



HOW WORKFORCE ALLIANCE OF SOUTH-CENTRAL KANSAS IS BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP TO SERVE JOB SEEKERS ON SNAP

A Case Study from NAWB and Seattle Jobs Initiative

OVERVIEW

[Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas \(workforce-ks.com\)](http://workforce-ks.com) is a local workforce development board serving 6 different counties covering both rural and urban communities in Kansas. Keith Lawing is the President and CEO, and Denise Houston is the Director of Training.



In 2021, Workforce Alliance participated in the inaugural NAWB Workforce + SNAP E&T Community of Practice Cohort and over a nine-month period attended several SNAP E&T training sessions, received technical assistance, and engaged with other workforce boards exploring SNAP E&T partnership opportunities. They were able to learn about the basic elements of SNAP E&T programming and operations, funding and service models, and examples of current SNAP E&T workforce board partnerships from across the country.

Encouraged by the NAWB Cohort, the Workforce Alliance team, Keith and Denise, reached out to the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) which oversees SNAP and SNAP E&T services in the state. They connected with Eric Hunt, DCF Department Director for Employment Services, and Lisa Strunk, Assistant Director overseeing Employment and Training Services, to explore a potential SNAP E&T partnership. The initial discussions with the DCF team involved learning about their program services, funding, and structure as well as the opportunity for Workforce Alliance to present on its program. Both shared their organizational vision and program development needs, and they began to identify initial areas of alignment and how the two entities could collaborate to enhance each other's programming.



For Keith Lawing, connecting with DCF was part of a broader effort to seek new opportunities to expand workforce services, explore new partnerships and identify additional sources of funding for Workforce Alliance. At the same time, the DCF team was looking to secure employment and training services for SNAP recipients and leverage the SNAP E&T 50-50 funding model with community partners. In support of their partnership efforts, they reached out to Josh McDaniel, the FNS Regional Analyst serving Kansas, who became involved and provided essential technical assistance and guidance.

In 2023, following almost two years of planning, a pilot project was initiated by Workforce Alliance and DCF, which centered on Workforce Alliance delivering SNAP E&T services to SNAP participants. The pilot was funded initially for a three-month start-up phase by DCF using FNS SNAP E&T formula funds that Kansas receives annually. These formula funds did not require an investment of non-federal funds by DCF or Workforce Alliance and were designed to assist Workforce Alliance with program start-up costs. This initial phase was designed to enable needed program processes related to referrals, services coordination, and regular communication to be developed, as well as to prepare for a transition to accessing FNS 50:50 funds for ongoing programming and services.

The shift to the 50:50 model reimbursement model required Workforce Alliance to identify a source of eligible non-federal funds to generate ongoing reimbursement from DCF and FNS. Workforce Alliance had secured eligible local funds targeted for services to justice-impacted job seekers, many of whom were on SNAP or eligible for SNAP, which enabled them to continue to deliver SNAP E&T employment and training services.

FEDERAL SNAP E&T FUNDING

E&T Program Grant (100% Funds)

- All States receive 100% formula-based grants to plan, implement, and operate SNAP E&T.
- Total funding available in FFY 2022: \$104 Million
- Funds can be used for any allowable cost that is necessary and reasonable for the planning, implementation, and program operation. Formula funds are not eligible for supportive services to participants.

50% Reimbursement Funds (50-50 Funds)

- Reimbursement funds for SNAP E&T programs costs exceeding those covered by 100% funds or for supportive services provided to participants.
- Funds eligible for reimbursement can include state or local funds or non-federal funds from "Third Party Partners" contracted by States to offer E&T services
- Eligible non-federal funds are spent "upfront" on approved services for E&T participants in order to generate 50% reimbursement from FNS

Through the pilot, Workforce Alliance has been able to offer a range of services to SNAP E&T participants, including employment assessments, workshops, job search assistance, resume creation, case management, benefit cliff planning, and job retention. In addition, participants have access to job training programs and job placement opportunities provided by the Workforce Alliance Business Services team.



A case manager has been hired to coordinate and work with referrals from DCF, which has been key. The case manager is now attending E&T group orientation/assessment appointments at DCF. This allows DCF to connect new referrals with the case manager immediately. Referrals started slowly but have gradually increased, and Workforce Alliance and DCF are looking to develop a reverse referral process that could significantly enhance the numbers served. A reverse referral process allows Workforce Alliance, for example, to identify and refer SNAP-eligible job seekers served in American Job Centers to DCF for screening and enrollment in the Workforce Alliance pilot.

The next step for the Workforce Alliance and DCF partnership is for the Workforce Alliance to develop the capacity to operate as a SNAP E&T intermediary. This will involve recruiting and contracting with local workforce programs that can serve SNAP participants utilizing their eligible non-federal dollars to support their services and generate reimbursement from FNS and other duties. Keith Lawing, in his role as president and CEO, has actively reached out and engaged local providers in the greater Wichita area to introduce the idea of working as a SNAP E&T provider.

What is a SNAP E&T Intermediary?

A SNAP E&T intermediary supports the State SNAP agency by performing essential administrative tasks on its behalf. A SNAP E&T intermediary can increase capacity and support E&T programs through established leadership roles, key partnerships, and expertise within workforce, employment, and training.

State SNAP agencies that partner with an intermediary remain responsible for the overall SNAP E&T programming, compliance, and providing policy updates, training, and monitoring of the intermediary along with regular communication.

NEXT STEPS - WHAT'S AHEAD

Workforce Alliance and DCF continue to meet and plan out the next steps in their partnership, addressing the following items:

- Continued work to implement an effective reverse referral process in coordination with DCF and an internal system to identify and refer customers who are on or eligible for SNAP, including those served in the American Jobs Center (AJC) and other specific populations.

- Build out Workforce Alliance’s role and capacity to operate as a SNAP E&T Intermediary, including contracting with local providers that offer aligned services and have access to eligible non-federal funds.
- Continue regular meetings with DCF, Workforce Alliance, and FNS to assess program progress, coordinate services, identify best practices, and plan next steps.
- Pursue additional sources of non-federal funds to support program operations and growth. For example, meet with the City of Wichita to discuss CDBG funds or funds for specific populations or projects and look to foundations and grant opportunities.
- Continue to learn and master key SNAP E&T program functions. For example, SNAP E&T eligibility and verification process, SNAP data collection and reporting, program budgeting and invoicing, program monitoring and contracting.
- Develop capacity to braid SNAP E&T funding and services to effectively meet the needs of eligible job seekers by leveraging both systems.
- Incorporate SNAP E&T programming within Workforce Alliance’s full continuum of workforce services and capacity to serve diverse job seekers.

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS FACTORS

The development, launch, and initial success of the Workforce Alliance and DCF SNAP E&T program partnership included its challenges and delays. At the same time, there have been key success factors that have contributed to the progress made, which offer potentially helpful tips and best practices for other workforce boards and state SNAP agencies considering partnership options.

Challenges

Shift from a voluntary to a mandatory SNAP E&T program model

As Workforce Alliance and DCF were meeting and designing their partnership, the Kansas State Legislature voted to shift their SNAP E&T program from a voluntary model to a mandatory model. This was coupled with an additional change made by the United States Congress, which voted to expand the age range for qualifying ABAWDs in 2023. The age range for ABAWDs moved from 18-49 to 18-52 with planned increases to 54 in future years. These shifts required a great deal of time, resources, and focus for the DCF team, which slowed the work and delayed the startup of the SNAP E&T pilot.



Availability of non-federal funds

The Kansas DCF program receives a modest amount of SNAP E&T formula funds from the USDA. To develop and sustain robust SNAP E&T programming, DCF and Workforce Alliance need to rely on the FNS 50:50 model, which requires the availability of non-federal funds to cover the upfront costs of services to draw a 50% reimbursement payment from FNS.

Workforce Alliance was able to draw on a local grant, which provided non-federal funds to serve job seekers who have been justice-involved. Many of these job seekers are on or eligible for SNAP. However, both Workforce Alliance and DCF need to identify and secure new sources of non-federal funds in order to grow and expand services.

Success Factors

Workforce Alliance and SNAP E&T Knowledge and Commitment

The Workforce Alliance team committed the time and energy to learn about the SNAP E&T program and key elements such as funding, SNAP eligibility, pertinent FNS policy, and the capacity needs of a potential partner. Not only did the team become well versed in SNAP E&T, but they also became local SNAP E&T “Champions.” They approached working with DCF and FNS with determination, enthusiasm, and a sense of innovation, which was needed to address the challenges and time necessary to launch a partnership.



Kansas DCF and Workforce Alliance partnership

Both Workforce Alliance and DCF took the time to understand each program’s services and share service gaps, program strengths, and assets. This enabled both parties to identify how a partnership could enhance each other’s services and lead to better services for job seekers on or eligible for SNAP.

For Workforce Alliance, access to a new federal funding source through FNS was a potential opportunity. In addition, establishing a working relationship with the Department of Children and Families provided an important connection to the human services system, which many job seekers rely on.

For DCF, the partnership provided access to high-quality workforce services for SNAP participants, particularly those faced with a work requirement. This has become increasingly important with the shift from voluntary to mandatory models.

FNS Regional Analyst support, technical assistance, and guidance

The FNS Regional Analyst Josh McDaniel played an essential role in supporting the design and launch of this partnership by providing SNAP E&T-specific technical guidance and strategic planning and drawing on his background in the workforce field. He assisted with identifying and utilizing FNS formula funds for start-up and providing guidance on the FNS 50:50 funding model, among other items. All states have access to the FNS Regional Office and SNAP E&T Regional Analysts. Workforce boards looking to pursue SNAP E&T partnerships should seek information and assistance.

Grit and Persistence

The DCF/Workforce Alliance working relationship has been characterized by commitment, perseverance, and an ability not to be discouraged by setbacks and challenges. Developing a partnership across systems, each with its own complexities, bureaucracies, and unique cultures, takes time, trust, innovation, and persistence. All parties involved have shown these qualities, which have been essential to progress.

PROOF OF CONCEPT

While the referral process started slowly, more individuals have been referred from DCF and enrolled and participated in services over the months. Both DCF and Workforce Alliance have worked to implement an effective referral process, service coordination protocol, and reporting. Seeing the pilot's initial success has been encouraging, and it supports efforts to develop both a reverse referral process and an intermediary role for Workforce Alliance.

Below is an initial success story that demonstrates the potential benefits of the partnership.

Participant Success Story



DCF referred Laurie to the WA SNAP E&T project in December 2023. She had been unemployed for several months since relocating to Kansas from Colorado. Laurie had multiple barriers including no high school diploma, a criminal background, and very little work history. She worked with her WA case manager on creating a resume, interview practice, and intensive job search assistance. She also attended several workshops to increase her skills.

Laurie successfully gained employment on 3-25-24 as a Machine Assembly Operator at a local employer. She works full-time, earning \$18.00 per hour with overtime opportunities. This position also allowed Laurie access to benefits on her employment start date.

CONCLUSION

Workforce Alliance has diligently pursued a SNAP E&T partnership with the Kansas Department of Child and Family Services (DCF) with support from the FNS Regional office and Analyst. At this point in time, a pilot program has been implemented and the next steps and tasks have been identified and mapped out. The team of Workforce Alliance, DCF and the FNS Regional Analyst remain committed and focused.

Like others across the country, this SNAP E&T partnership has been built within a local context and shaped by the available opportunities, resources, challenges, and parameters of the SNAP E&T and workforce systems. It is hoped that by sharing this partnership journey, other workforce boards, State SNAP agencies, and interested stakeholders will feel better informed and inspired to consider their own partnership options and possibilities.

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