

Building healthy relationships between state SNAP agency and SNAP-Ed implementing agencies (October, 2018)

The USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal program that is administered by each state through their designated SNAP agency. Its purpose is to provide supplementary food assistance to low-income households in accordance with federal poverty level income guidelines. State agencies are organized differently in each state, but the SNAP program must be administered by a state agency.

SNAP-Education administration looks very different by state. The funding for SNAP-Education comes from the USDA FNS to the state SNAP agency based on a federal formula. State federal allocations are published each year and can be located on the SNAP-Ed Connections website. The state SNAP agency has the following four options when it comes to implementing SNAP-Education:

1. Keep all of the funding and implement SNAP-Education themselves
2. Contract with one implementing agency to implement SNAP-Education
3. Contract with multiple implementing agencies to implement SNAP-Education
4. Choose not to implement SNAP-education

Typically one of the implementing agencies (IAs) is the Cooperative Extension System through the state's land grant university.

State agency involvement can vary on a continuum from very active to minimal. Every state agency must have final fiscal oversight, ultimate state plan and program approval, and management evaluation responsibility. In some instances, the state may maintain these required functions, but otherwise serve in a pass-through capacity, giving the IA the freedom to implement SNAP-Education based on their expertise and evidence. In other cases, state SNAP agency employees may work closely and collaboratively in shaping the core components of the state plan. In rare instances, the state SNAP agency may dedicate one to two employees completely to the state administration of the SNAP-Ed Plan.

In addition to the FTE devoted to SNAP-Ed, the approach of the state SNAP agency may vary from an almost equal partnership to close monitoring/regulatory environment. The SNAP-Ed funding stream is unique in that conversations with the federal regional FNS office must be coordinated through the state agency, and not occur in isolation from the state agency. This communication structure ensures that both the state and IA works as a cohesive, collaborative, and intentional team in administering the goals of the state plan. A best practice is that neither the federal agency, the state agency, nor the IAs be surprised by program activities.

Recommendations for positive leadership and communication for state SNAP agency and IAs:

- Regular leadership team meetings between the state SNAP agency and IAs to develop strategic directions that inform and direct outcomes in the state SNAP-Ed Plan. All partners should review the federal guidance.
- A contract between the state agency and IAs, including outcomes and deliverables. Subcontracts should include scope of work and budgets.
- Quarterly progress reports developed by IAs for the state agency. This increases communication and serves as a regular Management Evaluation tool.
- Intentional communication plans that guarantee that the state agency, IAs, and stakeholders meet regularly.
- A State Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) to ensure that partners are aware of each other's efforts. This increases the likelihood of collaboration on joint ventures and defining core nutrition goals across multiple state agency departments.
- Regular information about best practices and national trends, while adapting as needed to the unique demographics and partnerships in your local and state level settings.
- Communication about the unique state projects, partners, strategies, and collaborations with regional and national federal partners to create and maintain state contextual relevance within national parameters.