

# Expanding Opportunities and Reducing Barriers to Work: Evaluation of USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Pilots: Final Summary Report (Summary)

## Background

The Agricultural Act of 2014 authorized \$200 million for the development, implementation, and evaluation of up to 10 pilot projects to test innovative strategies to increase employment and reduce the need for SNAP among program participants. The 10 States that received grants were California, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Grantees began implementing their pilots between January and April 2016, and all pilot services concluded by April 2019.

The Final Summary Report presents employment, earnings, SNAP participation, and other outcome findings that cover a 36-month period for individuals enrolled in the pilots by December 2017. It also presents findings from the implementation evaluation and cost-benefit analysis. The report summarizes findings from the 10 pilot-specific final evaluation reports.

## Key Findings

- Earnings increased in three pilots and employment increased in five pilots for the treatment group compared to the control group.
- An increase in employment did not mean that earnings increased.
- Pilots generally did not decrease SNAP participation or improve food security.
- The cost of pilot services outweighed benefits in most pilots.

## Methods

All pilots used an experimental research design and a total of 44,359 SNAP participants were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups across the 10 pilots. Most pilots had one treatment and one control group. Mississippi had two treatment groups offering basic or enhanced community colleges services (BCCS and ECCS), and California had two control groups (with or without access to existing SNAP Employment and Training (E&T)). Treatment group members were eligible for an enhanced set of pilot-specific services and control group members were eligible for services through existing SNAP E&T; both groups were eligible for other E&T programs available in their communities.

The evaluation had four components:

1. An **implementation analysis** that documented the context and operations of each pilot;

2. A **participation analysis** that examined the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots;

3. An **impact analysis** that examined impacts on earnings, employment, public assistance receipt, and other outcomes such as food security;

4. A **cost/benefit analysis** that estimated the return on each dollar invested in the pilots.

Data collected and analyzed included:

- **Implementation data** from interviews with grantee, partner, and provider staff and treatment group members to understand the pilot planning and implementation and to provide context for other analyses;
- **Administrative service use data** to describe treatment group members' participation in pilot services;

- **Unemployment insurance (UI) wage records** to measure employment and earnings of treatment and control group members;
- **SNAP administrative data** to measure treatment and control group members' participation in SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, and the amount of SNAP and TANF benefits;
- **12- and 36-month follow up survey data** from treatment and control group members for additional information about service receipt, employment, and earnings, as well as food security, health, well-being, and housing status;
- **Cost data** from grantees and providers, and time-use data to estimate the cost of services and net costs and benefits to individuals, the Government, and society.

The two primary outcomes, earnings and SNAP participation, along with employment, were examined over a 2-year period (Years 2 and 3 after a participant's random assignment) to mitigate any adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor market outcomes in Year 3. Findings for Years 1, 2, and 3 are also presented in the report. Statistically significant findings are presented below.

## Findings

**Although the pilot models differed across States, the range of activities they offered were similar.** Nine out of ten pilots offered job search/readiness assistance or training, all offered occupational skills training, eight offered basic education and eight offered work-based learning. Pilots also provided more support services or participant reimbursements and more intensive case management than existing SNAP E&T programs.

**Participation in pilot services was high but so were exits from the pilots.** In most pilots, more than 80 percent of treatment group members initially engaged in pilot services but less than 70 percent started an employment or training-related activity. Across all pilots, the treatment group was more likely to complete an activity than the control group. Nonetheless, 35 to 66 percent of treatment group members exited from the pilots before completing all activities. About 8 to 24 percent exited for employment in the six pilots reporting this information.

**The services offered to treatment group members led to increased earnings in three pilots but had no effect in seven pilots.** Increased earnings were observed in California (compared to the control group with no access to SNAP E&T), Mississippi, and Virginia (Table 1) ranging from \$1,600 to \$4,000 in total earnings in Years 2 and 3, compared to their respective control groups. All three pilots had larger differences between treatment and control groups in starting and completing employment or training-related activities, and in receipt of case management and support services. The lack of impact on earnings in the remaining pilots may be due to various reasons, including smaller differentials between treatment and control group participation and completion of employment and training-related activities.

**Employment increased in five pilots, but in four of these pilots, increased employment did not lead to increased earnings.** Although employment rate increased by about 4 to 6 percentage points for treatment group members in California, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and Vermont, the only pilot that increased both employment and earnings was California (compared to no SNAP E&T control).

**The pilots did not decrease SNAP participation except in Illinois.** Individuals enrolled in the Illinois pilot were primarily mandatory work registrants who could lose SNAP benefits if sanctioned for not participating in E&T. Increased employment as well as higher sanction rates likely led to the 3-percentage point decrease in SNAP participation of the treatment group compared to the control group. There was no effect of pilot services on SNAP participation in seven pilots (Table 1). SNAP participation increased by 2 to 4 percentage points in Mississippi (BCCS) and Virginia, despite increased earnings.

**Food security improved in two pilots.** In California, treatment group members were less likely than the no SNAP E&T services control group to report living in a food insecure household (42.5 versus 49.4 percent) or in a household with very low food security (23.2 versus 30.9 percent) at 36 months. The prevalence of very low food security (29.3 versus 40.5 percent) was also lower than the control group for Mississippi (BCCS). Both pilots had increased treatment group earnings relative to their control groups.

**Benefits did not offset the costs of pilot services.**

The total costs of the pilots for planning, recruiting participants, and providing treatment group services ranged from \$6.8 million in Georgia to \$23.4 million in Washington. Although treatment group services generally led to a net benefit for individuals, the cost to government and taxpayers for providing treatment group services and activities was larger than the benefits, resulting in a negative net benefit to society (by \$400 to \$6,000 per treatment group member across pilots and data sources, survey, or UI) for most pilots. Three pilots, California (compared to the no SNAP E&T control group), Georgia, and Mississippi had a positive net benefit to society by about \$1,000 (survey data),

\$100 (survey data) and \$300 (UI data) per treatment group member, respectively.

**The implementation context for each pilot can help explain their specific findings.**

A number of factors may have played a role: level of participation in and completion of pilot activities, types of employment and training activities offered, level of receipt of case management and support services, availability of E&T services to the control group, the ease of participant flow through pilot activities, which affected dropoff, extent of barriers to participation and employment among individuals targeted by the pilot, and the local job market.

Table 1. Summary of treatment–control differences in earnings, employment, and SNAP participation in Years 2 and 3 after random assignment

	CA (NS)	CA (ES)	DE	GA	IL	KS	KY	MS (ECCS)	MS (BCCS)	VA	VT	WA
Earnings	+	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	+	+	+	ns	ns
Employment	+	ns	ns	ns	+	+	+	ns	ns	ns	+	ns
SNAP participation	ns	ns	ns	ns	–	ns	ns	ns	+	+	ns	ns

+ indicates that difference between research groups is positive and statistically significant at the 0.10 level.

– indicates that difference between research groups is negative and statistically significant at the 0.10 level.

ns indicates that difference between research groups is not statistically significant at the 0.10 level.

Data Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation unemployment insurance (UI) wage records, 12- and 36-month survey data, and SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note:

CA (NS) and CA (ES) refer to the differences between the treatment group in California and the “no SNAP E&T services” and “existing SNAP E&T services” control groups, respectively. MS (ECCS) and MS (BCCS) refer to the differences between the enhanced community colleges services (ECCS) and the basic community colleges services (BCCS) treatment groups in Mississippi and the control group.

Impacts on earnings were based on UI data for Mississippi. Impacts on employment were based on UI and survey data for Kansas and on UI data only for Kentucky; all other impacts on earnings and employment were based on survey data.

**For More Information:**

Rowe, G., Mabli, J., Hartnack, J., and Monzella, K. (2022). Expanding Opportunities and Reducing Barriers to Work: Final Summary Report. (Evaluation of USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Pilots.) Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. AG-3198-B-15-0002. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. Available online at: [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).