



2014 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SNAP Outreach Case Studies Coast to Coast

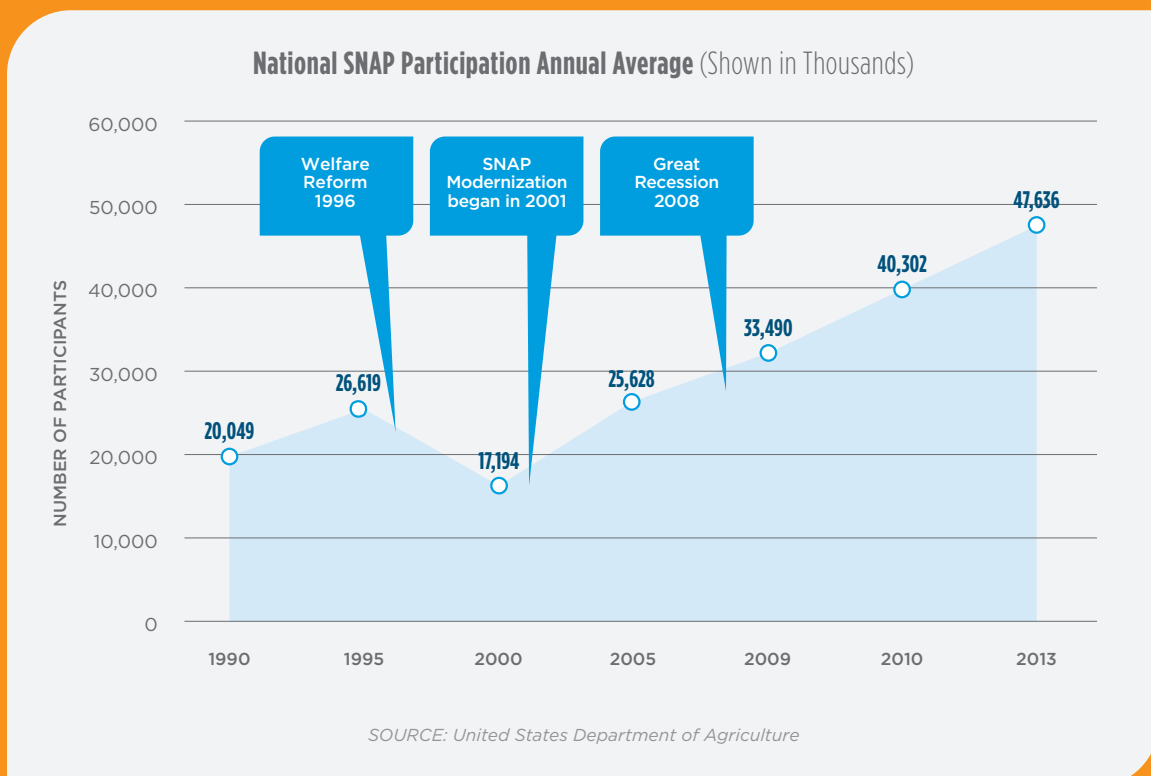
NOVEMBER 2014



BACKGROUND

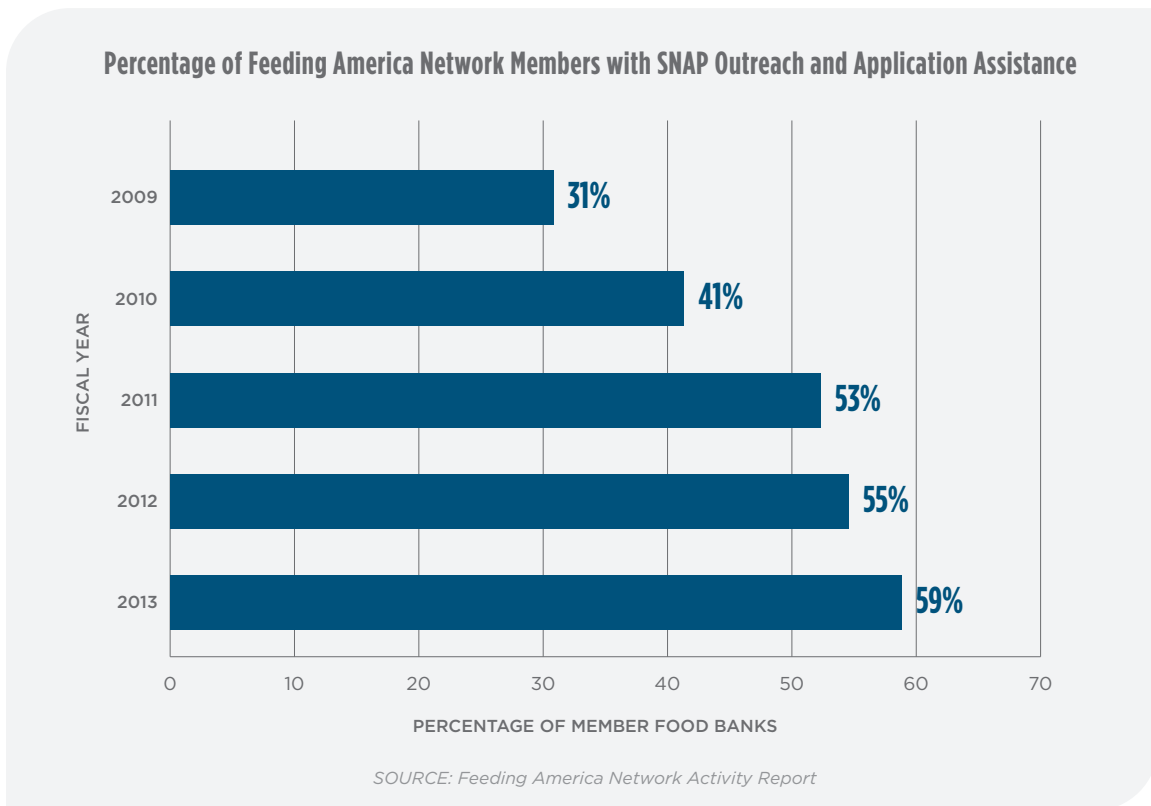
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest domestic hunger relief program in the United States, providing low-income individuals with financial assistance to support food consumption. SNAP is a means-tested federal program; in order to be deemed eligible, households must typically either have gross incomes that are at or less than 130 percent of the U.S. poverty level (approximately \$2,500 per month for a family of four) or be categorically eligible through participation in a state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), general assistance (GA), or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. As of 2013, a family of four with no income would be eligible for a maximum monthly benefit of \$632. Although the program's basic structure and payment amounts are set at the federal level, details of eligibility and program administration differ across states and sometimes counties.

In 2013, the level of SNAP participation was at an historic high, with more than 47 million individuals enrolled in the program; a decade prior, in 2003, enrollment was half that level, estimated at 21 million individuals. The significant growth in participation was triggered by the Great Recession. Prior to the Great Recession, major federal legislation such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), also known as welfare reform, and gradual adoption of SNAP modernization policies were also pivotal to SNAP participation trends. Most recently, the U.S. Farm Bill, which passed in February 2014, proposed a change to SNAP that had the potential to reduce overall funding for SNAP by up to \$8.6 billion over ten years and changed program rules on federal funding allowances for SNAP outreach activities.



SNAP OUTREACH PROGRAMS AT FOOD BANKS

Food bank members of the Feeding America network have increasingly become involved in SNAP outreach activities and application assistance during the last decade, which coincides with changes in legislation, policies and economic conditions. The creation of state outreach plans was a game changer—the plans allow food banks to contract with their state or a state-designated nonprofit organization, such as a food bank association, to conduct outreach and receive reimbursement for some of their administrative expenses for these activities by USDA funds. As of Fiscal Year 2013, close to 60 percent of member food banks conducted SNAP outreach and application assistance. Feeding America’s national office began collecting data about SNAP outreach in Fiscal Year 2009.



Despite the importance of SNAP outreach efforts by food banks, very little research exists about actual program activities and outcomes, which vary significantly across Feeding America network members. Therefore, Feeding America initiated a multi-site program evaluation case study; case studies are “used frequently to examine program implementation” and “integrate quantitative and qualitative information” from a variety of sources to give an in-depth picture to the issue being studied and the broader environment” (O’Brien and Martinson, 2010). This study examined geographic context, multi-year program trends, diversity in program models, resources, leadership, and priorities of food banks. The objective was to learn how these factors

contribute to successes, barriers, opportunities, and promising practices for SNAP outreach. Selection of participating food banks was designed to explore variation within the network, across these multiple dimensions. Eight food banks, located in six states—Arizona, California, New York, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin—were recruited to participate in the case study and a ninth food bank only participated in interviews. Data were collected from food bank monthly program reports and through qualitative interviews with almost fifty key informants during a period of eight months (April–November 2013). Additionally, evaluators accessed several publicly available data sources. The following key evaluation questions guided and directed the study.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. What are the main program strategies and activities employed by network food banks when conducting SNAP outreach and application assistance? How are strategies similar and different across food bank locations?
2. How do organizational dynamics at food banks, such as leadership and resources, affect program implementation?
3. How do key environmental factors influence program outcomes for SNAP outreach and application assistance?
4. Which internal and external factors impact program performance and trends in SNAP outreach and application assistance at food banks? Why?

SNAP ASSISTANCE PROCESS

Based on a comparative analysis, food banks commonly follow a sequential set of activities for SNAP assistance; variation was often found within the implementation of activities, rather than the process. All of the food banks in this study provide both outreach and some form of application assistance. Food banks may also receive requests for re-certification¹ of SNAP benefits, which do not require all the steps in the process.

- First, staff conduct **outreach** by visiting partner agencies, including emergency food distribution locations, and other non-food organizations, such as schools, senior centers and large scale events such as health fairs. Most food banks report that they do not necessarily target specific populations, but typically reach a variety of vulnerable groups, including Latinos, veterans, homeless persons, seniors and low-income families. They may hand out fliers with basic income eligibility requirements at a partner site or present eligibility requirements at community meetings and workshops.
- Staff then **pre-screen** interested individuals for SNAP eligibility, as determined by federal rules and state-level policies. Staff report that maintaining the privacy of individuals is important. Therefore, food bank and partner staff may encourage individuals to call or schedule appointments for assistance, especially if they do not have the time to immediately engage with staff.
- Next, if an individual is deemed eligible, staff typically conduct **one-on-one application assistance**. Application assistance most often takes place at a partner location or over the phone, but three of the nine food banks also reported having dedicated space for clients to visit and receive application assistance. One food bank from the study has hired an authorized representative² who manages the majority of the application assistance for clients who are deemed particularly vulnerable, and may have complex challenges, such as homeless, previously incarcerated, elderly and disabled populations. Although not a predominant model, there are 23 other member food banks within the Feeding America network that have an authorized representative. The most common use of the authorized representative is during the application assistance.
- Finally, after an application is submitted to a government agency (state or county), food banks report that **client advocacy**, an intervention with SNAP agencies on behalf of applicants, is the last and critical step in the SNAP assistance process. Food bank staff want to make sure that clients receive a timely response from their SNAP agency, are treated fairly and receive benefits when they meet eligibility requirements. A few food banks reported that they may spend a significant amount of time on client advocacy, which has benefited several clients who were wrongfully denied benefits or did not receive an opportunity to complete the application process because of misinformation.

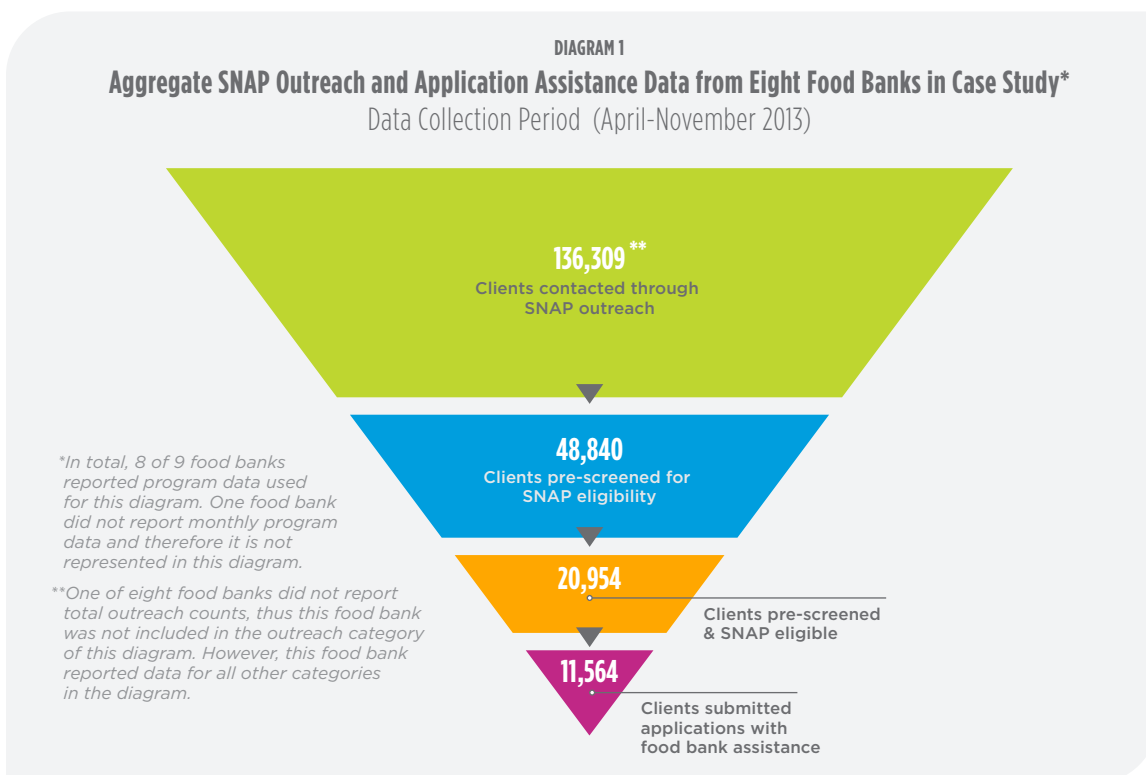
SNAP ASSISTANCE OUTCOMES

During the case study period from April-November 2013, eight food banks collectively reached close to 140,000 people to raise awareness about SNAP, averaging close to twenty thousand people a month.³ Outreach may include distribution of fliers, phone contacts (inbound and outbound), group meetings and workshops, and individual in-person contact. Diagram 1 shows the common four stages of the outreach process, with outputs from each stage.

In total, eight food banks collectively pre-screened 48,840 people for SNAP in eight months (36 percent of those estimated to be touched through outreach activities); of these, 57 percent of clients were deemed ineligible or were unable to produce required documentation. Of the remaining 20,954 people who were pre-screened and deemed eligible, 55 percent (11,564 people) submitted a SNAP application to their governmental SNAP agency with food bank support; 45 percent, or more than 9,000 eligible individuals did not submit an application with the assistance of the food bank, although it is possible that some completed applications on their own.

While there are a number of considerations for defining program success, the intended objective of SNAP outreach is to connect food bank staff with eligible applicants. Thus, one key metric for measuring success is the rate of SNAP application assistance. While

it is useful to track the number of awareness contacts made with community members, the better starting point for determining if outreach is effective in reaching eligible individuals begins at the pre-screening stage, when eligibility is determined. Once individuals are deemed eligible, they can self-select to receive SNAP application assistance offered by food bank staff. Then the retention of eligible individuals through the application assistance process can be better assessed and monitored. However, retention of individuals can be heavily client driven. Outreach staff commonly reported that some clients did not return for services even if they were eligible because a) they were not interested in completing the process, b) they decided to apply on their own, or c) they delayed completing an application. Other factors may play a role in choosing to proceed with application assistance, such as the level of need and a client's other coping strategies, which were outside of the scope of the case study.



FOOD BANK SETTINGS AND SERVICE AREAS

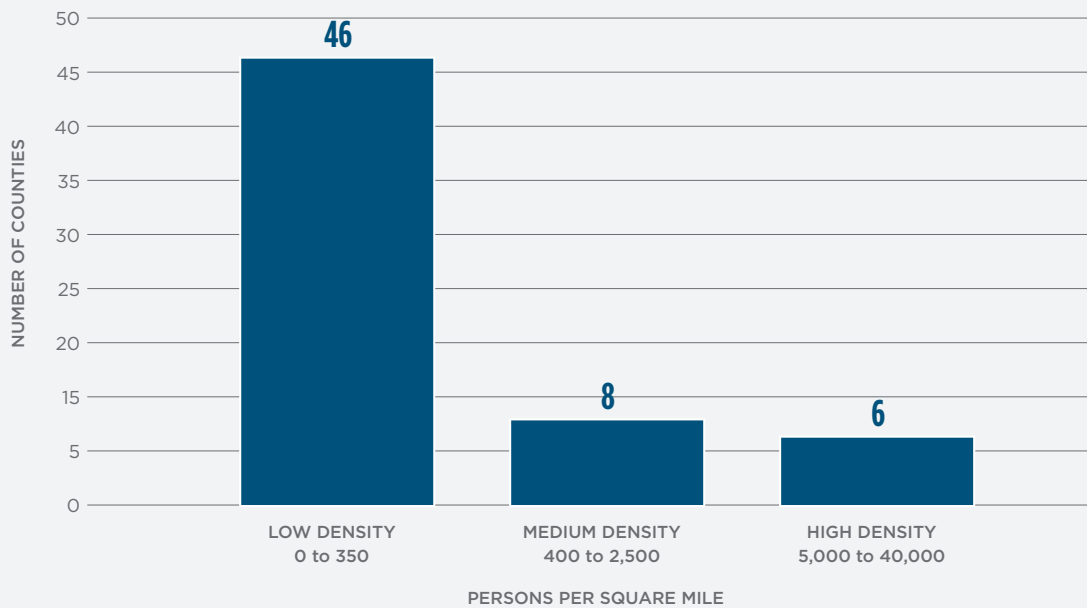
The nine food banks that participated in the case study collectively conduct SNAP outreach within 60 counties, covering an estimated 65,978 square miles; the food banks conduct SNAP outreach at varying levels of reach depending upon environmental factors and program resources. The average rate of food insecurity across food bank service areas was 15.5 percent; individual service area food insecurity rates ranged from 11.4 percent to 17.4 percent (*Map the Meal Gap 2014, Feeding America*). Of the nine food banks, two have a single county service area, and two have a two-county service area. The other five food banks have service areas ranging from five to twenty counties. A greater number of counties within a food bank's service area typically increases the challenge of extending SNAP assistance to the full service area. Thus, food banks make decisions about service coverage based on resources and feasibility of reaching populations that are farther from the central location. Within the case study, three food banks with very large service areas, and one food bank with a smaller service area (two counties), utilized Partner Distribution Organizations (PDOs) to also conduct SNAP outreach. In general, a PDO operates within a defined portion of the food bank service area and performs all of the primary food bank responsibilities, including the procurement and distribution of food and partnership with member agencies. Among the ten PDOs affiliated with the case study food banks—9 of 10 conduct SNAP outreach by distributing information about the program; 4 of 10 host SNAP outreach workers to conduct application assistance; 2 of 10 prescreen individuals for SNAP eligibility; and 3 of 10 conduct some form of direct application assistance. Similar to food distribution, the feasibility of conducting SNAP outreach will be affected by the size of a food bank's service area.

Another key factor to consider with regard to service coverage is population density, as measured by persons per square mile. There was significant variance in population density found between food bank service areas and typically, a food bank serving multiple counties faces starkly different population densities. For example, one food bank serves a county with a population density of 408 persons per square mile, but also serves a county with 27 persons per square mile. For SNAP outreach, population density was found to be of critical importance when reaching potentially eligible populations in a cost-effective manner. Food banks reported conducting SNAP outreach most frequently in higher population density areas located closer to the food bank. Comparatively, counties with low population density were rural communities where SNAP outreach was viewed as most challenging, due to higher costs for time and travel, higher rates of stigma, fewer opportunities to partner with organizations, and fewer opportunities to routinely interact with people. Thus, rural communities were most likely to be underserved or served inconsistently. Staff reported barriers such as long commutes and travel costs, and a perceived low return in reaching eligible populations who were receptive to learn about and apply for SNAP benefits.

The opportunity to form partnerships with nonprofit agencies for SNAP outreach and application assistance is also a matter of geographic location and population density. The food banks in the case study collectively serve a combined total of 3,512 community agencies (Feeding America Network Activity Report, 2013), but food banks reported that individual partnerships ranged from 100 to 800 agencies that provide a range of client services. Comparatively, food banks collectively worked with close to 400 active partner agencies⁴ on a monthly basis for SNAP outreach during the case study; individual partnerships ranged from 8 to almost 200 agencies, which represents only 11 percent of the total community agency partner network. Thus, there may be opportunity to expand SNAP outreach at other partner agencies. Although the majority of partner agencies where food banks reported conducting SNAP outreach are emergency food distribution sites (e.g., pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens), staff also reported partnerships with other types of organizations. At one food bank, staff described libraries as a primary location for outreach because they are open year-round and reach diverse populations; this food bank began partnering with libraries in response to phone calls from nurses conducting health screenings at community libraries who found children facing hunger after school.

Counties with Persons Per Square Mile by Category in Food Bank Service Areas

(n=60)



SOURCE: U.S. Census Data, 2013

Other locations for SNAP outreach include WIC centers⁵, community health centers, schools, domestic violence shelters, and senior housing and community sites. A few unique sites where food bank staff conducted outreach included nail salons where low-income immigrant women work, a car wash site, and a migrant farm-worker employer site. Oftentimes, food banks choose to partner with these unique community agencies or businesses because of their access to local community populations who may be otherwise difficult to reach.

Although densely populated areas are more likely to have a larger base of potential community partners, the number of partners a food bank maintains is not completely determined by this factor. Some food banks located in lower population density areas actually reported a greater number of active partners during the case study period (April-November 2013). For example, a food bank located in a county with 1,465 persons per square mile reported an average of twenty-three active partners on a monthly basis, compared to a food bank located in a county of 311 persons per square mile that reported an average of forty active partners per month. Thus, geography may be less influ-

ential on partner strategy than the focus of the food bank's outreach strategy. A food bank that prioritizes frequent outreach efforts in many communities may rely more on a larger partner network than a food bank that conducts outreach to fewer and more narrowly targeted populations. Also, program model type plays a role in the development of partners. Of the nine food banks, a food bank with the highest number of partners also operates an indirect program model. In this model food bank staff do not have direct contact with clients for SNAP outreach, but instead the partner network is fully engaged in the SNAP assistance process; food bank staff play a training and administrative role for SNAP outreach programming. Three other food banks operate mixed program models, which means that food bank staff and partners conduct outreach together and independently. The remaining five food banks operate direct program models which means that partners do not typically conduct client SNAP assistance without the presence of food bank staff; however, they may make client referrals.

Furthermore, the volume of client referrals made by partners may be influenced by partner agreements. In

*Case study food bank staff received a total of **1,991 client referrals from partners for SNAP assistance**, which equals 4 percent of all individuals pre-screened for SNAP eligibility. The total number of referrals made to each food bank ranged from 0 to 550, with a median of 270. At one food bank with an indirect program model, partners handled 3,223 referrals for SNAP and other services.*

one case, a food bank included a section on SNAP outreach in their Partner Agency Agreements, which are used by Feeding America network members. The section has specific terms that require partners to display any materials they receive from the food bank about SNAP and refer clients to the food bank for services as needed. The food bank asked agencies, especially larger ones, to allow their staff to visit on a regular basis to talk with their clients and assist them with the SNAP application process. The volume of partner referrals is also influenced by their reach into potentially eligible populations. Referrals may also be generated by other sources, such as state-level human service agencies, as was the case in one food bank, or from case managers in other programmatic areas of the food banks.

Overall, food banks seem to make decisions about the number of partners they engage with and how they

engage with community agencies according to their program goals and objectives. Therefore, it is important for SNAP program goals and objectives to be clearly articulated and grounded in a longer term strategy in order to maximize the value of partnerships in achieving those goals. If goals and objectives are not clear or too short-term, it may be challenging for food banks to define and measure the success of their program over time and to fully engage partners in achieving success. Additionally, it is important for food banks to consider multiple factors that will influence the sustainability of a program model, such as rate of eligible population participation, changing demographics and local economic conditions. Across the six states, eligible participation rates varied, but were relatively high, with the exception of California (57%); Arizona (79%), Ohio (85%), New York (79%), Texas (72%) and Wisconsin (89%) (USDA, 2011).

KEY INFLUENCES ON FOOD BANK SNAP OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Organizational structure, available resources and external environmental factors all shape the positioning of SNAP within the food bank and its strategies for SNAP outreach and application assistance.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND CROSS-FUNCTIONAL PROGRAMMING

- **Food bank staff and managers emphasize the importance of buy-in by leadership—both food bank management and Board of Directors—in setting the tone for investment in SNAP outreach as central to the mission of the food bank.** In more politically conservative states, where SNAP policies have been vigorously debated or where public opinion tends to be neutral or unfavorable, leaders and Board of Directors were more likely to weigh SNAP programming with regard to maintaining good relationships with state and county politicians. In some cases, there was a lack of consensus and shared philosophies about how SNAP outreach should be positioned at the food bank and this fostered tentative long-term commitments to the program.
- **The position of SNAP outreach within a food bank's organizational structure can either hinder or foster cross-functional programming,** which affects the opportunity for staff across program and operational areas to partner together to benefit SNAP outreach goals. Due to the nature of the work, SNAP outreach staff are not frequently present at the food bank for long periods of time. As a result, it was common for SNAP outreach staff to state that they did not often collaborate with staff in other program or functional areas. However, leadership at two food banks made strategic decisions to marry functions together. At one food bank, the SNAP outreach program team was moved under the Operations Group to align them with Agency Member Relations in order to build agency capacity. At another food bank, SNAP outreach was grouped with nutrition education which emphasizes SNAP as a public health program. One more factor that may play a role in cross-functional programming is the size of the food bank, including total staff resources and variety of programs.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

- **Funding, staff resources and volunteers determine the capacity for SNAP outreach activities.** As of Fiscal Year 2013, based on data collected from seven of the participating food banks, the average SNAP outreach program budget ranged between \$100k and \$250k, but food banks have experienced an increase in funding in the last few years. The reasons for growth in funding seem to be directly associated with greater donor interest, more grant opportunities and awards, and state and federal SNAP-related pilots. Each of the nine food banks fundraises for their program, but only three reported consistently using internal operational funds beyond dedicated grants. Thus, food banks are exposed to greater risk when 100 percent of funding comes from external sources, which may threaten program sustainability.

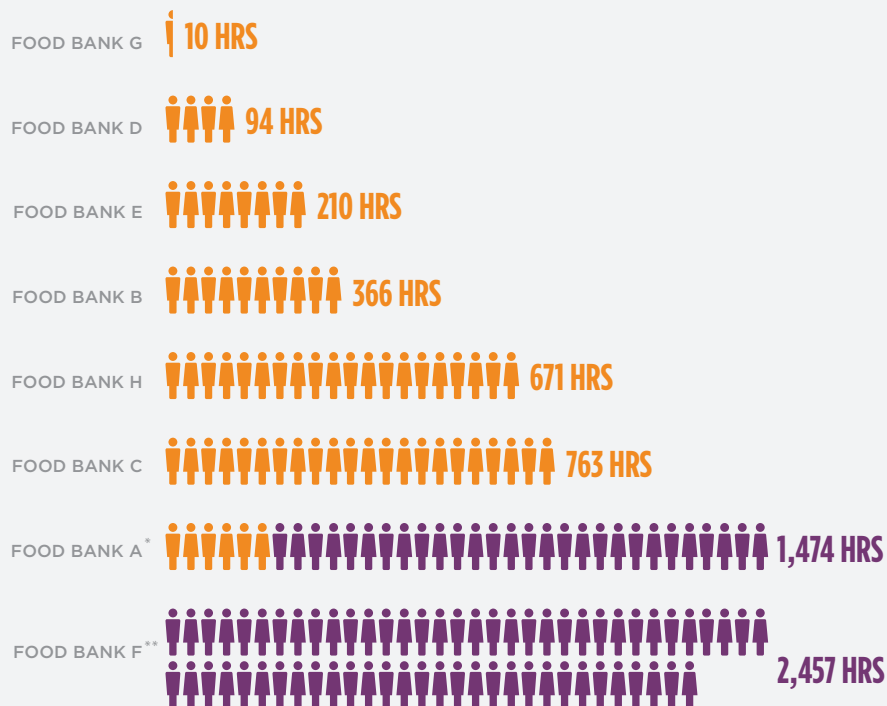
STAFF AND VOLUNTEER RESOURCES

- On average, a SNAP assistance team accounted for approximately ten percent of all food bank staff at case study food banks. **The average tenure for SNAP outreach coordinators in the Feeding America network is 2.7 years, which is approximately 12 months shorter than similar positions in other food bank program areas.** Although food banks in this case study did not report an issue of high turnover, this may be an issue for others within the network, given case study reports about workload. In some cases, outreach staff reported significant autonomy, but this also included longer working hours, often exceeding forty hours per week. Also, outreach workers gain a specialized set of skills and knowledge when conducting SNAP assistance, which seems to create opportunities for them to change employment between state or local SNAP agencies and the food bank. Finally, staff may be at risk for burnout due to high performance expectations, significant travel and occasional low results after substantial effort is made.

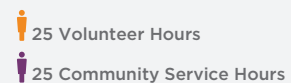
- **Volunteers can increase staff capacity in SNAP outreach and some food banks have been successful** at recruiting local volunteers and community service volunteers from national programs such as AmeriCorps VISTA. **However, other food banks report that it is challenging to recruit and retain volunteers who may shy away from intensive training and committed hours.** Also, the location of food banks plays a role in attracting skilled volunteers. Staff reported the most difficulty in recruiting bilingual and multilingual volunteers. Over the eight month period, the use of volunteers varied quite a bit among the food banks in this study. Total volunteer hours ranged from a low of 10 hours to a high of 2,457 hours (*Diagram 2*).

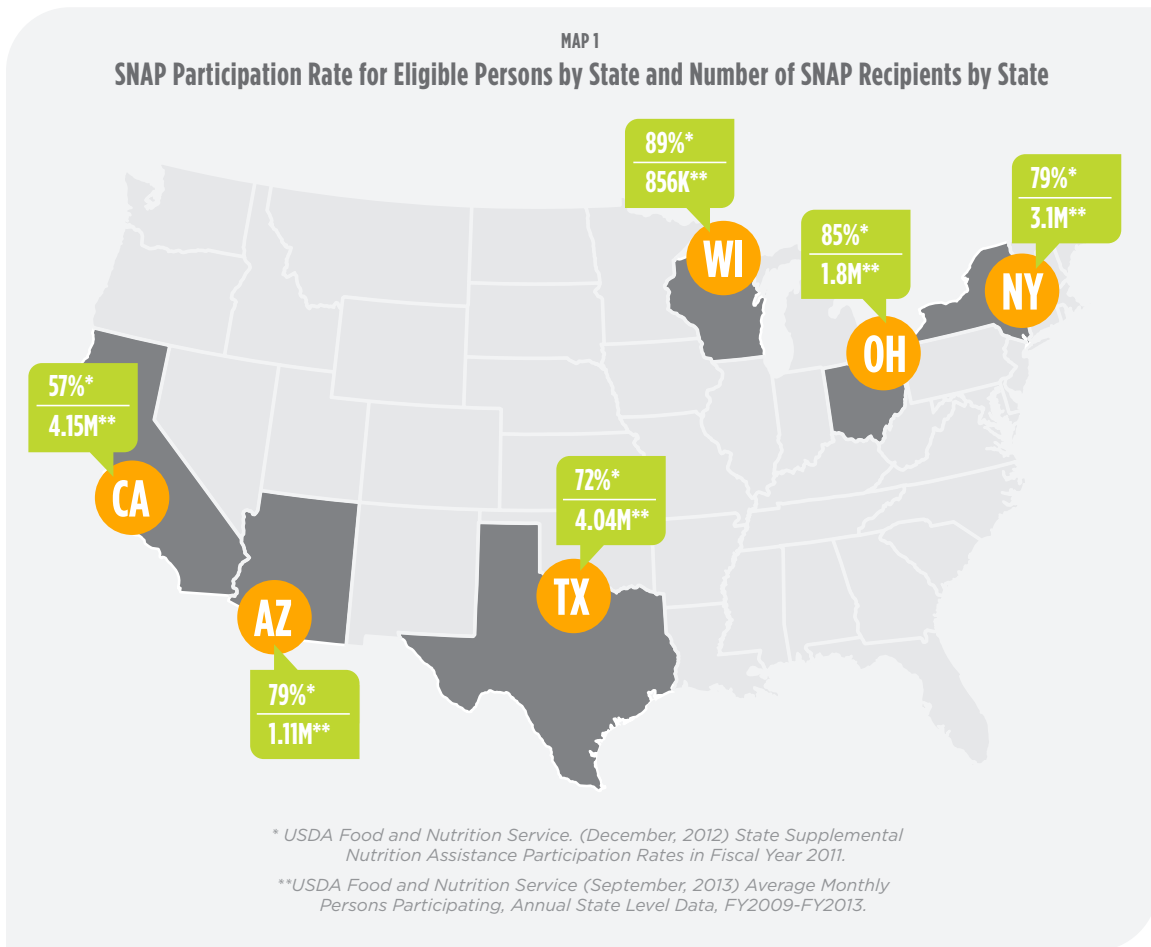
- **At one food bank (Food Bank C), where volunteers contributed 763 hours to SNAP outreach, twelve agency volunteers were enrolled through an Outreach Buddy Program.** This team of local volunteers, nominated by partner agencies, is trained by the food bank. The training has three components: outreach/promotion, prescreening regulations, and policy/advocacy; each part of the training typically lasts about 1.5 hours. Once trained, the volunteers are required to conduct SNAP outreach at their agency pantry site at least twice per month and also assist with tabling events and advocacy efforts. **Comparatively, at Food Bank G, staff reported they had limited volunteer commitment, and they also didn't have the internal resources to dedicate toward volunteer recruitment and retention.**

DIAGRAM 2
**Total Number of Community Volunteer and Community Service Hours
 Logged for SNAP Program (April-November 2013)**



* Includes staff from Jesuit Volunteer Corps program
 ** Includes staff from AmeriCorps VISTA program





OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Food banks formulate outreach strategies that take into consideration geographic location, as well as characteristics of populations in the service area, including race/ethnicity, language, disability status, age, gender and immigration status. In many instances, SNAP outreach activities are tailored around the skill sets and knowledge base of food bank staff. Their community networks, language ability, interests and work background matter in the focus and implementation of the food bank’s program.

Some food banks serve multi-lingual and immigrant populations that are more likely to be found in certain geographic regions of the country, such as the West and Northeast (MAP 1). As reported by numerous food banks, Spanish is a necessary second language requirement for outreach workers. However, staff were less likely to speak Asian languages, such as Chinese and Vietnamese and others such as Arabic. Therefore, language was considered a barrier in some food bank

service areas. In some cases, food banks were able to partner with local immigrant service organizations to find translators and they encouraged individuals to bring their own translators to application assistance sessions. Additionally, staff at more than one food bank reported sharing a letter with clients from their state’s department of immigration services to verify that SNAP benefits would not affect their immigration or citizenship status. Overall, staff found it was very important to build trust with individuals from immigrant communities, which sometimes meant that they met with applicants multiple times before completing application assistance.

Most food banks serve populations that need additional support including veterans, senior citizens, low-income families with children and communities with low computer and English language literacy. The differences in client population needs directly influence how food banks support applicants. One food bank completed a successful SNAP pilot for seniors in rural communities.

Staff found that seniors were less likely to be aware that they were eligible for SNAP, some seniors held stigma toward SNAP, and seniors were more likely to be responsive if staff followed up with them and offered them a contact number. Another success factor for the pilot was that the food bank formulated specific outreach strategies that appealed to seniors such as direct mailing, avoiding the term food stamps and designing materials featuring coupons for groceries. The average age of seniors reached was 71, but several hundred seniors were over the age of 80.

Promising practices are needed particularly in the area of rural outreach, where out-migration in communities may result in a limited number of community partners, volunteers and eligible applicants at any particular location. Food banks in this case study with rural populations consistently reported struggling to find effective strategies to overcome challenges of distance and sparse population. Also, staff overwhelmingly reported that they were more likely to encounter stigma in rural areas. Overall, food banks made decisions about rural outreach based on resources, opportunity costs, and ultimately time. At one food bank where an outreach pilot was conducted in rural communities over a period of two years, staff and management concluded that this time period wasn't long enough to implement an effective rural outreach strategy, but they lacked funding to continue services.

PARTNERSHIPS

Building relationships with state and local government SNAP agencies is particularly important because agencies are responsible for the application process, final eligibility determination and the distribution of benefits to SNAP households. All food bank staff agreed that relationships with key personnel at an administrative office are critical and there is a vested interest in having a positive working relationship. However, there was mixed feedback by food bank staff about their relationships with SNAP agencies. Staff who had longer-term relationships with a county or state office, typically with the same agency staff member or director, reported more positive experiences. In other cases, when a changeover occurred in county or state staff or leadership position, food bank staff reported fewer positive

experiences, especially if changeovers were frequent. From the perspective of food bank staff, a change in personnel at a state or county agency could mean a period of transition and uncertainty, a change in norms and culture in the way of doing business and variance in level of engagement. Sometimes changes were favorable for process improvements, but not always, and it took time for food bank staff to establish relationships with new personnel.

All food bank staff agreed that relationships with key personnel at an administrative office are critical and there is a vested interest in having a positive working relationship.

Across states and counties, there is a growing trend to promote online services in order to make SNAP enrollment and information more accessible to applicants and nonprofit organizations, such as food banks that support applicants. Each of the six states examined for the case study has key information and tools about SNAP available on their websites. Eight of the nine food banks utilize mobile technology to assist applicants while off-site to access state and county SNAP agency websites; food banks bring laptops with Wi-Fi to partner agency locations. When staff access online application systems, they are able to assist clients in submitting SNAP applications immediately to SNAP agencies. Staff reported that it is easier to track and monitor the status of applications and approval rates through online systems. However, in some cases, staff reported technological glitches with access to the internet at partner sites, which meant that paper applications were a default. In cases when discrepancies and delays were caused by governmental agencies, food banks practiced client advocacy to ensure that eligible clients were being treated fairly and were approved for benefits in a timely manner.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Case study findings highlight the importance of evaluating the SNAP assistance process, from initial contact with populations to the submission of applications, in order to generate insights for continuous improvement.** Results from data analysis and interviews with staff indicated that few food banks have monitored multi-year program trends. Trends in program data revealed for some food banks that the total number of clients they have assisted with SNAP applications has consistently declined on an annual basis for two or more years, although there were no major staff or resource changes during that period. For other food banks, trends emphasized that a significant increase in application assistance was directly correlated with a major grant award, increase in staff, or geographic expansion of services. By evaluating trends and the context behind them, a food bank can better identify successes and challenges in program delivery. In addition, trends may expose changes in environment factors such as population demographics, level of community need, local or state policies, and economic conditions. Therefore, program evaluation should include a consistent review of trends that consider a full range of factors, and not simply one or two metrics, in order for management to be fully informed about the course of a program.
- Consistent data collection from three primary sources is key for improving program evaluation. *Client-level data* will indicate success in targeting certain populations for outreach, as well as rates of participation in SNAP. *Government agency data* will give insight to food banks about processes and policies that foster or hinder SNAP application processing and benefit distribution to eligible individuals and families. *Community partner data* will help food banks to assess community need and opportunity for SNAP outreach, as well as engagement of partners following training activities. **Findings from the case study revealed that most food banks have been challenged in obtaining client-level data and government agency data because some of this information sharing is within the purview of SNAP agencies, and efforts to obtain application outcome data directly from clients can be challenging.** In most cases, food banks reported having access to agency notes made by county or state workers about the status of client applications,

which enables outreach staff to practice client advocacy. Also, some food banks report receiving quarterly data from government agencies with regard to overall approval and denial of applications submitted by the food bank or partner sites. However, aggregated data has more limited value in completing a full evaluation of effectiveness in their SNAP application assistance process. Nevertheless, food banks have used the data they have received from SNAP agencies to improve upon their one-on-one application process. Food banks may advocate for greater sharing of data as a value to SNAP agencies if food banks are able to use information to improve the quality of applications and reduce the level of effort for under-resourced government administrators.

- **Evaluating partner engagement in SNAP outreach and application assistance is a more feasible task for food banks, but requires a more systematic data collection process, with consensus about which metrics and information would be useful.** All food banks work with several partners in various communities to complete SNAP outreach activities. Some of these partners attend trainings about SNAP outreach and application assistance offered by food bank staff, as well as by governmental agencies. However, there is little information demonstrating the outcomes from these trainings. It is unknown if trainings are mostly reinforcing what partners already know, assisting partners with learning a new strategy, engaging partners to begin SNAP outreach, or another outcome. Additionally, since some food banks do not receive numerous client referrals from partners for SNAP assistance, it is unclear how partners are sharing information with communities about SNAP. Based on case study findings, partners play a very important role in planning and strategy development for SNAP outreach programming. Therefore, it would be beneficial for food banks to measure the value of partners in the SNAP assistance process. One food bank built an online platform for data collection to capture partner level data that helps them to track and monitor client referrals, SNAP outreach, and relative activity within their partner network. Partners are trained on the system and based on their capacity, they submit information and then the food bank has immediate access to the data for reporting purposes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate key contributions to the SNAP Outreach Case Studies Coast to Coast Report and Executive Summary from the following people:

AUTHORS

Shana Alford, *Author*
Feeding America

Elaine Waxman, *Co-Author*
Feeding America

Colleen Heflin, *Co-Author*
University of Missouri at Columbia

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Meghan O'Leary, *Hunger Study Research Fellow*
Feeding America

Jonathan Holmes, *Programs Intern*
Feeding America

Amaris Kinne, *Hunger Study Research Fellow*
Feeding America

David Watsula, *Hunger Fellow*
Feeding America

REVIEWERS

Ami McReynolds
Feeding America

Brady Koch
Feeding America

David Lee
Feeding America

Michelle Berger-Marshall
Feeding America

MEMBER FOOD BANKS

We would like to thank the nine food bank project coordinators for their contributions to this program evaluation case study, including their time, expertise, and knowledge about SNAP outreach and application assistance. This project would not have been possible without their cooperation and partnership.

FOOTNOTES

¹After a certain period of time, as stipulated by individual states, SNAP recipients must re-certify their eligibility for benefits. This process involves recipients following specific re-application procedures and sometimes contact with governmental SNAP agencies. The average certification period for benefits was 12 months; however, in two states, recertification must occur every six months.

²An authorized representative is someone who is not a member of the household applying for or receiving SNAP benefits, but who is authorized to represent that household in the SNAP eligibility process. An authorized representative is allowed to submit applications and supporting materials to the local SNAP office, in physical and electronic form, when the applicant is not present.

³One food bank only participated, in the qualitative interview portion of the study, therefore monthly program data were not collected.

⁴Food banks reported active partners based on frequency of communication and activity at partner sites where they conducted SNAP outreach and application assistance.

⁵The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides a monthly food package, nutrition education, and counseling to nutritionally at-risk women, infants and young children up to age 5 with family income at or below 185% of the poverty level. The program also serves pregnant, nursing, and postpartum women. The food package is designed based on the participant's age and nursing status to provide nutrients typically missing in the diets of the target population.



35 East Wacker Drive
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60601
800.771.2303