SNAP E&T How-To-Guide: Building Continuous Improvement Practices

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Overview

A continuous improvement process can help workforce boards to regularly and consistently review data, leading to data-informed decisions that better support SNAP E&T participants to gain and sustain employment at a livable wage.

In addition to meeting federal reporting requirements, the ability to use data is critical for strengthening the program over time and building stakeholder support. This guide outlines how to build a continuous improvement plan for your SNAP E&T program by:

- Determining your program goals and priorities;
- Identifying metrics and targets to measure success and progress;
- Setting up data collection and management processes; and
- Designing continuous improvement practices to collect, analyze, and share data.

Step One: Determine Program Goals and Priorities

Your SNAP E&T program goals and priorities should determine what you should measure. Based on those goals and priorities, determine the questions you are seeking to answer for how to make program improvements to meet those goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your SNAP E&amp;T program goal is to increase enrollment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key questions you may want to answer include:**

- What is the typical profile (i.e. race, age, gender, zip code) of your current SNAP E&T participants?
- Who are the people your program is not currently reaching?
- What is the conversion rate from referral to enrollment?
- What is the typical time from referral to first contact?
**Step Two: Identify Metrics**

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Federal Nutrition Services (FNS) requires states to report on five national SNAP E&T quantitative reporting measures (see Box 1 below). Although SNAP E&T and WIOA collect many of the same metrics, SNAP E&T reporting metrics are not measured against any benchmarks, unlike WIOA’s performance metrics, and there are no consequences associated with performance. Thus, SNAP E&T allows greater flexibility for programs to select and track their own metrics for purposes of continuous improvement. These reporting metrics also offer SNAP E&T programs more flexibility to serve individuals who may be harder to serve.

**Mandatory Federal Nutrition Services (FNS) Reporting Measures**

01
# and % of E&T participants and former participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after completion of participation in E&T

02
# and % of E&T participants and former participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after completion of participation in E&T

03
The median quarterly earnings of all the E&T participants and former participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after completion of participation in E&T and

04
# and % of participants who completed a training, education, work experience or an on-the-job training component

05
The number and percent of current and former participants who:
- Are voluntary or mandatory participants;
- Have received a high school degree (or high school equivalency) prior to being provided with E&T services;
- Are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs);
- Speak English as a second language;
- Are male or female; or
- Are within each of the following age ranges: 16-17, 18-35, 36-49, 50-59, 60+.
Based on the key guiding questions for your program, determine specific metrics to measure status and change in the questions you are seeking to answer. Metrics are instructions for what quantitative and qualitative data to collect.

As best practice, integrate both quantitative (counts, dollars, etc.) and qualitative (interviews, case notes, etc.) information as part of your continuous improvement process. Using various types of information tells a fuller story to explain patterns and trends. When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative information can help identify program successes and challenges, understand strengths and gaps, and point to which changes can be made to improve program outcomes.

**Example on Quantitative Metric**

You are interested in the # and % of people who engage in SNAP E&T after enrolling; and have defined:

- number of people enrolled in SNAP E&T as the # of people who completed “Orientation” or “Employability Assessment”
- number of people engaged in SNAP E&T as the # of people who currently are participating or have participated in at least one SNAP E&T component OR job search (SJS) or job search training (JST) for at least 60 days

When analyzing the metric, you calculate the percentage of people engaged to the total number of people enrolled. You disaggregate the data by race, gender, geography, and provider to study trends.

**Example on Quantitative Metric**

You are interested in the % of participants that report feeling increased trust and reliability in using SNAP E&T resources. You measure the metric at intake and upon exit through a survey that has a response scale from 1 (do not rely on SNAP E&T resources in my employment efforts) to 5 (actively rely on SNAP E&T resources in my employment efforts).

When analyzing the metric, you disaggregate the data by race, gender, geography, and provider to study trends.
TIPS for Selecting Metrics

Align your metrics with the values of your SNAP E&T program
The metrics you choose will influence behavior change and shape how people work, and how participants respond to your program.

Identify factors for disaggregation
Disaggregate data to ensure outcomes are improving for all people regardless of race, gender, geography, or other factors.

Set both program quality and population outcome metrics
Use program quality metrics (e.g. % of SNAP E&T participants accessing wraparound supports) to better understand population outcome metrics (e.g. % SNAP participants that enroll in SNAP E&T).

Design metrics to mitigate unintended consequences
Be cautious of the unintended consequences that certain metrics may encourage, such as “creaming” by selecting participants who are easiest to reach and disincentivizing under-resourced participants to enroll.

Once you have a draft list of potential metrics, assess them for usability based on the criteria below.
Consider the following criteria when selecting metrics:

**Alignment & Impact**
- Does it align with your state's SNAP E&T plan?
- Is it already collected by other partners?
- How will this metric improve participants' experiences?

**Availability & Accessibility**
- How challenging is it to collect this data consistently and accurately?
- How regularly can you access it?

**Achievability**
- How much influence do you have in improving this metric?
- How much improvement can you expect with the resources you have?

### Worksheet: Identifying Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric Definition</th>
<th>Program or Population Metric</th>
<th>Disaggregation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged = # of people who completed “Orientation” or “Employability Assessment”</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Race, gender, zip code, provider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet: Assessing Metrics

Rank each metric by the following criteria:

- **High**
- **Medium**
- **Low**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric 1</th>
<th>Metric 2</th>
<th>Metric 3</th>
<th>Metric 4</th>
<th>Metric 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Alignment &amp; Impact</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability &amp; Accessibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achievability</td>
<td></td>
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**Step Three: Set Up Data Collection and Management Processes**

Once you have determined your desired SNAP E&T program metrics, determine details for data collection and management. Name each individual responsible for each task.

For each metric, specify:

1. **Who is collecting and entering the data**
   - Is data currently accessible, or is a data sharing agreement or MOU required? Is the data consistently and accurately collected?

2. **How often the data is collected**
   - How often is data entered? How often can data be pulled?

3. **Where the data is being stored and how it can be accessed**
   - Who has access to the raw data? What format can the data be accessed?
4. **Who is pulling and analyzing the data**

How much effort is required to ensure the data is clean, complete, and ready for analysis? Do staff have the knowledge, capability, and capacity to analyze data on a regular cadence? If metrics need to pull from more than one data source, can the data sources be easily integrated across each other?

**Worksheet: Identifying Metrics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Data collector</th>
<th>Data entry frequency</th>
<th>Data location &amp; access</th>
<th>Data analyzer</th>
<th>Data analysis frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which metric are you tracking?</td>
<td>Who enters the data?</td>
<td>How often is the data entered?</td>
<td>Where is the data housed?</td>
<td>Who analyzes the data?</td>
<td>How often is data pulled for analysis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of people engaged</td>
<td>WDB case manager</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>State SNAP E&amp;T data system</td>
<td>WDB case manager</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step Four: Design Continuous Improvement Practices

Roles in the Feedback Loop

- **Data Collector**: Collects and shares data. Identifies any new metrics to collect data on.
- **Data Enterer**: Enters data into the database for analyzers.
- **Data Analyzer**: Pulls and analyzes data, reports to decision-makers.
- **Decision-makers & Stakeholders**: Hosts in-person or virtual Continuous Improvement Meeting with stakeholders. Identify areas for improvement and opportunity for change.
- **Decision-makers**: Determines program changes to be made and assists with implementing changes.

Collect Data

Begin collecting and tracking data for your selected metrics. Assign clear responsibilities and instructions for who is entering data and where data is stored. Determine qualitative data collection practices to supplement quantitative data.
Analyze Data

Set up regular processes to review and analyze the data. When analyzing data, consider the following:

- Study outliers (data points that are very high or very low); are there consistent patterns among outliers (e.g. by provider or by geographic area)?
- Study averages and trends: what do the mean and median reveal about patterns?
- Study trends and patterns in further disaggregation to compare impact on certain groups of individuals or quality of certain providers.

Discuss Results

After data has been collected and analyzed, share data with partners and stakeholders to understand and evaluate opportunities and challenges. Evaluate what the data means for your program and community. Identify trends across communities to identify broader opportunities and challenges to collectively determine next steps.

Results should be shared in a variety of formats to ensure data insights are easy to understand and use when making program improvement decisions. Consider the following options:

- Reports
- Newsletters
- Data Dashboards
- Data review meetings
- Meetings with individual providers to discuss individualized data
- Provider peer learning spaces

Improve Outcomes

Host regular checkpoints for the above three steps and convene program decision-makers to make program improvements based on results discussed. Review quantitative and qualitative information to inform strategies to improve policies or practices. Engage stakeholders and gather feedback as needed to ensure decisions reach the desired impact. Monitor changes and repeat the continuous improvement feedback loop.
Resources

For more information on continuous improvement for SNAP E&T programs, visit the references below:

- [USDA's webinar, Improving Equity and Data in SNAP E&T](#) provides useful insights into how using data better has improved program quality in Minnesota.
- [SNAP to Skills SNAP E&T Data Capture, Measurement & Reporting Policy Brief](#) explains data collection guidelines for national reporting measures.
- [SNAP E&T Program Toolkit](#) explains what data is needed to verify eligibility.
- [USDA’s DATA Grant](#) is working with state SNAP E&T agencies to improve their data collection systems, which all SNAP E&T providers in the state will be using.
Appendix: Sample Metrics

Program Quality Metrics

- # of hours to make first contact with participant after referral and eligibility verification
- % of SNAP E&T participants accessing wraparound supports (transportation, childcare, etc.)
- % SNAP E&T participants co-enrolled in other workforce programs
- # of times providers reach out to a participant per week
- % of SNAP E&T participants who engage and actively participate in component
- # of providers using strategies for targeted participant recruitment and engagement (i.e. materials in multiple languages, verbal outreach)
- # of participants receiving a county or tribal referral for SNAP E&T services
- % of participants that use the program’s SNAP E&T website to access resources
- % of participants receiving language interpretation services if needed
- % staff receiving data training
- % staff who were former SNAP E&T participants, or who speak XYZ languages, or are from XYZ demographics

Population Outcome Metrics

- % eligible SNAP participants that enroll in SNAP E&T
- % of participants with net asset gain v. % who experience benefits cliff (i.e. lose other benefits due to wage gain)
- % of participants with industry-recognized credentials and education
- % of participants employed who are XYZ demographics
- % of participants with wage gain who are XYZ demographics
- % of participants that report feeling confident or optimistic about their employment opportunities
- % of participants that report feeling increased trust and reliability in using SNAP E&T resources