



## SNAP Employment and Training Expansion Report

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Children and Family Services Administration

Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division

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## Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training program, through strong partnerships, helps SNAP recipients fully utilize their benefits, gain the essential skills needed for gainful employment, and successfully transition off public assistance. This report outlines expansion efforts of the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Employment and Economic Development.

## Legislation

Minnesota Statutes 2016, section 256D.051, Food Stamp Employment and Training Program, subd. 6b.

(b) The appropriation must be used for skill attainment through employment, training, and support services for food stamp participants. By February 15, 2017, the commissioner shall report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over the food stamp employment and training program on the progress of securing additional federal reimbursement dollars under this program.

The Employment and Training Program statute, in its entirety, is in the Appendix of this report.

## **Introduction**

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This report is submitted to the 2017 Minnesota Legislature pursuant to Minn. Stat. 2016, section 256D.051, Food Stamp Employment and Training Program, subd. 6b.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training Program (SNAP E&T), refers to the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program as named in statute. The program, through strong partnerships, helps recipients fully utilize their SNAP benefits, gain essential skills needed for gainful employment, and successfully transition off public assistance.

Guided by the Food and Nutrition Act (the Act) of 2008, Minnesota operates SNAP E&T to allow SNAP recipients to meet work requirements stipulated in the Act. The Act mandates that all nonexempt SNAP recipients register for work. The Act also mandates that each state agency develop and operate an E&T program that consists of one or more of the employment and/or training components determined by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) through approval of a state E&T plan. Minnesota's approved components are outlined in Table 1, below.

### **Funding**

As a condition of SNAP eligibility, individuals must comply with SNAP work requirements. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service provides state agencies with grant money to fund the administrative costs of an E&T program. In FY 2017 (current FY), FNS allocated Minnesota \$1.6 million to conduct SNAP E&T.

These funds are called 100 percent federal funding and are used for the planning, implementation and operation of SNAP E&T. The funding cannot be used for any participant reimbursements, such as transportation, uniforms, or child care. Food and Nutrition Services determines funding for each state based on work registrants and the number of individuals who are able to work. A second funding stream is also available to states, often called 50 percent reimbursement money. From this funding stream, reimbursement can be requested for participant reimbursements and additional administrative costs for planning, implementing and operating the SNAP E&T program. This funding is used for program expansion; its availability is not based on the number of participants in an E&T program. Minnesota requested 50 percent reimbursement funding for up to \$5.4 million in FFY 2017.

### **Administration**

The Minnesota Department of Human Services administers the SNAP E&T program in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), through an interagency agreement. DEED maintains WorkForce One (WF1), the system that hosts the SNAP Employment and Training program. In addition to data sharing with the department, DEED ensures that coordination with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) occurs, and that maximization of employment services occurs with providers. Since Minnesota's SNAP E&T program is county agency administered, local area plans are submitted, describing SNAP E&T services that will be delivered within the county, and describe coordination with other employment programs and client support systems. Counties that have low employment rates are given exempt status from Food and Nutrition Services through a waiver. This waiver is reviewed annually. Minnesota received waiver approval for all tribes and 15 counties exempt for FFY 2017: Aitkin, Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard, Itasca, Kanabec, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomen, Marshall, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Norman, Pine and Wadena. Seven

additional county agencies have chosen not to operate a SNAP E&T program: Benton, Fillmore, Freeborn, Rice, Olmsted, Stearns and Winona.

## Services

Within 30 days of SNAP eligibility, participants must receive services, including orientation, assessment, and develop an employment plan. Participants may engage in multiple activities to meet individual identified needs.

Table 1

Allowable Component	Activity Type	Target Audience	Examples
<b>Non-education, Non-work Components</b>	Job search Job seeking skills/job club Job retention services	All SNAP E&T participants  Offered 90 days after SNAP closure due to increased earnings	Completion of applications, Interviews, and structured group sessions on resume writing, telephone techniques
<b>Education Components</b>	Basic education Vocational training	All SNAP E&T participants	English as a Second Language (ESL), High school equivalency (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and additional skill building through training programs.
<b>Work Components</b>	Workfare Work experience	All SNAP E&T participants	Working the value of SNAP benefits through an approved nonprofit or private entity, and actual work experience or training activities.
<b>Other Activities</b>	Orientation Assessment Employment plan Social services	All SNAP E&T participants	Explanation of requirements, evaluations used to develop plans, and referrals to agencies to assist with barriers.

## **Demographics**

Using the most up-to-date report on SNAP participants (SNAP Characteristics Report, 2014), data indicates the population reached by SNAP E&T are most likely:

- Fifty-eight percent White, 24 percent Black, 8 percent Asian and 4 percent Hispanic and American Indian.
- Almost 40 percent of recipients had less than a high school education.
- Of the subset of SNAP recipients who are under age 60, do not have children, and not disabled (13 percent of the total caseload and are SNAP E&T eligible), 35 percent report work earnings. According to recent department data, more than 32,000 adults were referred to SNAP E&T services in 2016; 6,300 were enrolled and served.

## Expansion

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Many SNAP recipients are not connected to skill development programs. Expanding SNAP Employment and Training will connect participants to an array of supportive services and skill development programs so they can take full advantage of their benefits, gain the skills needed to advance to self-sustaining employment, and successfully transition off SNAP.

SNAP to Skills (S2S) research indicates that most available jobs in the upcoming years will require at least some education beyond high school, yet many SNAP participants have not reached this level of education. To meet labor market demand, a focus on SNAP recipient's skills and education will increase their likelihood of exiting SNAP. [<https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/why-snap-to-skills>]

Expansion efforts include focusing on maintenance of benefits while investing in occupational skill development to obtain employment and career advancement. The continuum of support services and skill development programs available to SNAP participants are expanding by:

- Reviewing the current E&T structure and funding to better serve recipients
- Increasing 50 percent matching funds through third-party partner programs to expand services
- Expanding and building on current pilots and supplementary programs

The department will follow a five-year strategic plan with five goals, each with strategies and measures for success. This strategic plan initiates a change in the traditional SNAP E&T program that was built on limited federal funds. It incorporates the 50 percent funding to build and expand the program, allowing strategic utilization of 100 percent funds.

**Goal 1:** Build a diverse network of providers that serve eligible participants across the state. Create more skill development opportunities, and increase the number of access points for recipients while capitalizing on the federal 50 percent funding opportunity.

**Strategies the department and partners will utilize include:**

- Engaging with local providers
- Assessing training and skills development programs
- Ensuring service training and educational programs are aligned with local industry and employment needs
- Ensuring provider programs and services are connected to local communities and economies
- Supporting a model for reimbursement funds to be reinvested for expansion
- Creating the capacity to increase the number of providers available to serve recipients
- Growing federal financial participation to increase state investments

**Measures of success include increased:**

- Range of SNAP E&T services and options available
- Number of recipients served
- Federal financial funds reinvested in E&T

**Goal 2:** Connect SNAP participants to appropriate skill development and training programs through a shared and strong referral process. Create a no wrong door approach, allowing individuals to be served effectively and seamlessly.

**Strategies the department and partners will utilize include:**

- Developing a combination of outreach and marketing products to inform participants
- Collaborating to determine the best assessment and strategies to match and connect participants with employment and career goals
- Supporting providers in efforts to enroll recipients, allowing providers to focus on participant coaching and assistance
- Working with service providers to integrate cross-provider collaborations and referral processes

**Measures of success include increased:**

- Access to a range of training opportunities
- Number of recipients who meet work requirements
- Increased number of recipients who improve their skills, obtain employment, retain employment and increase their employment earnings

**Goal 3:** Create an array of essential support services that address barriers, and support participation in training and employment activities. Address a number of key challenges that SNAP recipients face such as access to transportation, homelessness, ex-offender records and child care. Growing evidence shows that providing

supportive services assists recipients in participating and completing skill development and employment programs.

**Strategies the department and partners will utilize include:**

- Creating capacity and identifying funding to maintain a continuum of support services needed
- Facilitating regular meetings with E&T providers to ensure participant supports are addressed
- Building and expand the current array of participant support services

**Measures of success will include increased:**

- Number of participants completing E&T programming
- Federal financial participation funds reinvested into SNAP E&T for recipients

**Goal 4:** Establish strong connections with local and regional employers. Employer-service provider partnerships are critical in ensuring skill development programs align with employer needs.

**Strategies the department and partners will utilize include:**

- Guiding providers to deliberately integrate employer engagement into programming
- Providing job market information to providers
- Working with providers to host job fairs with local area employers
- Identifying and promote strategies for service providers and local employers' collaboration efforts

**Measures of success will include increased number of participants who:**

- Obtain employment, retain employment and increase their employment earnings
- Successfully transition off of SNAP

**Goal 5:** Evaluate to measure success and share results. Integrate evaluation to gauge how well E&T is working for Minnesotans, including program efficiency, effectiveness and the impact on moving families toward self-sufficiency.

**Strategies the department partners will utilize include:**

- Evaluating SNAP E&T's effectiveness in growing skills, placement success, and increases in earnings for participants
- Identifying and sharing evidence-based practices
- Sharing state performance on federal reporting measures

- Publishing information on recipients, participation in E&T, and data on the measures of success annually
- Sharing the annual state plan publicly

**Measures of success will include tracking and reporting data through:**

- Minnesota's performance on federal reporting measures
- Publication of E&T data and analysis
- Ensuring stakeholders, providers, and the public have access to the department's state plan

**Current Efforts**

Expansion efforts began in Hennepin and Ramsey counties where nearly half of all SNAP recipients reside. Four community-based organizations, HIRED, Catholic Charities, Goodwill-Easter Seals and Project for Pride in Living, are contracting directly with the department and operating as third party match providers in cooperation with Hennepin County. The four agencies have previous experience with SNAP E&T programming and are assisting in determining the best practices, and identifying systems and processes needed for expanding this effort with other nonprofit organizations.

Additional expansion efforts are occurring at the county level; Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington and Anoka counties outlined plans for incorporating eligible 50 percent funds.

The 2016 legislative session resulted in appropriations to DEED aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities in Minnesota. Of the equity grants, 25 percent can be used for SNAP E&T match. This coordinated effort supports the state's effort to increase SNAP participant's utilization of SNAP E&T services.

At the policy level, expansion efforts include aligning Minnesota policy with federal options. This is outlined in the 2017 governor's budget package. The current option used by Minnesota has generated excessive notices and paperwork, but very little engagement in employment services.

**Future Efforts**

Planning is underway to prepare for the inclusion of other third-party partners. Other areas across Minnesota will follow, especially in regions with high concentrations of SNAP recipients. As third-party partners come on board, they will engage employers to align services and skills training with local needs, and to match qualified workers with employers.

In 2017, potential third-party partners will be assessed to provide information on organizational models, programs, people served, partners they collaborate with, services provided and funding sources. Results from assessments will be used to choose a first cohort of partners. Other partners will be added as capacity to manage the program grows.

Planning is also underway to determine opportunities to utilize the Minnesota State Grant Program, which is received by SNAP recipients as part of their education aid package. Education is an allowable reimbursable cost

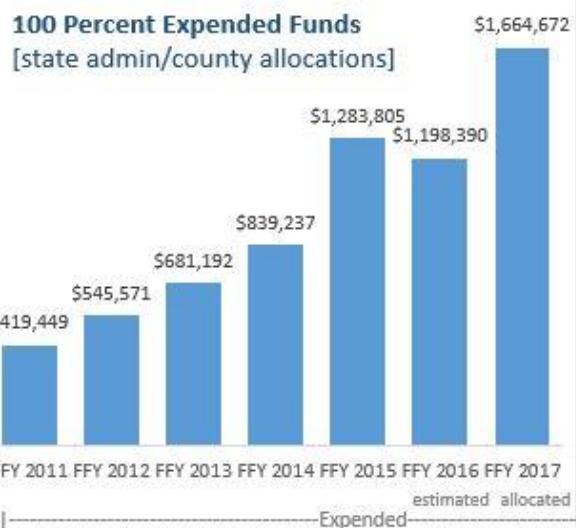
for the 50 percent funding stream. Working with Food and Nutrition Services, department staff is exploring federal guidance and determining options for utilization.

Figure 1 below shows growth in allocated funding for 100 percent funds and projected funds for 50 percent funds from FFY 2011-FFY 2017.

## SNAP E&T Federal Funding

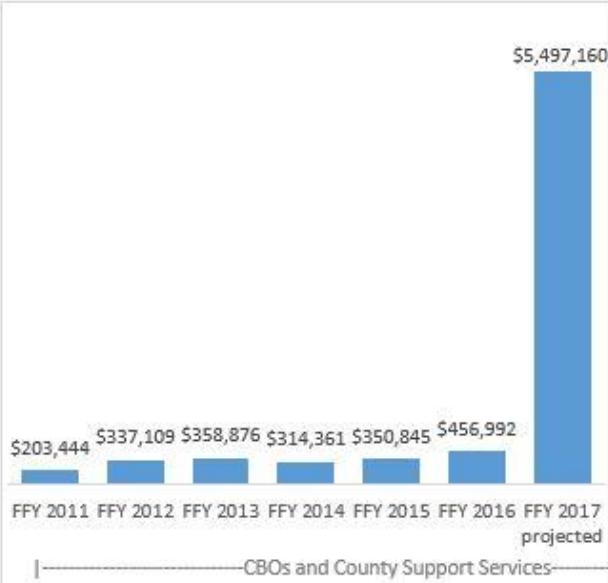
### 100 percent funds or formula grants

- Funding pays for E&T planning, implementation and operations.
- Approved costs includes administrative expenses and direct services.
- Funding cannot be used to reimburse participant expenses but can be used to purchase necessary supplies or services for participants.
- Currently capped at \$90 million nationwide



### 50 percent reimbursement funds

- The federal government will reimburse 50 percent of non-federal funds expended for eligible services to eligible participants including:
- Administrative costs that exceed the state's funding under the E&T formula grants
- E&T participant expenses directly related to participation in the program such as dependent care, transportation, safety equipment, supplies and books.
- There is no federal cap on these funds.



## **Program Guidance**

The department and DEED developed a SNAP E&T expansion committee to focus on expansion efforts. Committee representation includes state, county, rural and metro community-based organizations, and philanthropic organizations. Duties include reviewing policy, providing guidance, and staffing work groups to allow additional inclusion from interested organizations. Work groups will delve further into policy, outreach, system change and newly developed processes.

SNAP to Skills (S2S) is a project of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service designed to provide technical assistance, tools and resources needed to build more effective and job-driven SNAP E&T programs. The S2S Project works with 10 states, including Minnesota, selected to develop and expand their SNAP E&T programs in early 2016. Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) was selected as the program partner and contracted by Food and Nutrition Services to develop and operate S2S due to success with and experience in developing high-quality workforce development programs, and providing technical assistance to states on developing and operating SNAP E&T programs at the strategic, administrative and programmatic levels.

Minnesota state staff participate in bi-monthly conference calls, workshops, conferences and on-site technical assistance with SJI and Food and Nutrition Services.

## **Conclusion**

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Minnesota, through strong partnerships, is taking advantage of technical assistance opportunities with SNAP to Skills and federal agency support. With commitment from the two state agencies' staff, Minnesota is on its way to increasing participation in SNAP E&T through expansion efforts. As more information is obtained from program participants, county and community-based organization efforts, and through peer-to-peer learning from other state's embarking along the same path, Minnesota will adjust program design, as necessary, resulting in a robust and sustainable SNAP E&T program.

## **Appendix 1**

### **2016 Minnesota Statutes**

#### **256D.051 Food Stamp Employment and Training Programs. Subd.1.**

Food stamp employment and training program. The commissioner shall implement a food stamp employment and training program in order to meet the food stamp employment and training participation requirements of the United States Department of Agriculture. Unless exempt under subdivision 3a, each adult recipient in the unit must participate in the food stamp employment and training program each month that the person is eligible for food stamps. The person's participation in food stamp employment and training services must begin no later than the first day of the calendar month following the determination of eligibility for food stamps. With the county agency's consent, and to the extent of available resources, the person may voluntarily continue to participate in food stamp employment and training services for up to three additional consecutive months immediately following termination of food stamp benefits in order to complete the provisions of the person's employability development plan.

**Subd. 1a. Notices and sanctions.** (a) At the time the county agency notifies the household that it is eligible for food stamps, the county agency must inform all mandatory employment and training services participants as identified in subdivision 1 in the household that they must comply with all food stamp employment and training program requirements each month, including the requirement to attend an initial orientation to the food stamp employment and training program and that food stamp eligibility will end unless the participants comply with the requirements specified in the notice.

(b) A participant who fails without good cause to comply with food stamp employment and training program requirements of this section, including attendance at orientation, will lose food stamp eligibility for the following periods:

(1) for the first occurrence, for one month or until the person complies with the requirements not previously complied with, whichever is longer;

(2) for the second occurrence, for three months or until the person complies with the requirements not previously complied with, whichever is longer; or

(3) for the third and any subsequent occurrence, for six months or until the person complies with the requirements not previously complied with, whichever is longer.

If the participant is not the food stamp head of household, the person shall be considered an ineligible household member for food stamp purposes. If the participant is the food stamp head of household, the entire household is ineligible for food stamps as provided in Code of Federal Regulations, title 7, section 273.7(g). "Good cause" means circumstances beyond the control of the participant, such as illness or injury, illness or injury of another household member requiring the participant's presence, a household emergency, or the inability to obtain child care for children between the ages of six and 12 or to obtain transportation needed in order for the participant to meet the food stamp employment and training program participation requirements.

(c) The county agency shall mail or hand deliver a notice to the participant not later than five days after determining that the participant has failed without good cause to comply with food stamp employment and training program requirements which specifies the requirements that were not complied with, the factual basis for the determination of noncompliance, and the right to reinstate eligibility upon a showing of good cause for failure to meet the requirements. The notice must ask the reason for the noncompliance and identify the participant's appeal rights. The notice must request that the participant inform the county agency if the participant believes that good cause existed for the failure to comply and must state that the county agency intends to terminate eligibility for food stamp benefits due to failure to comply with food stamp employment and training program requirements.

(d) If the county agency determines that the participant did not comply during the month with all food stamp employment and training program requirements that were in effect, and if the county agency determines that good cause was not present, the county must provide a 10 day notice of termination of food stamp benefits. The amount of food stamps that are withheld from the household and determination of the impact of the sanction on other household members is governed by Code of Federal Regulations, title 7, section 273.7.

(e) The participant may appeal the termination of food stamp benefits under the provisions of section 256.045.

Subd. 2. County agency duties. (a) The county agency shall provide to food stamp recipients a food stamp employment and training program. The program must include:

(1) orientation to the food stamp employment and training program;

(2) an individualized employability assessment and an individualized employability development plan that includes assessment of literacy, ability to communicate in the English language, educational and employment history, and that estimates the length of time it will take the participant to obtain employment. The employability assessment and development plan must be completed in consultation with the participant, must assess the participant's assets, barriers, and strengths, and must identify steps necessary to overcome barriers to employment. A copy of the employability development plan must be provided to the registrant;

(3) referral to available accredited remedial or skills training programs designed to address participant's barriers to employment;

(4) referral to available programs that provide subsidized or unsubsidized employment, as necessary;

(5) a job search program, including job seeking skills training; and

(6) other activities, to the extent of available resources designed by the county agency to prepare the participant for permanent employment.

In order to allow time for job search, the county agency may not require an individual to participate in the food stamp employment and training program for more than 32 hours a week. The county agency shall require an individual to spend at least eight hours a week in job search or other food stamp employment and training program activities.

(b) The county agency shall prepare an annual plan for the operation of its food stamp employment and training program. The plan must be submitted to and approved by the commissioner of employment and economic development. The plan must include:

- (1) a description of the services to be offered by the county agency;
- (2) a plan to coordinate the activities of all public entities providing employment-related services in order to avoid duplication of effort and to provide services more efficiently;
- (3) a description of the factors that will be taken into account when determining a client's employability development plan; and
- (4) provisions to ensure that the county agency's employment and training service provider provides each recipient with an orientation, employability assessment, and employability development plan as specified in paragraph (a), clauses (1) and (2), within 30 days of the recipient's eligibility for assistance.

Subd. 2a. Duties of commissioner. In addition to any other duties imposed by law, the commissioner shall:

- (1) based on this section and section 256D.052 and Code of Federal Regulations, title 7, section 273.7, supervise the administration of food stamp employment and training services to county agencies;
- (2) disburse money appropriated for food stamp employment and training services to county agencies based upon the county's costs as specified in section 256D.051, subdivision 6c;
- (3) accept and supervise the disbursement of any funds that may be provided by the federal government or from other sources for use in this state for food stamp employment and training services;
- (4) cooperate with other agencies including any agency of the United States or of another state in all matters concerning the powers and duties of the commissioner under this section and section 256D.052; and
- (5) in cooperation with the commissioner of employment and economic development, ensure that each component of an employment and training program carried out under this section is delivered through a statewide workforce development system, unless the component is not available locally through such a system.

Subd. 3. Participant duties. In order to receive food stamp assistance, a registrant shall: (1) cooperate with the county agency in all aspects of the food stamp employment and training program; (2) accept any suitable employment, including employment offered through the Job Training Partnership Act, and other employment and training options; and (3) participate in food stamp employment and training activities assigned by the county agency. The county agency may terminate assistance to a registrant who fails to cooperate in the food stamp employment and training program, as provided in subdivision 1a.

Subd. 3a. Requirement to register work. (a) To the extent required under Code of Federal Regulations, title 7, section 273.7(a), each applicant for and recipient of food stamps is required to register for work as a condition of eligibility for food stamp benefits. Applicants and recipients are registered by signing an application or annual reapplication for food stamps, and must be informed that they are registering for work by signing the form.

- (b) The commissioner shall determine, within federal requirements, persons required to participate in the food stamp employment and training (FSET) program.
- (c) The following food stamp recipients are exempt from mandatory participation in food stamp employment and training services:
- (1) recipients of benefits under the Minnesota Family Investment Program, Minnesota Supplemental Aid Program, or the general assistance program;
  - (2) a child;
  - (3) a recipient over age 55;
  - (4) a recipient who has a mental or physical illness, injury, or incapacity which is expected to continue for at least 30 days and which impairs the recipient's ability to obtain or retain employment as evidenced by professional certification or the receipt of temporary or permanent disability benefits issued by a private or government source;
  - (5) a parent or other household member responsible for the care of either a dependent child in the household who is under age 6 or a person in the household who is professionally certified as having a physical or mental illness, injury, or incapacity. Only one parent or other household member may claim exemption under this provision;
  - (6) a recipient receiving unemployment insurance or who has applied for unemployment insurance and has been required to register for work with the Department of Employment and Economic Development as part of the unemployment insurance application process;
  - (7) a recipient participating each week in a drug addiction or alcohol abuse treatment and rehabilitation program, provided the operators of the treatment and rehabilitation program, in consultation with the county agency, recommend that the recipient not participate in the food stamp employment and training program;
  - (8) a recipient employed or self-employed for 30 or more hours per week at employment paying at least minimum wage, or who earns wages from employment equal to or exceeding 30 hours multiplied by the federal minimum wage; or
  - (9) a student enrolled at least half time in any school, training program, or institution of higher education. When determining if a student meets this criteria, the school's, program's or institution's criteria for being enrolled half time shall be used.

Subd. 3b. Orientation. The county agency or its employment and training service provider must provide an orientation to food stamp employment and training services to each nonexempt food stamp recipient within 30 days of the date that food stamp eligibility is determined. The orientation must inform the participant of the requirement to participate in services, the date, time, and address to report to for services, the name and telephone number of the food stamp employment and training service provider, the consequences for failure without good cause to comply, the services and support services available through food stamp employment and training services and other providers of similar services, and must encourage the participant to view the food

stamp program as a temporary means of supplementing the family's food needs until the family achieves self-sufficiency through employment. The orientation may be provided through audio-visual methods, but the participant must have the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with county agency staff.

Subd. 6b. Federal reimbursement. (a) Federal financial participation from the United States Department of Agriculture for food stamp employment and training expenditures that are eligible for reimbursement through the food stamp employment and training program are dedicated funds and are annually appropriated to the commissioner of human services for the operation of the food stamp employment and training program.

(b) The appropriation must be used for skill attainment through employment, training, and support services for food stamp participants. By February 15, 2017, the commissioner shall report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over the food stamp employment and training program on the progress of securing additional federal reimbursement dollars under this program.

(c) Federal financial participation for the nonstate portion of food stamp employment and training costs must be paid to the county agency or service provider that incurred the costs.

Subd. 6c. Program funding. Within the limits of available resources, the commissioner shall reimburse the actual costs of county agencies and their employment and training service providers for the provision of food stamp employment and training services, including participant support services, direct program services, and program administrative activities. The cost of services for each county's food stamp employment and training program shall not exceed the annual allocated amount. No more than 15 percent of program funds may be used for administrative activities. The county agency may expend county funds in excess of the limits of this subdivision without state reimbursement.

Program funds shall be allocated based on the county's average number of food stamp cases as compared to the statewide total number of such cases. The average number of cases shall be based on counts of cases as of March 31, June 30, September 30, and December 31 of the previous calendar year. The commissioner may reallocate unexpended money appropriated under this section to those county agencies that demonstrate a need for additional funds.

Subd. 7. Registrant status. A registrant under this section is not an employee for the purposes of workers' compensation, unemployment benefits, retirement, or civil service laws, and shall not perform work ordinarily performed by a regular public employee.

Subd. 8. Voluntary quit. A person who is required to participate in food stamp employment and training services is not eligible for food stamps if, without good cause, the person refuses a legitimate offer of, or quits, suitable employment within 60 days before the date of application. A person who is required to participate in food stamp employment and training services and, without good cause, voluntarily quits suitable employment or refuses a legitimate offer of suitable employment while receiving food stamps shall be terminated from the food stamp program as specified in subdivision 1a.

Subd. 9. Subcontractors. A county agency may, at its option, subcontract any or all of the duties under this section to a public or private entity approved by the commissioner of employment and economic development.

Subd. 18. Work experience placements. (a) To the extent of available resources, each county agency must establish and operate a work experience component in the food stamp employment and training program for recipients who are subject to a federal limit of three months of food stamp eligibility in any 36-month period. The purpose of the work experience component is to enhance the participant's employability, self-sufficiency, and to provide meaningful, productive work activities.

(b) The commissioner shall assist counties in the design and implementation of these components. The commissioner must ensure that job placements under a work experience component comply with section 256J.72. Written or oral concurrence with job duties of persons placed under the community work experience program shall be obtained from the appropriate exclusive bargaining representative.

(c) Worksites developed under this section are limited to projects that serve a useful public service such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, community service, services to aged or disabled citizens, and child care. To the extent possible, the prior training, skills, and experience of a recipient must be used in making appropriate work experience assignments.

(d) Structured, supervised volunteer work with an agency or organization that is monitored by the county service provider may, with the approval of the county agency, be used as a work experience placement.

(e) As a condition of placing a person receiving food stamps in a program under this subdivision, the county agency shall first provide the recipient the opportunity:

(1) for placement in suitable subsidized or unsubsidized employment through participation in job search under section 256D.051; or

(2) for placement in suitable employment through participation in on-the-job training, if such employment is available.

(f) The county agency shall limit the maximum monthly number of hours that any participant may work in a work experience placement to a number equal to the amount of the family's monthly food stamp allotment divided by the greater of the federal minimum wage or the applicable state minimum wage.

After a participant has been assigned to a position for nine months, the participant may not continue in that assignment unless the maximum number of hours a participant works is no greater than the amount of the food stamp benefit divided by the rate of pay for individuals employed in the same or similar occupations by the same employer at the same site.

(g) The participant's employability development plan must include the length of time needed in the work experience program, the need to continue job seeking activities while participating in work experience, and the participant's employment goals.

(h) After each six months of a recipient's participation in a work experience job placement, and at the conclusion of each work experience assignment under this section, the county agency shall reassess and revise, as appropriate, the participant's employability development plan.

- (i) A participant has good cause for failure to cooperate with a work experience job placement if, in the judgment of the employment and training service provider, the reason for failure is reasonable and justified. Good cause for purposes of this section is defined in subdivision 1a, paragraph (b).
- (j) A recipient who has failed without good cause to participate in or comply with the work experience job placement shall be terminated from participation in work experience job activities. If the recipient is not exempt from mandatory food stamp employment and training program participation under subdivision 3a, the recipient will be assigned to other mandatory program activities. If the recipient is exempt from mandatory participation but is participating as a volunteer, the person shall be terminated from the food stamp employment and training program.