Seniors

AARP Foundation

Meals on Wheels Association of America

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

National Council on Aging

State Health Insurance Programs (SHIP)

SNAP Document Verification Checklist Template

Please consult with your local or State office before finalizing and using this checklist. It is important to find out if the State has an existing document that you can use. If not, work with your State to ensure that you are gathering the information they need. Your form should always state that a case worker may ask for additional documents. You may also want to mention that it is possible for the same document to serve for more than one category, for example, a driver's license can verify identity and address.

SNAP Document Verification Checklist Template

SNAP Document Verification Checklist

To verify your identity

- Driver's license
- School or work identification
- Medical insurance identification
- Voter's registration card
- Birth certificate

To verify your address

- Library card showing address
- Voter's registration card
- Utility bills
- Rent or mortgage receipts showing address
- Correspondence sent to stated address

To verify your income
(Present Document For Each Income Source)

- Check stubs *(Confirm number required with local office)*
- Employer statement (if you get paid in cash or if you do not have your check stubs)
- Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or Veteran's Benefits
- Other Retirement or Disability Benefits
- Alimony
- Child support agreement
- Unemployment compensation
- Self-employment income (Includes rental income and freelance work; *check to see what form local office is using or provide tax returns*)
- Other, please specify.

To verify your immigration status

- Immigration and Naturalization Documents (These are not required if you are not eligible for SNAP and you are only applying for your children who were born in the United States.)

To verify your resources

- Bank accounts, savings accounts, and/or CD's
- Stock Shares or bonds
- Proof of rental properties
- Other, please specify.

To verify your expenses

- Rent or mortgage payments
- Property taxes
- Insurance on property
- Utilities receipts (gas, water, electricity, etc.)
- Child care costs
- Income summary if child support is deducted from wages or income
- Other, please specify

Medical expenses deduction (only for households of elderly, age 60 or older, or disabled persons) for expenses not covered by insurance

- Summary of provided services such as doctor or hospital visits
- Detailed receipts showing unreimbursed medical expenses
- Identification from the Medical Assistance Program for persons 65 and older (Medicare) that shows Plan "B" coverage
- Prescription pill bottles showing cost on label or printout
- Medical payment agreement
- Invoices or receipts for medical equipment (including the rental cost)
- Receipts for transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment
- Other, please specify

Senior Outreach

Section I: Understanding Why Seniors Are a Critical Audience

Seniors reflect the diversity of America—age, income, race, ethnicity, and lifestyle. It's important, however, to recognize that this label refers to a group whose ages span more than 30 years. "The Silent Generation," the oldest members of the group, was born between 1925 and 1945. Many of the younger seniors, commonly known as Baby Boomers, were born between 1946 and 1964. Both groups are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but in terms of experiences and outlook, they're generations apart, and therefore need to be approached in different ways.

It's fair to say that many seniors expected their "golden years" to be just that... golden. But the retirement years have not been trouble-free for all—some simply can't make ends meet. Millions of seniors are living in poverty or are facing financial hardship because of high medical costs and rising living expenses. Silently suffering, too many of America's oldest citizens are making tough choices—not taking their medications as prescribed, not adjusting the thermostat for heating or cooling, or skipping meals. While hunger in itself is a serious problem, not eating healthy meals often makes existing health conditions worse. The benefits offered by SNAP can help put food on the table and provide seniors with extra dollars to purchase fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk products.

What Does This Chapter Hope To Accomplish?

This toolkit section is designed to help address the rising rate of food insecurity among seniors, whom SNAP defines as 60 and older. Our goal is to put a "face" on people who are either coping with hunger over the long term or confronting it for the first time. While many are already enrolled in SNAP, millions are eligible, but have not applied. This section will help you reach both senior generations by:

- Providing a clearer picture of individuals 60 and older, particularly those who could be helped most by SNAP.
- Discussing some of the barriers and myths that prevent seniors from enrolling in SNAP and keep them from putting healthy foods on the table.
- Highlighting ideas to help you reach people who are often overlooked: seniors with disabilities, those raising grandchildren or serving as guardians for other minors, and, finally, seniors who live in rural areas.
- Introducing quick tips and techniques for easily reaching seniors through the community and the media, and by sharing lessons learned from workers in the field.

Differences Among Seniors

Because of the large spread in age between these two "Senior Generations," we need to account for differences in their circumstances and approach them through a variety of strategies. Let's examine three areas:

Education

Before 1970, only one-third of Caucasians and fewer than 10 percent of African-Americans were high school graduates. Over the past 30 years, the percentage of older Americans with high school diplomas skyrocketed. However, the number of Hispanic and Asian seniors with high school diplomas remains

Differences Among Seniors

- Education
- Immigration
- Employment and Technology

low—making it highly probable that they have difficulty speaking or reading comfortably in English. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are typically well educated.

Immigration

Our Nation has experienced a cultural shift. Hispanics are not simply the largest minority group, but are also the fastest growing. There are key differences, however, between individuals who migrated to America decades ago and more recent arrivals. Members of the Silent Generation typically speak English at home and at work, and more than likely have changed some of their behaviors to fit in. They are generally more comfortable interacting with government agencies and organizations, both inside and outside their community. In contrast, recent immigrants, even when documented, may hesitate to seek services from government agencies. They tend to hold officials in high regard or with suspicion, in turn suppressing their own views. Seniors from other minority backgrounds may function in similar ways. Visit the Cultural Competency chapter of this toolkit to learn more about outreach to minority audiences.

Employment and Technology

Baby Boomers, especially those born in the 1950s and early 1960s, are most likely still employed and have used technology at their place of business or at home. ATMs, debit cards, automated phone systems, and online banking are familiar. On the other hand, individuals 75 and older may have retired before technology, specifically the Internet, became part of everyday life. These seniors may feel more comfortable getting information through personal contacts, 1-800 numbers, large-print and easy-to-read fact sheets, and other more traditional media channels, such as the nightly news. Seniors who are disabled or who have health issues may need one-on-one assistance from an outreach worker. When possible, offer multiple ways for interested individuals to contact you.

General Outreach Strategies

There are some basic outreach strategies that cut across all audiences. The following are a few guidelines that will be described in more detail, as they relate to low-income seniors, as you go through this chapter:

1. Know and understand your audience.
2. Develop messages that are simple and that speak to your audience.
3. Identify and develop partnerships with organizations that are like-minded.
4. Distribute information through partners, media, and events.
5. Be mindful of cultural and gender differences.
6. Use your local resources, such as phone numbers and/or Web sites of State and local SNAP offices. Check with your local SNAP office before your outreach to make sure it can handle an increase in requests.
7. Be mindful of predatory behaviors and distinguish yourself from these.
8. Build trust and deliver what you offer with a high level of customer service.

Tips & Tools

As outreach workers, you must understand the literacy level of your audience before asking them to read and interpret brochures and applications.

Getting To Know Your Audience

In getting to know your audience, it's important to first assess where there are differences as well as similarities. Following is a snapshot that compares all seniors with low-income seniors. First, let's discuss what they have in common.

Knowing where a majority of your target audience lives is vital to successful outreach. A majority of older adults live in metropolitan areas. *Of those eligible for SNAP*, 70 percent do. In addition, women outnumber men, and the ratio is highest among adults 80 and older. Finally, seniors in minority groups are more likely to be poor but almost 70 percent of seniors eligible for SNAP are white.[1] These are all important facts to consider as you determine where to spend your resources.

Other considerations are those things that make low-income seniors different from their more financially stable counterparts. See the following table for more details.

Differences Between Seniors Overall and Low-Income Seniors

All Seniors	*Low-Income Seniors*
Among all seniors, 64 percent live with relatives.[2]	Almost 90 percent of poor older adults—87 percent of households with elderly that are eligible for SNAP benefits—live alone or with one other older adult.[3]
More than half of all seniors live in nine States (California, Florida, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and New Jersey).[4]	More than half of all seniors eligible for SNAP live in 10 States (New York, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Georgia). *California is not included because seniors who receive SSI also receive a standardized amount of cash for food assistance and are not eligible for SNAP benefits.* Further, one-quarter of all seniors who are eligible for SNAP live in the Southeastern part of the U.S. The Northeast region has the next highest concentration of poor seniors.[5]
Persons over age 80 are a large group in the general population, but many live in institutional housing where they are not eligible for SNAP benefits.[6]	By age groups, 40 percent of poor seniors are in their 60s, about 30 percent are in the 70s, and the other 30 percent are 80 and older.[7]

1. Leftin, J. & Cunnyngham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
2. U.S. Census Bureau Newsroom. Facts for Feature: Older Americans Month, May 2008, ONLINE. 2008. U.S. Census Bureau. Available: http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff06.html [25 Aug. 2009]
3. Leftin, J. & Cunnyngham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
4. Administration on Aging. A Profile of Older Americans: 2008, ONLINE 2009. U.S. Bureau of Census. Available: http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/Profile/2008/8.aspx [25 Aug. 2009]
5. Leftin, J. & Wolkwitz, K. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007.*
6. Leftin, J. & Cunnyngham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
7. Leftin, J. & Cunnyngham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*

A Few More Facts About Seniors: Which Seniors Are Most at Risk?

Food insecurity remains a problem that cuts across race, gender, age, and geography. Over 5 million seniors—11.4 percent of all seniors—experienced some form of food insecurity (i.e., were marginally food insecure).[8] Recently, the Meals on Wheels Association of America funded a study to look at seniors and hunger entitled "The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America." The study found that those seniors at higher risk for food insecurity tend to be:

- Low-income. Seniors living at or below the poverty line.
- Younger seniors. Individuals under the age of 70 are at higher risk for hunger than their older peers.
- Minority. African-Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.
- Raising a grandchild. One in five seniors who are living with a grandchild has an increased risk for hunger. This is often because families in these households are already struggling with fewer resources.
- Less educated. Individuals without a high school diploma.
- Living alone. Are divorced, separated, widowed, or never married.
- Disabled or requiring support for basic activities.
- Renters. Often face rent increases while living on fixed incomes.
- Living in the South. While food insecurity and poverty occur in every State, household incomes in the South continue to lag behind other parts of the country. Seniors living in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Arkansas are at even higher risk of hunger.

8. Ziliak, J.P.: Gundersen, C.; Haist, M. The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America. Web site: *http://216.235.203.153/Document.Doc?id=13*

A Community Needs Assessment Can Help You Reach Seniors

While it is important to be mindful of the above information about senior audiences, sometimes the only way you can really know and understand the seniors you are trying to reach is to do a community needs assessment.

Meeting with others who serve older adults will give you a clearer and more accurate picture of your target audience and what is being done in your community. For example, you will learn what each organization is doing, how your program might fit in, what resources (funds, volunteers, facilities, Web sites, etc.) are available, what can be done to remove barriers to SNAP participation, and how you can work together to minimize duplication of efforts and better use limited resources.

Tips & Tools

The *Cultural Competency section* of the toolkit provides a step-by-step guide for conducting a community needs assessment.

Networking with other service groups will also:

- Help you identify new partners. For example, you might establish or strengthen relationships with local SNAP offices, State Units on Aging, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers or other groups, especially those that receive SNAP funding under the optional State outreach and/or nutrition educations plans.
- Help you define and understand your target audience, as well as identify areas of low participation.
- Identify gaps between services and needs and strategies for addressing them.
- Provide opportunities to combine or offer one-stop shopping services. Your organization can team up with other programs to offer a "package" of benefits, rather than marketing each of them separately. For example, low-income seniors who are enrolled in Medicare can qualify for substantial benefits through two other important programs: the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) and Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs), which are State Medicaid programs that help with drug costs and cover out-of-pocket health costs that Medicare does not cover. SNAP, LIS, and MSPs have very similar eligibility rules, but all suffer from low participation rates among low-income seniors who are not connected to other benefits.
- Provide opportunities for cross-training of employees. For example, SNAP offices could learn more about your organization and what services you provide. Your employees would learn more about SNAP requirements and policy. Understanding roles and responsibilities may lead to ideas on how to implement new business practices. It also ensures that accurate information is being provided to seniors who may have misinformation about the Program.
- Show where technology could help extend the reach of services, such as creating links to relevant Web sites.
- Reveal tried-and-true suggestions that worked with other programs, for example, demonstration projects such as Combined Application Projects (CAPs). These projects are a creative partnership among the Social Security Administration (SSA), State agencies, and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to simplify the SNAP application process for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) who live alone. Under the CAP demonstration, one-person SSI households can file a shortened SNAP application form without having a face-to-face interview at the SNAP office. Data collected from the SSA interview are electronically transferred to the SNAP office for processing.
- Help set goals and measure success (what worked, didn't work, and lessons learned).

Did You Know?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and State Medicaid agencies have a new process in which SSA forwards LIS applications to States for MSP (Medicare Secondary Payer) eligibility determinations. State agencies can increase the value of this effort by connecting seniors to the full range of public benefits for which they qualify. In almost every State, the MSP program is administered by the same agency (indeed, often by the same State worker) as SNAP, so it would be highly efficient to use the new process as a tool for signing up eligible Medicare beneficiaries for SNAP.[9]

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Clearly, there is a lot of diversity within the two generations of seniors. Here are some creative ideas for reaching them.

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Members of the Silent Generation

1. Present a True Picture. Avoid portraying all older seniors as frail or inactive. A new study of seniors 70+ found that, on average, they feel 13 years younger than their actual age. Focus on the benefits of getting older, not the limitations.
2. Mix It Up. Since women typically outlive men, show mixed groups of friends, not just couples, in materials. Include pictures with grandchildren.
3. Serve Those Who Served Their Country. The majority of men of this generation served in the military. Thousands of women also served as nurses or volunteered with organizations like the American Red Cross and the United Service Organization (USO). Make outreach to veterans' groups, homes, and hospitals part of your strategy.
4. Go Along for the Ride. Partner with transportation services that take seniors on errands or to appointments; have materials on hand that include the myths and facts about SNAP benefits.

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Baby Boomers

1. Keep It Short. Keep It Simple. Boomers also find themselves as "card carrying" members of the sandwich generation—providing for older adult parents while taking care of children at home. Place information in venues that they normally visit, like the grocery store or pharmacy waiting area. They might not be eligible but may know of someone who is.
2. Showcase Diversity. Immigrants represent 17 percent of all Baby Boomers. Connect with communities and organizations that serve immigrant and non-English-speaking households.
3. Go Online. Nearly three-fourths of Baby Boomers go online at least once a month. Tap into sites like AARP Foundation's online community or senior-oriented social networking sites.
4. Forget Labels. Boomers view themselves as young and vibrant and typically won't respond to anything aimed at "seniors." Resist using this label and other age-related expressions, like "golden years."
5. Remember the Workplace. Many are still actively involved in their careers or have returned to the workplace as part-timers. Human Resources directors are generally willing to provide helpful information to employees.

Tips & Tools

Invite staff from your local SNAP office to attend and help with prescreenings, filling out application forms, and/or scheduling appointments.

Outreach workers or volunteers who will be completing SNAP application forms should be trained in how to fill out the form. If applicants submit applications that are not filled out correctly, it not only creates problems for the customers but also for the local SNAP offices. In addition, it can undermine the trust and relationship between the customer and the outreach worker or organization.

Recipe for Success

"Seniors are harder to reach because they are more isolated, often live alone, and don't have anyone to help them navigate the SNAP enrollment process. They are also more mistrustful of giving out personal information and are potentially too proud to ask for government assistance."

Celia Hagert, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Public Policy Priorities

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Seniors With Disabilities

1. Join Others. Form partnerships and provide materials to local groups that serve disabled communities, including individuals with low vision (Lighthouse International), limited hearing (Hearing Loss Association of America), and mobility (Easter Seals). Don't forget that help is a two-way street. It is important to recruit volunteer outreach workers from these agencies as well.
2. Get Buy-In From Retailers. Ask grocery stores, and stores that sell medical equipment and supplies (such as wheelchairs and walkers), if they will put up posters and provide sample SNAP promotional materials.
3. Seek Aid From Nurses. Meet with rehabilitation facilities, dialysis centers, and local chapters of the Visiting Nurses' Association or Meals on Wheels groups to reach seniors who are recently disabled and may be considering support services for the first time.
4. Be Part of a Road Show. Make a list of health-related support groups aimed at seniors, such as those focusing on diabetes, arthritis, low vision, prostate or breast cancer, and stroke—and offer to make mini-presentations about SNAP and its benefits.
5. Consider Furry Friends. According to Meals on Wheels, about 60 percent of seniors who receive their services live with pets. Target organizations and veterinarians that provide discounted services for seniors, such as the Humane Society.

Tips & Tools

Volunteer to host a "meet and greet" event with organizations serving seniors in your community. A good place to start is with the local Area Agency on Aging to see what services are provided and how your agency might fit in.

Your local SNAP office is also an important partner and may attend. Also, your SNAP office might be able to direct you to other agencies in your community.

As part of your planning, take time to review the Administration on Aging's policies that guide outreach programs aimed at seniors. These guidelines cover nutrition services, home-delivered meals, guidelines for paying volunteers, and organizing community service programs.

Recipe for Success

"We partner with about 480 agencies. That's the secret for our food bank…people go into other agencies because they don't have enough rent money, utilities, or they have a legal problem…"

Sandy Hinojos, Community Food Bank, Tucson, AZ

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Seniors Who Are Guardians

1. Take It Back to School. If you live in one of the areas (typically in the South) where grandparents raising children is more common, partner with your local school district to distribute information through school events and staff. Make sure to include PTA meetings, school meal service directors and child nutrition professionals, school counselors, school nurses, and athletic coaches.
2. Work With the Professionals. Partner with your local SNAP office to train workers from key organizations such as visiting nurses and registered dieticians who are affiliated with your local county office. Educate them about the nutrition benefits of SNAP and how to apply. You may also ask them to make referrals to your organization for budgeting and/or prescreenings.
3. Build Your Own Village. Contact programs for foster parents and grandparents, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and other mentoring programs to help get information out. Keep summer camps and recreation programs in mind, especially those aimed at low-income families. Area Agencies on Aging often sponsor Grandparents Raising Grandchildren programs.
4. Stay In Step With the Seasons. Participate in annual events such as an end-of-summer school supply drive, "Back to School Night," fall coat giveaway, winter Angel Tree gift exchange, and spring registration for summer camps and recreation programs. Ask to distribute a one-page factsheet or to set up an information booth or table at events that parents/guardians may attend.
5. Put It In a Backpack. Send information home with children who receive free or reduced-price lunch. You may want to consider timing this for the beginning of the school year or at the end of grading periods as children may begin to live with a guardian mid-school year.

Addressing Barriers & Challenges

What Prevents Seniors From Enrolling in SNAP?

The majority of seniors who are potentially eligible for SNAP do not participate. There are many reasons why—for a more detailed list, review the Ten Myths and Barriers. From USDA research reports (see Resources Section for complete listing) and first-hand experience, we know some of the reasons why seniors do not participate in SNAP. By each reason below, a brief talking point is provided. Consider these "mini-scripts" to help you overcome the word "No."

Talking Points to Address Concerns About Applying for SNAP Benefits

Welfare stigma

For many in the Silent Generation, relying on "welfare" or any type of public assistance is not acceptable. This generation of "self-sacrifice" was raised to be independent and self-reliant. They don't want to "lose face" in front of their peers.

RESPONSE
You worked hard and the taxes you paid helped to create SNAP. Now it's time to let it help you buy the healthy foods you like to eat.

Embarrassment

Seniors believe that family members and friends would view them differently and might think that they are not able to care for themselves. Plus, many seniors would be ashamed to be seen at the welfare office applying for benefits or using the EBT card at the grocery store.

RESPONSE
The local office is not always the only place you can apply for SNAP. Some local offices visit senior centers or other sites to take applications. There are other ways to apply — you can mail or fax your application, and in some places you can apply online. If you mail, fax, or submit your application online, you may request a telephone interview with the SNAP worker who is handling your application. You may also authorize a friend or relative to take your application form to the local office. This designated person can also be interviewed by the SNAP worker.

Remember: Everyone needs help now and then. Some people rely on visiting nurses or other services after an illness. There are also transportation services for seniors who can no longer drive. Plus, everyone over age 65 gets support from Medicare, and Medicaid helps people who are disabled, including seniors. Receiving SNAP benefits to buy all sorts of food such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy products is no different.

Tips & Tools

Partnerships work.
Encourage your SNAP office to have a designated person who assists seniors with applications.

Preparation is the key to success.
Be prepared and have appropriate materials such as your business card, SNAP office locations, phone numbers and business hours, informational brochures, or SNAP application forms with you. Your goal is to present sufficient information to help people make an informed decision whether or not to apply for SNAP benefits.

Application filing.
Encourage seniors without all of the required forms to fill out the first page of the application form. This starts the application process.

Recipe for Success

"Our partnership with a tax preparation organization has been very successful with seniors. While the tax preparers are completing their taxes, they're able to see if they might be eligible for SNAP benefits. Right then, on the spot, they help the seniors complete the application. It works very well."

Susan Craig, SNAP, Kansas

Addressing Barriers & Challenges

Sense of Failure

Regardless of which generation they come from, older adults who have worked all their lives view needing SNAP benefits as a failure and think others feel the same way.

RESPONSE
Lots of people, young and old, are having financial difficulties, especially in this economic climate. Tough times require new solutions.

Culture

Hispanic and Asian cultures, in particular, believe that family members, not the government, should care for aging parents and grandparents.

RESPONSE
Family members can continue to help you. SNAP is a program that can add to the help you receive from your family. Receiving SNAP benefits lets you purchase all kinds of foods such as fruits and vegetables. Having those extra food dollars gives you more money to spend on other things such as medicine, utilities, activities, and personal items.

Difficulty completing an application

For many low-income seniors, difficulty can mean different things:

- Transportation may not be readily available, especially for those adults in rural areas or who have mobility issues.
- Application forms may be long and complicated. These forms may have small print, which makes them difficult to read.
- Long waits at the local SNAP office or waiting in a noisy lobby may discourage some from applying. Many seniors do not know that they can be interviewed by telephone or at other locations such as senior centers. They also are not aware that they can designate an authorized representative to take the application form to the local office. This representative can be interviewed by the SNAP worker on their behalf.
- Acronyms and jargon used by the local office worker may be difficult to understand and, as a result, the applicant might not understand what documentation must be submitted. Applicants may also be hard of hearing and may have difficulty understanding the worker.

RESPONSE
I can help you or I will call my contact at the SNAP office.
(If there is a particular organization in the area that helps seniors apply, provide the contact information or offer to make a call.)

Recipe for Success

"We hold social events with ethnic communities (Jewish, Greek, Italian) with food and music. When they get there, we give them food baskets that include information on SNAP. It's more of an indirect way of reaching them."

Ilene Marcus, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, New York City

Did You Know?

Important 2008 Farm Bill Changes
The Farm Bill eliminated the cap on the dependent care deduction. For seniors paying for child care or adult care, this means they can now deduct the entire cost of the care. For example, a working senior might have to pay adult day care fees for his or her spouse in order to remain employed. Another example would be working seniors with custody of their grandchildren who require childcare services.

Saving is encouraged by excluding tax-preferred retirement accounts and education accounts. Not counting the value of these accounts will help seniors.

What Are the Benefits of Partnerships in Reaching Seniors?

Like most individuals, when seniors seek a particular service, they call or visit the appropriate agency or organization. But when they have multiple needs, as many do, they may not know where to start. Partnerships with organizations that are trusted and credible messengers, such as the local Office on Aging or places of worship, can help seniors take the first step to getting the help they need. The ability to access and choose adequate, safe, and healthy food is essential if older adults are to remain independent at home in the community. Geographic food access plays an important role in determining the quality and quantity of foods older persons are able to purchase in their neighborhoods. The organization may be able to offer a "package" of benefits because it handles multiple programs or it may make referrals to other agencies. Encourage your partners to submit a referral document or to make a phone call while the senior is with them. That way, the senior who may have hearing, transportation, or other issues will not have to initiate the contact.

Together, partnerships:

- Address community issues concerning their target audiences. This can be accomplished through a community needs assessment. The assessment will also show you which organizations are like-minded and who will make the strongest partners.
- Can make referrals to SNAP offices or other community organizations or distribute informational materials.
- Provide opportunities for one-stop shopping. Being able to apply for more than one type of benefit at a time makes it easier for potential applicants to apply for SNAP.
- Provide prescreening services which can show the potential applicant an estimated amount of the SNAP benefit in terms of dollars he or she might receive.
- Provide use of facilities for outreach efforts such as distribution of materials, prescreenings, events, etc.
- Provide nutrition education counseling and educational resources that are designed to improve the consumption of healthful foods and physical activity that are age appropriate. These educational resources reinforce the importance of a nutritious diet and regular physical activity in achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight for older adults.
- Enhance coordination for planning and implementing projects or campaigns by pooling resources and minimizing duplication of efforts.

Potential Partners

- SNAP Office
- Local Office on Aging
- Local houses of worship or other faith-based organizations
- Senior recreation centers
- Hospitals and health clinics
- Home health agencies and visiting nurse programs
- Senior advocacy groups (AARP Foundation, National Council on Aging)
- Nutrition programs for seniors (congregate meal sites, home delivered meals, Meals on Wheels, Feeding America)
- USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- Association of State Nutrition Network Administration
- Community Action Agencies
- Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Senior Corps programs
- Medicare/Medicaid managed care organizations
- Public housing authorities
- Volunteer groups (foster grandparents, telephone reassurance programs, etc.)
- Adult day care facilities
- Service organizations (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Goodwill)
- Civic organizations (Lion's Club, Rotary Club, Masons, Kiwanis, and others)
- Caregiver support groups through Area Agencies on Aging, faith-based groups, etc.
- Local libraries
- Public transportation authorities
- Labor unions
- Unemployment offices
- Grocery stores or local farmers' markets
- Radio "Community Spotlight" programs
- Humane Society, pet rescue organizations

In conducting outreach to seniors, participation in community collaborations can:

- Ensure that this often physically and financially vulnerable population benefits from efficiencies in cost, resources, and time.
- Bring outreach efforts where seniors or their caregivers live, work, and relax.
- Improve outreach to hard-to-reach subgroups such as those who are homebound, low-literate, and non-English speakers.
- Capitalize on the trusting relationships many organizations have with their older members.

One of the most important benefits of building partnerships is that collaborators can become "ambassadors" for your agency and its programs and services. This is particularly important when working with the older seniors whom, research shows, most often rely on word-of-mouth and trusted messengers when making important decisions.

In short, partnerships and collaborative activities will allow your organization to reach more seniors in need of nutrition assistance than it ever could on its own. For more information on forming partnerships in general, see the Partnerships section of this toolkit.

Tips & Tools

Consider working with the State to develop a new outreach plan or strengthen the existing one. Check out SNAP's State Outreach Plan Guidance.

How Can Partnerships Help You Reach Caregivers?

Age and the aging process cause seniors to need more support and services than at any other time in their lives. Caregivers, arguably, shoulder most of the responsibility associated with meeting that need. Since caregivers frequently have first-hand experience in helping their loved ones, the right partnerships can greatly enhance your ability to reach seniors. Caregivers are typically younger than the people they care for, may be working, and have different daily routines, lifestyles, and interests. So, the best opportunities to promote SNAP benefits to caregivers will most likely rest with the following types of organizations:

- Major local employers
- Hospitals/health clinics
- Senior advocacy groups
- Local houses of worship or area clergy groups
- Adult day care centers
- Medicaid-managed care organizations
- Caregiver support groups

Partnership Agreement Letter Template

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

Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:
Millions of American seniors live alone, have difficulty providing themselves with a steady supply of food, and experience some degree of hunger. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly the Food Stamp Program) is the first line of defense against this problem. In our city/county up to [X] seniors are potentially eligible to receive these nutrition assistance benefits every month.

On behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME], I am writing to invite you to lend your support to [STATE/CITY/TOWN'S] SNAP outreach efforts to seniors 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 seniors who are eligible for SNAP know about the program and are able to access benefits. Our organization is helping to promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP to seniors and their caregivers.

[Provide local information on what your organization is doing and whom you plan to target in your campaign.]

We hope you will join us in supporting [ORGANIZATION or COALITION NAME's] 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] senior citizens not yet enrolled in SNAP. By participating *[List benefits to organization such as: reinforce position as community leader, provide opportunity for positive media exposure, offer 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 SNAP 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

Section III: Communicating Effectively With Older Adults

What Information Sources Do Seniors Trust Most?

When it comes to issues related to health or well-being, older adults place high value on the advice and opinion of the people they know. This trend increases with age, with Silent Generation seniors placing the most trust in interpersonal sources. Such sources include health care and other professionals or trained personnel, family members, faith-based organizations, and friends.

In community outreach, these sources are commonly referred to as "trusted messengers" and are excellent channels for promoting the issue of hunger and food insecurity and the availability of SNAP benefits.

The top five most frequently used sources that seniors go to for information:

1. Interpersonal sources, such as health care providers and professionals, friends, and family
2. Newspapers and magazines
3. Television
4. Radio
5. Internet

For information about social services, Silent Generation seniors tend to turn to print sources as a primary reference, specifically newspapers, magazines, and books. While there are issues with literacy among older seniors, those that do read comfortably often use their local libraries for information about general health issues.

- This age group also tends to watch more television than others, especially during the day, so that remains one of the top ways they get health information. The same is true for radio, where senior listenership to talk radio is significant.
- Although Internet use is far less frequent among low-income seniors than it is among moderate- to high-income seniors, it is a promising medium for promoting SNAP, especially to caregivers and the youngest members of the group. Keep in mind that Baby Boomers are tech savvy, having used computers in the workplace and at home. As a result, they often turn to the Internet for health information.
- Although older seniors use the Internet to a much lesser extent, when they do use it, it's often at their local libraries. When seniors go online, the majority do so to locate general health information, although they will also seek out information through other sources. For Baby Boomers, on the other hand, the Internet is generally more trusted than traditional media.

Recipe for Success

As the Internet is becoming increasingly popular across all age groups, we encourage you to "optimize" any press releases you may distribute, in addition to doing a traditional press release. This means doing certain things that make it stand out online. For specific tips on how to optimize a press release, check out the *Media Relations* chapter. Does your agency have a Web page? If so, why not link to other agencies? If not, why not work with your partners to develop a Web site?

How Can I Tell if My Outreach Materials Are Appropriate for Seniors?

The good news is that older people, particularly Silent Generation seniors, are readers. In fact, they are largely responsible for keeping newspapers in business! Baby Boomers also read information on the Internet. But as people age, changes in their memory and physical condition can limit their ability to understand information. For example, seniors may have some difficulty:

- Learning information quickly, such as understanding charts and graphs or comparing pieces of information
- Reading a page that is in small print and filled with information. It is important to use large print and to keep a fair amount of white space on the page
- Remembering important information when it is mixed in with information that is not important
- Handling small documents
- Turning pages, especially on glossy or thin paper

How Do I Create Materials That Reflect the Different Cultures and Ethnicities Within the Senior Community Where I Work?

The Cultural Competency chapter addresses the importance of creating materials that are culturally and linguistically competent. The same holds true for the senior population. As a rule, materials should be tailored to reflect the cultural background of the intended audience. This can be achieved through graphics and photographs, and by creating in-language materials for non-English speakers.

Is There a Way To Test Materials To Make Sure They Appeal to Older Adults?

Yes! That's where your community partners can help. Ask your experts to review draft materials and point out problem areas.

Tips & Tools

Your community partner may be using a flier or brochure that has space for you to add your program information. Also, check with your local SNAP office and see if they have a local toll-free number or Web site, and direct people there.

How Do I Know if My Writing Is Appropriate for Seniors?

Your writing is appropriate for seniors if it:[10]

- Is simple and to the point. Use clear and familiar words. Omit unnecessary words and jargon. In other words, say what you mean. You are presenting facts to help your audience make an informed decision. Also, be sure to keep literacy levels in mind as you develop your materials. You may want to consider using an online tool to help you keep the literacy level below grade 7.
- Uses real-life, relevant examples. These can help the reader build on what he or she already knows about a topic.
- Uses pictures to help present the information. For example, pictures of a SNAP application form might be helpful to show your audience where to sign it.
- Limits key points and action steps. Make your message brief, with no more than five points, and use an active voice. For example, "Call to make an appointment" is better than saying, "You can make an appointment by calling."
- Repeats main points multiple times. This focuses attention on what is important and will help older adults recall information. A good rule of thumb:
  - Introduce what you are going to say.
  - Say it.
  - Repeat what you said.

How Do I Know if My Graphic Design Is Appropriate?

Your graphic design is appropriate if it:[12]

- Uses short sentences. Short sentences are often easier for seniors to digest.
- Avoids stereotypes. Know your audience. Make sure pictures and graphics represent the audience you are trying to reach.
- Is printed on standard 8-1/2" x 11" paper. Resist printing smaller brochures or leaflets. Arthritis and other ailments often make smaller materials harder for seniors to hold and manipulate.
- Uses simple fonts and large type. Make sure your font is free of fancy loops. Use fonts that are easy to read such as Times New Roman and Georgia. Avoid novelty typefaces, like Bodoni or Chiller. Similarly, text is easier to read when it is at least 13- or 14-point.
- Has plenty of white space and bold, contrasting colors. Empty space on a page provides a natural place for eyes to rest and refocus. To older eyes, yellows, blues, and greens appear to blend in with the background when next to one another. However, some organizations use black type on yellow paper because it reduces glare.

10. National Institute on Aging. Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior Friendly, ONLINE. 2008. National Institute on Aging. Available: *http://www.nia.nih.gov/healthinformation/publications/srfriendly.htm* [25 Aug. 2009].

Writing for the Internet

Because the Internet is a trusted source of information for the largest segment of the senior population, Baby Boomers, you may want to post fliers, forms, or general information on your organization's Web site – particularly if you want to reach caregivers. Use the tips above as a general guide, and keep these in mind especially for the Internet:[11]

- Main points should be listed at the top of the Web page, so visitors don't have to scroll down.
- Limit paragraphs to 30 words. This creates additional white space.
- Use one idea per sentence and keep sentences under 17 words.
- Be direct. The Web is friendly. Use "we" and "you" instead of "the applicant," "the client," and so forth.

11. AskOxford.com. Better Writing: One Step Ahead: Writing for the Internet, ONLINE. 2009. Oxford Dictionary. *Available: http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/osa/internet/?view=uk* [25 Aug. 2009].

12. National Institute on Aging. Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior Friendly, ONLINE. 2008. National Institute on Aging. Available: *http://www.nia.nih.gov/healthinformation/publications/srfriendly.htm* [25 Aug. 2009].

Event Planning for Senior Audiences

What Do I Need To Consider When Planning an Event or Activities for Seniors?

One fun way to introduce the senior community to SNAP, regardless of age, is through a planned event or activity. Health fairs, grocery stores, and senior centers may be good locations for events. Don't forget to include the caregiver audience and those who influence seniors in your promotional efforts.

Here are a few things to consider as you plan your event:

- What type of event are you considering? Health fair, grocery store with nutrition education providers and prescreening services, senior center, other?
- Define audience when appropriate, as not all events are for all seniors.
- What is your budget?
- What type of equipment, materials (grocery bags/cart filled with food), banners, etc. will you need?
- What will your publicity be? How will your event be announced? What media sources will you use? When will promotion begin? Will you use the Internet?
- Whom can your organization partner with to share costs and materials, or to provide volunteers, etc.?
- Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Identify an event leader.
- Make a contact list for those who will be working on the event.
- What time of day will you hold the event? Rush-hour traffic, trouble seeing at night, and safety concerns may keep many seniors off the road after dusk. On the other hand, those who rely on caregivers or friends for transportation may be able to attend only after the normal workday ends or on weekends.
- Keep the season and weather in mind when choosing when to hold the event, and whether it will be held indoors or outside.
- Food? Keep in mind that many seniors have medical conditions that limit certain foods, including those high in sugar and sodium. In addition, if your budget is tight, a local restaurant or nonprofit, such as the local Diabetes or Heart Association, university, or SNAP nutrition education provider may be willing to fund the food as part of a healthy cooking demonstration.
- Evaluation of event? Are there any reports to complete? Make sure someone is keeping track of attendance, applications requested or completed, and other important information. Consider developing a brief survey (no more than 10 questions) to find out what people thought of the event and ways to improve it. It's the best way to know for sure if your event was a success! You can also use this sample evaluation form.

SNAP Offices and the Media

Be sure to advise your local SNAP office if you plan to host an event or conduct any media outreach. It is important that they be prepared for an increase in calls or visits. In addition, it is helpful if you provide them with a list of messages or media materials you plan to use. That way, local offices can better serve callers and/or visitors.

If possible, partner with the local SNAP office. Local offices may have materials that you can give out and may be willing to send local spokespeople or workers to the event.

Event Planning for Senior Audiences

Choosing a Location

Since it is likely that some in your audience will need assistance, you will want to consider:

- Wheelchair accessibility. Does your event site have ramps, elevators, and other accommodations?
- Restrooms. Are they nearby and available to people with problems moving around?
- What transportation services will be available, if any?
- Make sure hallways are well-lit and can accommodate wheelchairs and walkers, and that floors are free of trash or loose rugs and mats.
- If a mobile van for health screenings, nutrition education, or SNAP prescreenings will be there, where will it be parked, and how will waiting lines be handled?

Setting Up an Event (day of or several days before event):

- Check in with partners.
- Distribute contact list.
- Materials: Do you have all the materials you need, such as name tags, forms, or pencils and pens? Practical "give-away" promotional items are often popular with seniors. Items might include grocery pad magnets, key chains with mini-flashlights, and refrigerator photo frames.
- Booth location: Schedule a walkthrough of the location to double check details, such as placement of electrical outlets, if needed.
- Evaluation tool: If you have a survey to distribute, make sure you have enough copies.

Day of Event:

- Arrive early to check out booth, or to hold a quick pre-event meeting.
- Use plenty of signage and have extra volunteers on hand to help with directions and answer questions.
- People working on the event should understand roles and responsibilities, and should have a point of contact in case more help is needed or to resolve issues.
- Check equipment to make sure it is working.
- Expect surprises! No matter how well you plan, unexpected things happen.
- Consider standing a short distance away from your table to allow hesitant people to browse your information without feeling pressured. Approach them when they appear to be looking around for someone and thank them for stopping by when they move on.

Tips & Tools

For more information about how to plan a successful event, please see the *Events* chapter.

How Do I Promote SNAP to the Media?

The Media chapter provides proven techniques and tips for working with the media. This includes how to determine which media professionals to contact and when, as well as how to communicate your message through:

- Interviews
- Media advisories
- Press releases, both traditional and optimized
- Community calendar listings
- Public service announcements (visit www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach for ready-made PSAs)

Sample Community Calendar Listing

If you're 60 or older, and thinking about how to make ends meet, you may qualify for extra help with food through [State's] Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. On [date/time], the [organization] will host a free 1-hour information session at [address]. Friendly volunteers look forward to talking with you and helping you with the paperwork to apply. Call 1-800-XXX-XXXX to learn more or to RSVP. If you are interested in SNAP, ask us what papers you should bring.

Recipe for Success

"You can send press releases, purchase advertisement space and place your event in our community calendar, and after a while you're sure to meet with some success. But nothing, nothing can match the impact of a great story."

Reporter, Senior Beacon Newspaper, Washington, DC

How Do I Communicate Effectively With Caregivers?

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need. The person receiving care may have a condition such as dementia, cancer, or brain injury, or he or she might just need help with basic daily tasks such as:

- House cleaning and maintenance
- Grocery or other shopping
- Cooking
- Transportation
- Paying bills
- Taking medicine
- Bathing
- Dressing
- Using the toilet

Caregivers do not fit one description. They can be volunteers or paid employees with a social service or health care agency. Caregivers also can be family members who may or may not reside with the senior or friends.

Whether the caregiver is family, a friend, or a paid aide, the demands of caring for an older adult or aging parent are many, and finding where and how to get services can be frustrating.

Caregivers typically have influence on the decisions that seniors make. Chances are, seniors considering SNAP will seek the advice of a caregiver, if there is one, or a trusted friend. The type of information the caregiver will need is the same type the senior needs.

Authorized Representatives

A senior may wish to designate an authorized representative during the application process.

An authorized representative could:

- submit an application on behalf of a SNAP participant
- attend a certification interview
- do grocery shopping for SNAP participant

The authorized representative can be the same person or two different individuals.

Who Are our Nation's Caregivers?

Most Americans will be a caregiver to a family member or friend—sometimes called "informal caregivers"—at some point during their lives. Altogether, informal caregivers provide the majority of the long-term care in the United States. As you plan your outreach to caregivers, first take some time to familiarize yourself with the nature of that audience and demographic. Understanding the typical profile of a caregiver will be very useful in targeting your outreach efforts. Following are some characteristics of caregivers today:

- The majority of caregivers are women.
- Most caregivers are middle-aged, and some of them may even be struggling with their own health
- Many caregivers are Baby Boomers (aged 50-64) who are actively employed, working either full time or part time.

How Can I Influence the Influencers?

When communicating with caregivers, remember they:

- Are looking for answers and services that can help the senior.
- May be concerned about financial costs.
- May be limited on time. Most caretakers are typically short on time and are pulled in many directions. Some may be working or raising their own children.
- Are interested in the "process" of applying for SNAP benefits and how to make this process most efficient.
- Walk a fine line as they try to preserve the dignity of those in their care who may not agree with the decisions being made, especially about applying for SNAP or other public assistance. This balance cannot be overstressed.

Communicating with Caregivers about SNAP

When communicating to caregivers about SNAP, it will be important to:

- Acknowledge the important role of the caregiver and show understanding of the responsibility involved.
- Stress your concern for the senior and commitment to making the process as simple as possible.
- Clearly lay out the eligibility rules and guidelines. Eligibility rules for elderly and disabled persons are different.
- Reassure the caregiver that there are no hidden costs to the senior or responsible party, and that applying for SNAP does not require multiple appointments. Be sure to cover telephone interviews and authorized representatives.
- Provide caregivers with examples of how to file SNAP applications– drop off at local office, mail, fax, email in some States, or by authorized representative.
- Refer caregivers to outreach workers who can provide one-on-one application assistance such as filling out the form, prescreening for benefits, gathering the verification documents, or sitting in on the interview.
- Provide examples of how SNAP benefits can be used if the senior no longer cooks at home. Explain that the senior can authorize someone to do the grocery shopping.

Where Are the Best Places To Distribute SNAP Materials to Caregivers?

Here are a few cost-effective media outlets and "communication spots" for reaching older adults, caregivers, and other individuals with information about SNAP benefits for seniors. They are not ranked in any particular order.

- Local Area Office on Aging
- Outreach/nutrition education coalitions in local communities
- Community centers
- Senior transportation services
- Senior center activities
- Internet (ask to link to partners' Web sites and offer them template introductory language)
- Hospitals, doctors' offices, or health department
- Pharmacy waiting areas (consider asking pharmacies to include a SNAP message on bags or forms attached to prescription bags discussing medications)
- Faith-based groups or houses of worship
- Grocery stores or farmers' markets
- Mall walker programs
- Free television community event postings
- Free radio public service announcements on talk radio
- Barbershops/hair salons
- Daycare centers
- School PTA meetings
- Health fairs or events
- Library kiosks, community bulletin boards and/or newsletters
- Fitness centers, especially those that offer classes tailored to people over age 40
- "Penny saver" community advertisements

Tips & Tools

Having a contact at a local SNAP office who specializes in serving seniors is a win-win situation. Explore this possibility if you are involved in developing State plans.