

Expanding Opportunities and Reducing Barriers to Work: Interim Summary Report (Summary)

Evaluation of Pilot Projects to Promote Work and Increase Accountability in the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

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 reduce dependency on and increase employment among Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants. The 10 States that received grants were California, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington and began implementing their pilots between January and April 2016. All grantees concluded pilot services by April 2019.

The Interim Summary Report presents short-term outcome findings that cover each individual for 12 months after enrollment in the pilots for individuals who enrolled by December 2017. The report also includes findings on the implementation evaluation and cost analysis. The report summarizes findings drawn from interim evaluation reports prepared for each of the 10 pilots. The final evaluation reports will present longer-term (36-month) outcomes that may offer more conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of pilot services.

Key Findings

- The 10 pilots implemented diverse service models and served various target groups.
- Grantees faced steep implementation challenges such as hiring staff and developing partnerships.
- Both pilot engagement and exit rates were high during the 12 month follow-up period.
- The pilots had few impacts on employment and did not decrease SNAP participation during the fourth quarter.

Methods

All pilots used an experimental research design and a total of 44,359 SNAP participants were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Treatment group members were eligible for an enhanced set of pilot-specific services and control group members were eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs in the State; both groups continued to be eligible for other services available to anyone in their communities. The interim evaluation includes the following four components:

1. An **implementation analysis** that documents the context and operations of each pilot;
2. A **participation analysis** that examines the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots;

3. An **impact analysis** that identifies what works and for whom by examining impacts on employment and earnings, public assistance receipt, and other outcomes such as food security.

4. A **cost analysis** that describes the total and component costs of each pilot in the interim evaluation period.

The two primary outcomes (employment and SNAP participation) were measured for the fourth quarter after the participant's random assignment date.

Sources of data include administrative service use data to describe engagement and participation in services; unemployment insurance (UI) wage records to measure employment and earnings; SNAP administrative data to measure participation in SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, and the amount of SNAP and TANF benefits; and 12-month follow-up survey data to provide additional information

about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings, as well as food security, health, well-being, and housing status. The evaluation also used implementation data collected from interviews with pilot staff and treatment group members and grantee-provided cost data and time-use data to estimate the cost of services and service components.

Findings

Pilots implemented diverse service models. The pilots tested strategies that included job readiness training, basic education, occupational skills training, work-based learning, and subsidized employment. Pilots served diverse target groups including veterans, Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), and work registrants. Some pilots focused on moving participants into training or jobs, and others focused on first resolving barriers to employment.

Grantees faced steep challenges implementing pilot services. Challenges (including hiring staff and developing partnerships) provide important context for the interim findings. Most grantees were able to implement pilot models as designed.

Both engagement and exit rates were high in the pilots. Treatment groups were more likely to participate in an E&T activity compared to control groups (Exhibit 1). Pilot exit rates were above 50 percent for most pilots (Exhibit 2). States attributed a minority of pilot exits to program completion or employment.

Case management and support service receipt were high. Pilot staff reported case management was among the most successful pilot services (Exhibit 3). Some grantees using team-based case management found it to be particularly effective for managing client needs. Transportation assistance was the most common support service provided and was particularly important for rural pilot participants (Exhibit 4).

The pilots had few impacts on employment. There were no significant impacts on employment in six pilots. Pilots in Kansas and Kentucky led to increases in treatment group employment in Quarter 4 compared to control groups. The pilot led to lower employment in Virginia and Delaware (Exhibit 5). However, re-estimation using an additional 9 months of UI data for Delaware reveals no significant differences between treatment and control group employment rates in the fourth quarter. (Note: Complete UI data were not available for the interim analysis. Estimates were recalculated using all UI data once they became available. The updated analysis showed little change in results for most pilots.)

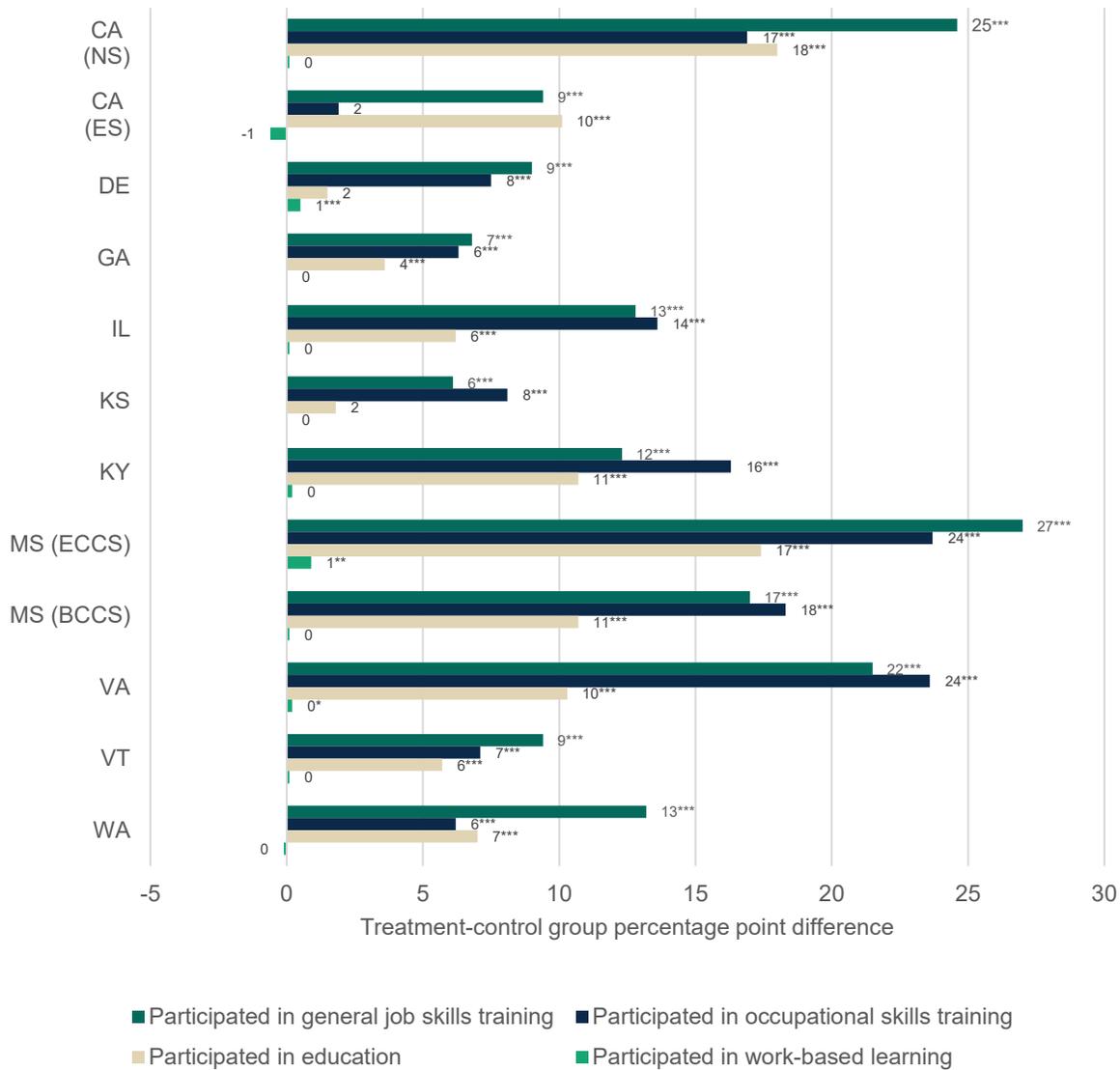
Overall, the pilots did not lead to increases in earnings. Increased earnings were observed in Kansas and California treatment groups. California earnings were only higher for the treatment group when compared to the control group with no access to E&T services. The pilot led to lower earnings in Virginia. There were no significant impacts on earnings in the other pilots (Exhibit 5).

The pilots did not decrease SNAP participation. An exception was Illinois, where treatment group members were less likely to be participating in SNAP in Quarter 4 compared to the control group, which may be due to high sanction rates (Exhibit 5).

The pilots did not decrease food insecurity. In Mississippi, however, one of the two treatment groups was less likely than the control group to report living in a household that is food insecure or with very low food security.

Grantees reported spending from \$4 to \$16 million on planning and implementing treatment group services through December 2017. Most of the costs were allocated to administration including pilot planning and development, management and oversight, and recruitment and enrollment; 7 of 10 grantees spent more than half of total costs on administrative activities. The remaining costs were for direct services.

Exhibit 1. Treatment-control group differences in participation in specific types of activities, by pilot



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

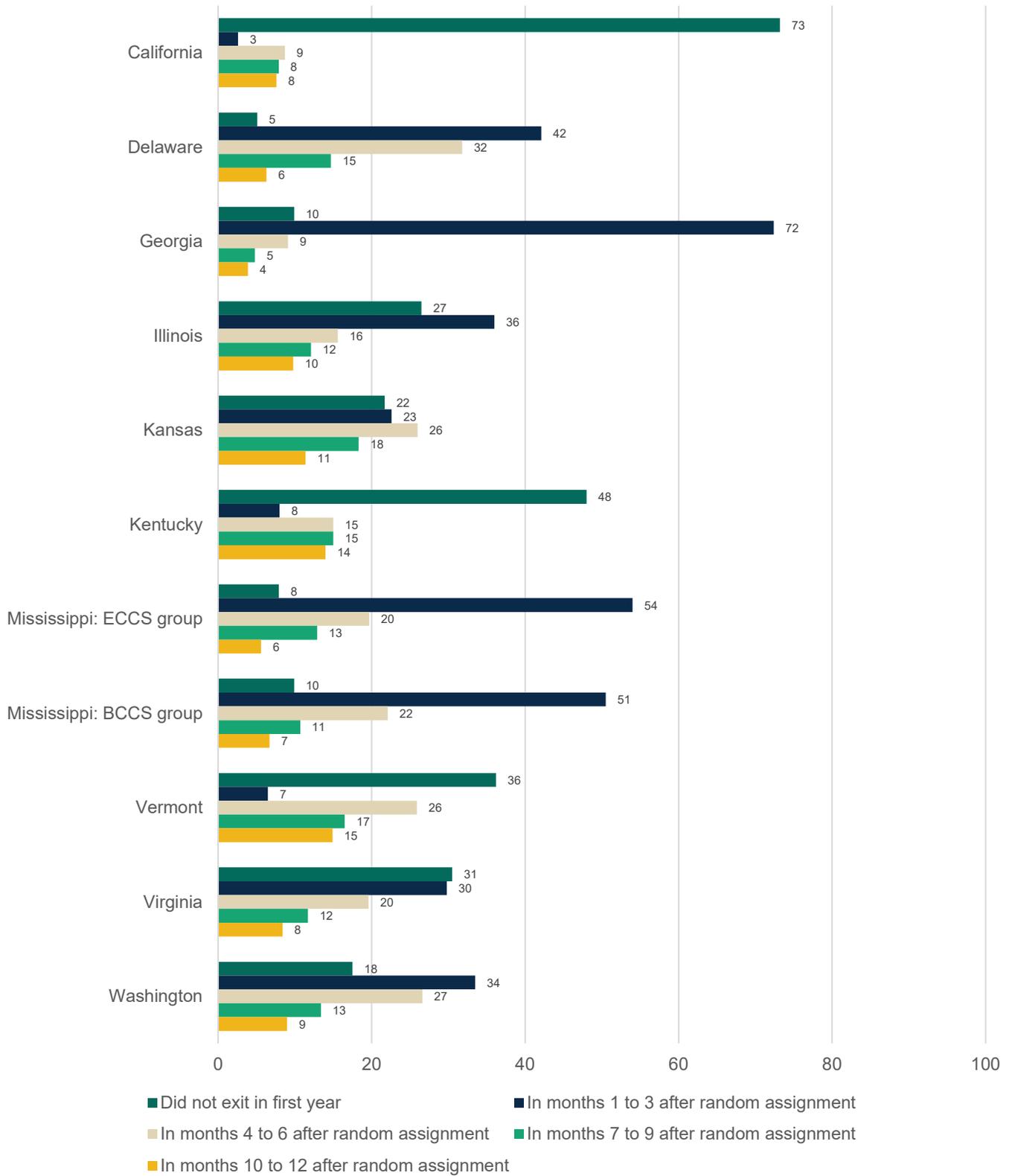
Note: CA (NS) and CA (ES) refer to the differences between the treatment group in California and the “no service” (NS) and “existing service” (ES) control groups, respectively. MS (ECCS) and MS (BCCS) refer to the differences between the “enhanced community college services” (ECCS) and “basic community college services” (BCCS) treatment groups in Mississippi and the control group.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.

*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test

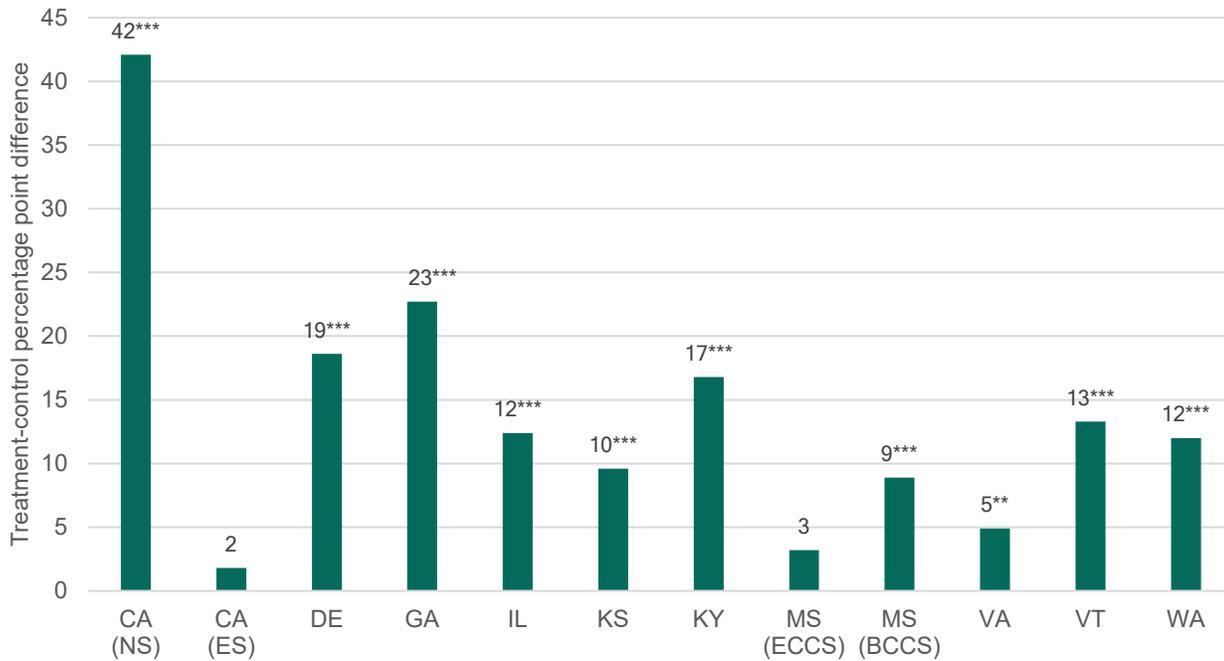
Exhibit 2. Percentage of individuals who exited over time, by pilot



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment.

Exhibit 3. Treatment-control difference in the percentage of individuals who received career counseling or one-on-one assistance from employment professional or case manager, by pilot



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

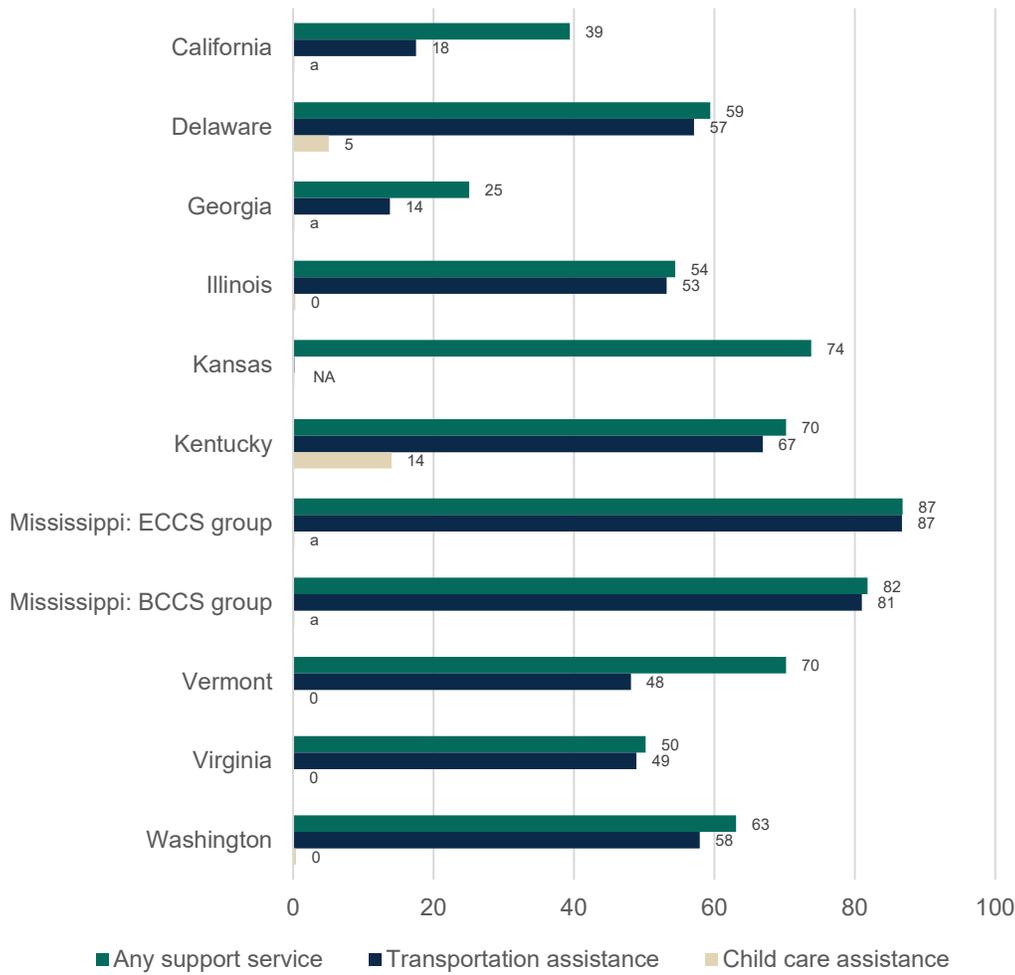
Note: CA (NS) and CA (ES) refer to the differences between the treatment group in California and the “no service” and “existing service” control groups, respectively. MS (ECCS) and MS (BCCS) refer to the differences between the “enhanced community college services” (ECCS) and “basic community college services” (BCCS) treatment groups in Mississippi and the control group.

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Exhibit 4. Percentage of individuals who received any support service and received each type of available support service, by pilot



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment.

^a Indicates the pilot did not offer direct payments for the type of support service.

NA indicates the pilot could not provide data activity was not offered.

Exhibit 5. Summary of treatment–control differences in employment, earnings, and SNAP participation

	CA	DE	GA	IL	KS	KY	MS (ECCS)	MS (BCCS)	VA	VT	WA
Employment (using UI wage records) in Quarter 4	ns	-	ns	ns	+	+	ns	ns	-	ns	ns
Employment (using survey data) in Quarter 4	+	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Earnings (UI wage records) in Quarter 4	+	ns	ns	ns	+	ns	ns	ns	-	ns	ns
Earnings (survey) in Quarter 4	+	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
SNAP participation in Quarter 4	ns	+	ns	-	ns	ns	+	+	+	ns	+

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, SNAP administrative data, and 12-month survey data, weighted data.

Note: MS (ECCS) and MS (BCCS) refer to the differences between the “enhanced community college services” (ECCS) and “basic community college services” (BCCS) treatment groups in Mississippi and the control group. Indications for CA reflect differences between the CA treatment group and the CA “no service” control group.

+ indicates that difference between research groups is positive (treatment group estimates are higher than control group estimates) and statistically significant at the .10 level.

- indicates that difference between research groups is negative (treatment group estimates are lower than control group estimates) and statistically significant at the .10 level.

ns indicates that difference between research groups is not statistically significant at the .10 level.

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For More Information:

Mabli, J., Rowe, G., Hamilton, G., Hartnack, J., and Schochet, P. (September 2021). Expanding Opportunities and Reducing Barriers to Work: Interim Summary Report. Evaluation of Pilot Projects to Promote Work and Increase State Accountability in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. 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. Project Officer: Danielle Deemer. The interim summary report and the 10 pilot-specific interim reports are available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.