



NCOA Senior SNAP Enrollment Promising Practice Brief

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INTRODUCTION

The National Council on Aging (NCOA)'s Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is designed to fight senior hunger by increasing the effectiveness of community-based organizations and agencies that help older adults enroll in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). With support from the Walmart Foundation, NCOA distributed \$2.15 million in grants over two years among more than 40 community-based organizations and agencies that conduct SNAP outreach to older adults and assist them with the application process.

NCOA allowed prospective grantees to design their own individualized approaches to increase SNAP enrollment within their service areas. At the end of the first grant year, NCOA reviewed the experiences of the first-round grantees to identify effective practices that are potentially replicable by organizations that help older adults enroll in SNAP. NCOA produced a best practices guide that highlights effective approaches to conducting outreach to potential enrollees, increasing SNAP enrollment, and advocating for SNAP at the national and state levels (McGovern 2015).

After awarding a second round of grants in 2015, NCOA engaged Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to produce a brief that summarizes promising practices

worthy of dissemination. The practices selected were drawn from four grantees that NCOA identified as exemplifying promising outreach and enrollment practices. SPR conducted site visits and follow-up phone calls with Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AASCC), DC Hunger Solutions (DCHS), Korean Women's Association (KWA), and Senior Community Outreach Services (SCOS), Inc.

Below we describe how grantees developed effective strategies to do the following:

1. Conduct outreach to inform seniors about the availability of SNAP benefits and motivate them to apply for benefits.
2. Support the preparation and submission of individual SNAP applications to increase the number of applications submitted and approved.
3. Access information from state program administrators about the status of submitted SNAP applications.

Although advocating for policy change was not an explicit focus of this initiative, several of the grantees also promoted changes that would make it easier for seniors to access SNAP benefits. Appendix A includes a brief summary of each sub-grantee and its context as background for readers considering adopting these promising practices.

PROMISING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Conducting outreach to seniors about the potential benefits of applying for SNAP was an important goal for all four grantees. While all of them engaged in traditional outreach methods, such as disseminating informational flyers and making presentations to seniors about the benefit, the grantees also tried some strategies that were more innovative. The most promising of these strategies are described below, divided between those related to reaching greater numbers of eligible seniors and those dedicated to educating seniors with information about SNAP.

The grantees emphasized that their outreach strategies had to be carefully crafted to match their particular community contexts. Nevertheless, the outreach methods they used may provide models that are helpful for other programs doing similar work.

PROMISING WAYS TO FIND AND REACH ELIGIBLE SENIORS

The grantees used many methods to find seniors who might be eligible for SNAP. Although each grantee had previously helped seniors apply for SNAP benefits, the Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative grant from NCOA enabled each organization to focus more of its energy on this task and

to expand its outreach to new groups of seniors. The four grantees offer examples of four promising methods of expanded outreach:

- Advertising on radio and television and in newspapers in languages other than English
- Providing information about SNAP using social media and targeted online advertising
- Integrating outreach for SNAP eligibility with recruitment for other benefits programs
- Building partnerships to expand the scope of outreach

Using Multilingual Radio, Television, and Newspaper Outreach

Three grantees found that it was important to conduct outreach and offer assistance in the languages in which particular groups of seniors feel most comfortable. In diverse communities, this approach means reaching out to seniors who speak languages other than English. The grantees not only hired staff members who spoke languages common in the region, but also advertised SNAP in newspapers printed in these languages and on radio and television programs broadcast in the

targeted languages. For example, AASCC advertises its services, including assistance with SNAP benefits, for 10 minutes each week on the local Spanish radio station. KWA advertises its SNAP programming in local Korean and Vietnamese newspapers. SCOS developed partnerships with several health insurance agents that sponsor weekly television and radio programs on Spanish-language radio and television. The programs, which feature Spanish language “oldies,” include a segment in which SCOS staff members highlight the fact that they provide SNAP application assistance. SCOS staff members noted that every time a radio or television program airs, they receive calls from interested seniors. Grantees reported that providing a relatively simple message in another language engages a group of seniors that might otherwise be underserved. Offering the content about SNAP with other topics of interest to seniors, such as nutrition or culturally relevant music, also may increase its effectiveness in reaching an expanded audience of listeners and viewers.

Using Social Media and Targeted Online Advertising

Using social media to conduct benefits outreach to seniors is another new strategy. Grantees varied in the extent to which they used social media and targeted online advertising. Staff members at SCOS and AASCC were originally skeptical, noting that many of their agency’s clients struggle even with basic computer literacy and that some clients have trouble filling out their state’s online SNAP application. Nevertheless, SCOS found that it was effective to provide



STRATEGIES TO PAY FOR MULTILINGUAL OUTREACH

Radio and television advertising can be expensive. One way around this barrier is to leverage connections and partnerships and get airtime donated, as both AASCC and SCOS have done. One of AASCC’s board members hosts a weekly cable television show and has agreed to highlight SNAP during a segment on senior nutrition. The insurance agents who partner with SCOS pay for the radio and television programs they offer, then donate the time SCOS uses to promote their services.

factual information about SNAP on the organization’s Facebook page, because as staff members learned, the children of seniors often heard about the service this way and then passed the information on to their parents. Grantees increasingly used this type of “light-touch” social media approach, which mentioned SNAP in an occasional Twitter message or on the grantee’s Facebook page.

DCHS used social media most boldly to reach seniors who had little prior contact with aging organizations. In partnership with NCOA, the grantee experimented with targeted advertising using Facebook and the Facebook mobile app. While DCHS staff members initially wondered how many seniors would be using Facebook, they found that the ads were quite popular. After

user testing, they ran the ads exclusively on the Facebook mobile app, since many seniors appeared to be accessing the site using their cellphones instead of personal computers.

DCHS’s Facebook ad shows a senior couple purchasing produce and this headline: “In Washington, DC, 10,000 seniors are using SNAP to pay for food. Are you?” It then provides a space for seniors to enter their contact information. DCHS staff members get in touch with those who have filled out this form, to screen them for eligibility and provide application assistance to those who are both interested and eligible. The ads are directed to District residents 60 years of age and over who are identified by Facebook as earning less than \$100,000 a year (the lowest income category that the company offers for targeted advertising). DCHS staff members believe that these ads reach seniors who have slightly higher incomes than the seniors who typically access social services organizations, but who are still eligible for SNAP benefits. They feel that this is a client group that is not well served by other means of outreach. Social media appears to be an effective way to engage this group. Although the number of seniors who have submitted SNAP applications after seeing one of these Facebook ads is limited to date, DCHS believes that seniors’ utilization of social media will continue to grow.

In addition to helping the organization reach a new group of seniors, the DCHS Facebook advertising campaign forced staff members to start thinking more about how the organization tracks data on client outreach and services provided. As part of the Senior

SNAP Initiative’s Facebook campaign, NCOA gave DCHS access to a Salesforce database to track client outcomes. DCHS staff members had previously relied on a series of Excel spreadsheets and Google forms to track SNAP outreach and assistance. The organization considers the Salesforce database a big upgrade. Going forward, they hope to use this database to track services for all SNAP seniors, not just the ones who have been recruited through Facebook.

Integrating SNAP Outreach with Other Benefits Programs

AASCC, KWA, and SCOS each have a history of providing outreach and application assistance for a variety of benefit programs, including health programs for which low-income seniors may qualify—such as Medicaid, the Medicare Savings Program (MSP), the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Low-Income Subsidy (LIS), and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The ability of each organization to offer assistance for a variety of benefits programs in addition to SNAP allows the grantee to promote many programs at the same time when it conducts benefits outreach and to take advantage of the resulting efficiencies and synergies. This integration demonstrates the grantees’ commitment to a person-centered approach that carefully considers the strengths and barriers facing each individual client.

Rather than simply directing clients to apply for SNAP, grantee staff educate them about all of the benefits and programs that might meet their needs, screen them for eligibility, and help with applying. For example,



STRATEGIES FOR FACEBOOK OUTREACH

- Pricing for targeted advertising on Facebook changes over time, with seniors being more expensive to reach during certain months (for example, directly before the Medicare Open Enrollment Period). Depending on a program’s budget, it is worth tracking prices over time to determine when to start a campaign.
- Seniors may be more present on mobile-based social networking sites than they are on computer-based ones.
- Because not all seniors are familiar with the term *SNAP*, it may be useful to include “food stamps” in the ad as well. Before DCHS added “food stamps” to its ad, some seniors thought it was for an online payment service.
- In general, ads should be tweaked frequently in response to user feedback.
- Ads sometimes prompt seniors who are already enrolled in SNAP to contact the organization; when this happens, it represents an opportunity to check in with the client about medical and other deductions, recertifications, and other needs.

staff members from three organizations use screening tools that consider a senior’s eligibility for multiple programs simultaneously, and they offer information about a variety of benefits programs at events where they make presentations or provide outreach information. AASCC staff members noted that individuals eligible for MSP and LIS are very often eligible for SNAP as well. These organizations are known for their benefits assistance—SCOS and KWA are NCOA Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC) sites, and both SCOS and AASCC are area agencies on aging. As such, integrated benefits screening is built into their way of working with clients.

The four grantees also developed innovative partnerships to integrate outreach across programs. By developing partnerships with other organizations that provide benefits to seniors, DCHS and SCOS were able to educate seniors who might not otherwise have heard about their organizations or the SNAP program. For example, DCHS developed a close working relationship with Community Tax Aid, a nonprofit organization that provides free tax-preparation services to low-income residents of the District of Columbia. As part of this relationship, DCHS staff members recruit and train volunteers who provide eligibility information about SNAP and offer SNAP screenings to District residents who are waiting for their tax returns to be completed. The direct service volunteers wear bright green T-shirts that say, “Need help buying food? Ask me.” Volunteers are trained to provide factual



COMMODITY AND SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM

CSFP is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that provides a monthly food box to individuals aged 60+ who meet the income eligibility guidelines (130% of the poverty line or lower). The box contains commodity food items including cereal, cheese, beans or peanut butter, canned fruits or vegetables, and pasta. Many seniors do not realize that they may qualify to receive SNAP benefits and the monthly CSFP box at the same time.

information that breaks down myths about SNAP, to offer application assistance, and to answer questions about recertification. Because the free tax preparation is offered only to those below a certain income threshold—the program coordinator noted that in 2015, the average gross annual income of those helped was \$19,600—DCHS knows that many of them will be eligible for SNAP. Similarly, as described previously, SCOS has established a partnership with several insurance agents who offer Medicare and Affordable Care Act plans. These agents refer seniors to SCOS to be screened for benefits, including SNAP, when they see that their income would likely make them eligible.

Reaching out to seniors known to be eligible for other benefits programs is a way for grantees to connect with seniors who will likely also qualify for SNAP, though it is worth noting that at least some of these seniors may already be enrolled in SNAP. For example, during this round of the Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative, DCHS partnered with The Capital Area Food Bank, which administers the Commodity and Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in the District of Columbia, to conduct outreach to seniors very likely to be both eligible for SNAP and highly interested in food assistance.

To inform CSFP participants about SNAP, in May of 2015 DCHS enclosed a postcard describing the program in 5,000 CSFP boxes. The postcard emphasized that combining SNAP and CSFP “will give you access to better nutrition” and included DCHS’s phone number and a form the senior could fill out and mail with their contact information. DCHS received hundreds of phone calls and over 600 mailers as a result of this outreach. Approximately 100 new SNAP applications were submitted through this campaign. The administrator of the program from the Capital Area Food Bank noted that while he had wanted to provide CSFP members with more information about SNAP before, he had not done so because his staff did not have the capacity to provide detailed application assistance. Since he felt confident that DCHS staff members would be able to provide this assistance using Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative funds, he allowed them to include the outreach material in the CSFP food boxes.

Building Partnerships to Increase Scope of Outreach

All four of the grantees demonstrated effective use of partnerships to expand their outreach to seniors who are potentially eligible for SNAP. DC Hunger Solutions offers a strong example of using partnerships to expand the scope of its outreach to potentially eligible seniors. As mentioned above, DCHS has partnered with the largest food bank in the Washington, DC, area and with an organization providing free tax preparation to low-income DC residents. DCHS also trains staff members at aging and direct service organizations in the District about senior hunger and SNAP. For example, in the summer of 2015, the organization hosted four trainings that served 20 different agencies. The trainings covered a variety of topics, such as hunger among seniors in DC, local SNAP participation rates, how to screen a senior for SNAP, how to fill out an application, SNAP expense deductions, and what to do if a senior is already enrolled in the benefit. In addition to increasing the scope of outreach, these trainings are designed to improve services to eligible SNAP clients and expand SNAP service capacity.

SCOS, too, has expanded the scope of its outreach by partnering with a number of other entities, including health insurance agents, medical clinics, and the housing authority. Through the partnership with the health insurance agents (two independent contractors who help individuals apply for public health care and Medicare), SCOS receives referrals and free radio and television advertising. SCOS staff members

have also developed relationships with several medical clinics in the area that allow them to leave informational literature about SNAP and SCOS in the clinic offices. Maps on the brochures show seniors how to reach the SCOS office from each specific clinic. SCOS also cultivates a partnership with the local housing authority wherein staff use the lobbies of assisted housing projects for presentations to promote SNAP and to help individuals fill out SNAP applications. This partnership increased in value as SCOS staff learned the most effective times to visit the housing project lobbies. For instance, they discovered that at one building it is best to visit in the afternoon, because many of the senior residents attend adult day care in the morning.

AASCC connects with the resident service coordinators at senior housing complexes to identify opportunities for outreach. AASCC staff members have also become acquainted with the owners of many of the local bodegas and corner stores in neighborhoods with senior housing complexes and have obtained their permission to post informational literature on their windows, counters, or community bulletin boards.

In addition to the promising or innovative strategies described above, grantees hosted or attended health and benefits fairs, trained staff members at other organizations that work with seniors about SNAP, and passed out flyers and other materials that described the program. The grantees made sure to conduct outreach at locations where seniors were likely to be, such as adult day care centers, medical

clinics, and senior housing buildings. SCOS even created maps that showed how seniors could get from Texas Oncology and the McAllen Primary Care Clinic to their main office. The combination of these outreach strategies helped the grantees reach a variety of seniors, including those who speak languages other than English, those whose income is a little higher than individuals who typically access social services, and those who are already receiving other means-tested benefits.

PROMISING WAYS TO EDUCATE SENIORS ABOUT SNAP

Once the grantees found these potentially eligible seniors, they had to inform them about the benefit; the key activity during this stage was to provide accurate information about SNAP. The practices used to accomplish this task are described below. Grantees reported that seniors were at times hesitant to apply for SNAP. Some were not sure that the SNAP benefit was worth the effort required to apply and recertify, others felt ashamed for needing assistance, and some were distrustful of government agencies and social services organizations. The grantees found promising methods of educating seniors about SNAP to address these concerns.

Having a positive reputation in the community, providing services that meet seniors' linguistic and literacy needs, and using volunteers are all ways that the grantees gained the trust of seniors in the local community while informing them about SNAP. The grantees also highlighted other innovative ways to educate seniors,

such as providing anti-fraud classes, using music and games in outreach, and most importantly, offering caring, one-on-one attention. A staff member at SCOS explained that staff members take the time to listen to seniors and give them total focus. For example, staff members do not check cellphones when clients are in the space, even if they are not working with clients at the time. Another staff person said, "Your heart really has to be in this work." Personalized, compassionate interaction with clients was observed across the grantees and seems to be an important factor in seniors' decision to apply for SNAP.

Specific strategies included the following:

1. Reframing the SNAP benefit to demonstrate its value
2. Reducing shame and stigma
3. Building trust with participants

Reframing the SNAP Benefit to Demonstrate its Value

Staff members at all of the grantees said that some seniors turn away from the program when they learn that the monthly minimum SNAP allotment is only \$16. They often think this amount will not make much difference in their budgets. The grantees have addressed this challenge in three ways. First, they educate seniors about the likelihood of qualifying for a higher benefit amount. They explain that if seniors accurately account for their medical and housing expenses so that they receive all appropriate deductions, they may be eligible for a substantially higher benefit. Outreach staff members at SCOS said

they tell seniors about cases where clients have received over \$100 a month in SNAP benefits. DCHS provides factual information about SNAP benefit amounts via the postcards sent to CSFP recipients that say, “On average, a senior who lives alone and participates in SNAP/Food Stamps receives \$110 a month in benefits.” Staff members at several grantees tell seniors that they will not lose anything by submitting an application, and that they might be surprised at the size of their allotment.

Second, all four grantees also have methods of reframing the value of the minimum benefit to inform seniors about what it could buy. For example, during presentations about SNAP, AASCC staff members create baskets with \$16 worth of food. Similarly, SCOS staff members remind seniors that \$16 can still buy rice, beans, and a gallon of milk, common staples in their area. KWA outreach staff people ask seniors, “If you saw \$16 on the ground, would you leave it there?” Several grantees remind seniors that if you think about how much the benefit would be worth in a year, it adds up. By reframing the value of the minimum benefit, the grantees provide the information that seniors may need to make the decision to apply.

Third, DCHS took the direct approach of actually increasing the minimum benefit amount for seniors. DCHS was part of a group of organizations that advocated to the DC Department of Human Services for an increase in the minimum monthly SNAP allotment for District residents from \$16 to \$30. This increase was approved and went into effect in January 2016. The

District uses local funding to make up the difference between \$16 and \$30. DCHS outreach staff members noted that since this change went into effect, it has been easier to educate seniors about applying for the benefit. They even plan to contact seniors who initially said that \$16 a month was not worth their time to see if they might now be interested in submitting an application for the increased benefit.

DCHS and KWA staff members noted that when making presentations about SNAP to a group, the voice of one person skeptical about the value of the SNAP benefit can make all attendees unsure of SNAP’s value. To deal with this, they recommend either doing small group presentations or encouraging group members to contact the outreach staff person after the group session, so that they can get questions answered in a one-on-one setting. Staff members noted that while everyone may appear to be skeptical in the presence of one skeptical peer, they often hear from interested individuals later.

Reducing Stigma and Shame

The grantees also had recommendations about how to reduce the stigma and shame that seniors often feel about needing assistance to buy food. Both DCHS and KWA staff members mentioned that seniors often express a fear that if they apply for the benefit, others more “deserving” of SNAP, such as families with children, will not get it. Staff members from DCHS noted that their strong understanding of policy makes it easy for them to clear up this misconception. They are able to explain

to seniors that SNAP is an entitlement program, which means that funding levels rise to meet demand and no eligible person or family is ever turned away. DCHS volunteers are also trained so that they know how to present this information. Both KWA and DCHS also use metaphors to better illustrate why a senior should feel no shame in accepting SNAP. KWA and DCHS staff members explain that accepting SNAP benefits is like going to the bank to draw down funds from programs they have been investing in all their lives by paying taxes. Finally, DCHS staff members also normalize the benefit by telling seniors that over 20% of all DC residents receive SNAP each month. This sends the message that seniors are not alone in needing the extra support that SNAP provides.

Building Trust to Ease Anxieties

The grantees reported that many seniors are anxious about applying for SNAP benefits. Some are afraid to provide sensitive information to a government agency, often as a result of uncertainty about their immigration status or that of other family members. Others have anxiety about identity theft and fraud due to the need to provide Social Security numbers and income verification when submitting an application.

Grantee staff members explained to the researchers that to overcome these fears, the first step is to clarify SNAP policies. They inform worried seniors that being on SNAP does not prevent someone from applying for citizenship. They also emphasize steps taken to protect sensitive information.

Because these are such sensitive issues, the grantees all insisted that building trust with seniors is also needed to help them overcome these serious concerns.

While a strategy described as “building trust” can seem somewhat nebulous, the grantees have developed concrete ways of building their trustworthiness in the eyes of seniors. These include the following:

1. Establishing a positive reputation in the community
2. Demonstrating a commitment to cultural competency
3. Reaching seniors by using staff and volunteers from the community

Establishing a Positive Reputation in the Community

Two of the grantees, KWA and SCOS, emphasize the trust-building value of their longstanding positive reputations within their local communities. While the services available from their organization have expanded in scope under the Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative, each organization focused at least initially on providing culturally competent services to a specific population (e.g., the Asian community in Western Washington for KWA and seniors in the Rio Grande Valley for SCOS).

Staff members interviewed at both organizations noted that they are committed to providing caring service for clients from these targeted populations and go out of their way to meet clients’ needs. For example, one outreach staff person at KWA regularly gives clients rides, and staff

members at SCOS frequently translate letters and other documents for their Spanish-speaking clients even when these documents are not specifically related to a benefits program. These actions, while small, make clients appreciate the grantees.

SCOS noted that many seniors first come to them after hearing about the organization from a friend or family member. They highlighted that this word-of-mouth advertising shows that clients trust them enough to recommend their services. Similarly, SCOS staff members explained that by meeting with seniors in places they trust, such as in adult day care centers, in housing authority buildings, and at medical offices, seniors begin to trust them more. The fact that these other trusted organizations have allowed SCOS to display their outreach material validates their status as a responsible service organization.

Demonstrating a Commitment to Cultural Competency

A commitment to cultural competency also helps build trust. The grantees showed different methods of providing culturally competent services, which necessarily vary depending on the local context. Both KWA and SCOS have a strong focus on serving clients in their preferred language. KWA and its partners offer assistance in seven languages, including English, Spanish, Russian, Somali, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Korean. At SCOS, all staff members speak Spanish, and many clients prefer to use that language.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE AN ORGANIZATION'S LANGUAGE REACH

When KWA was founded over 40 years ago, the agency's initial focus was on serving Korean wives of American servicemen in Washington state. However, the organization's reach expanded over the years, and it now provides services in multiple Asian languages, as well as Russian, Somali, and English. While the agency continues to serve Asian immigrants and speakers of Asian languages, the organization hopes to provide culturally competent services to low-income individuals who speak all languages. So that it could conduct SNAP outreach to more seniors, KWA partnered with the Latino Community Fund, which offers services in Spanish. Strategic partnerships such as this are an effective way for grantees to expand their linguistic reach.

In addition to using clients' preferred or native languages when providing application assistance, staff members at both grantees also do so when conducting outreach, translating SNAP eligibility interviews and letters from SNAP administrators, and creating flyers and posters. KWA staff members noted that for many seniors, limited English language skills are the major barrier to filling out the SNAP application, so by providing services in other languages,

they are making the program accessible to a group of seniors that might otherwise be shut out. They also added that if all a senior needs is help understanding what a government agency is asking for, being educated on this issue may allow them to help themselves in the future and perhaps others in the community as well.

Grantees report that offering services in other languages alone is not enough to provide seniors with culturally appropriate services. SCOS and AASCC also highlighted the importance of understanding seniors' basic literacy and computer literacy levels. To respond to the fact that many of their clients have low levels of formal education, SCOS staff members created flyers in clear, simple Spanish. These flyers include a list of the items seniors should bring to the SNAP appointment (e.g., identification card, income verification). Staff members noted that this material has been easy for seniors to understand and makes the seniors feel less intimidated.

Although the state agencies that administer SNAP in Connecticut and Texas both prefer that applications be submitted online, AASCC and SCOS emphasized that this process can be very difficult for some seniors. SCOS staff explained that many of their clients have never even used a mouse, so filling out an entire application online, even if it is in Spanish, can be daunting or impossible. To address this need, SCOS prints out paper versions of the SNAP application and works through them one-on-one with senior clients who need this level of assistance. Providing services that meet seniors' lan-

guage, literacy, and computer literacy needs enables them to feel more comfortable with the process and thus to trust the grantee.

Reaching Seniors through Volunteers and Community Workers

Another way the grantees build trust among seniors is to engage volunteers and workers from the community to provide outreach to seniors. Because seniors may be more comfortable interacting with someone of their own language or community group, the use of volunteers and workers from the local community can make seniors less anxious about the idea of applying for SNAP. All of the grantees have arranged for some community volunteers to conduct SNAP outreach and application assistance. However, KWA and SCOS have the most well-developed arrangements.

SCOS uses the “*promotora*” or community health worker model. The *promotoras* come from the same communities as SCOS clients and meet with seniors in these communities. They can provide services in both Spanish and English. While most receive a stipend for their service, the *promotoras* are perceived as more readily able to relate to clients' backgrounds and concerns. For example, a *promotora* may be better able than a staff member to explain that a SNAP application will not affect a family member's opportunities for U.S. citizenship. *Promotoras* receive the same training as other outreach workers at the center, so they can and do provide detailed assistance in addition to understanding the concerns of clients.



THE PROMOTORA MODEL

Promotoras are community health workers that “serve as a bridge between community based organizations, health care agencies, and their respective communities” (Capitman, Gonzales and Ramirez 2009). Frequently they provide services to individuals in their homes or locations within the community. While they do not require the same educational background as traditional health workers, they receive training to provide culturally component services and generally target hard-to-reach populations. More information can be found in NCOA’s Seniors & SNAP Best Practices Handbook (<https://www.ncoa.org/resources/seniors-snap-best-practices-handbook/>).

KWA does not use the *promotora* model per se, but it uses community volunteers to conduct outreach and gain trust. For example, staff members from KWA’s partner, the Latino Community Fund, said that they trained people from the community who speak needed languages to be volunteers. These volunteers can then function as community liaisons so that seniors do not have to deal directly with the state SNAP agency themselves.

In addition to providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services and building trust among seniors in the community, volunteers can also be used to expand a program’s outreach. In 2015, DCHS, which has very few staff members working on this grant, trained 30 SNAP volunteers to offer outreach and assistance at free tax preparation sites at a variety of locations. These volunteers screened 1,000 individuals, something that DCHS staff members would have had difficulty accomplishing on their own.



PROMISING APPLICATION AND ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES

The second central feature of the NCOA Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is helping seniors apply for and enroll in SNAP. In the sites visited—and surely many other sites—application and enrollment assistance occurs in three primary ways: as part of community outreach events, through in-person services provided at the grantee agency, and via telephone support.

The four grantees selected for close study employed a variety of particularly effective practices for providing seniors with assistance in applying for and enrolling in SNAP. These promising practices can be grouped into three general categories:

1. Providing assistance with the “nuts and bolts” of paper and online applications and recertifications
2. Forming partnerships that enhance the capacity to provide application and enrollment assistance
3. Creating a more effective interface with the state or county SNAP program administrators

PROMISING WAYS OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE WITH THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF APPLICATIONS AND RECERTIFICATIONS

Promising strategies used by the grantees to assist seniors in applying for SNAP and becoming recertified included:

1. Ensuring that staff members are knowledgeable about program policies
2. Providing one-on-one assistance in completing the application
3. Taking advantage of opportunities to help enrolled individuals with the recertification process



Employing Staff Members Who Are Knowledgeable about Program Details and State Policies

Given that SNAP is a public benefit program with detailed and often complicated eligibility requirements, having staff members who have a thorough understanding of required program procedures and state policies is a best practice. The four highlighted grantee organizations have knowledgeable staff members who can ensure that seniors applying for SNAP apply correctly and get the full benefits for which they are eligible. This knowledge is partly due to the fact that all of the grantees were already experienced in providing SNAP application assistance before receiving the Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative grant and partly due to the role each organization plays in the community it serves. DCHS staff members, for example, are very knowledgeable about SNAP due to the grantee's role as a SNAP outreach contractor for the state and its relationship to its parent organization, the Food Research and Action Center, which has SNAP expertise as a result of its national food policy and advocacy work. NCOA funds both KWA and SCOS to run Benefits Enrollment Centers, which help low-income people eligible for Medicare to access programs that pay for health care and food. AASCC is one of five area agencies on aging in Connecticut that have formed an affiliation network known as C4A, which focuses on state-level aging policy. It is through this network that AASCC has been encouraging the state SNAP program to improve its online application system.

Providing One-on-One Assistance in Filling Out the Application

One-on-one assistance is a critical and well-founded best practice to increase the likelihood that individuals will enroll in SNAP. Research suggests that hands-on assistance is more effective than simply providing information. One study found that simply sharing information about SNAP and providing the application forms to prospective program participants (in this case at food pantries) was not significantly associated with an increase in SNAP participation. Instead, food pantry sites that provided and submitted applications on behalf of individuals showed a significant increase in their likelihood to participate in SNAP (Mabli 2005). This suggests that more in-depth guidance provided to prospective applicants may translate into more program applicants compared to a “light-touch” approach.

Similar to the promising strategy of offering multilingual outreach, hands-on assistance filling out applications appears especially important for seniors who have limited proficiency with English or limited literacy in their native language (if the SNAP application is available in that language). Indeed, one study found that “the intervention materials may not need to be ‘culturally sensitive,’ i.e., specially prepared for the audience, as long as the interveners are” (Fedder et al 2003). This finding is important for SNAP application assistance in particular, because state-issued applications must be used as issued. This requirement is different from outreach materials, which can be customized and simplified and made easier to understand with graphics.

The SCOS grantee in Texas shines in this area due to its practice of employing *promotoras*—community health workers typically from the same rural, Spanish-speaking communities that they serve—to conduct both outreach and hands-on application assistance. *Promotoras* at SCOS will print two copies of the application, give one to the client to follow along with, and fill out the other. When the application is complete, the *promotora* will fax the application to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. KWA in Tacoma, WA, also provides this kind of hands-on, language-appropriate assistance in filling out applications. Speaking a variety of predominantly East and Southeast Asian languages, KWA staff members assist seniors either on-site at various outreach locations such as senior centers or at one of the KWA offices.

One key feature of effective hands-on assistance is the ability to help seniors who have started their applications but need to gather additional documentation in order to finalize them. All of the grantees demonstrated this flexibility and responsiveness in shepherding a SNAP application from beginning to submission. This is especially important as applications often undergo a multi-stage process that involves in-person meetings, phone contact, sending documents via the postal service, and faxing or emailing completed documents. An outreach worker at KWA will often start a paper application with an individual while out in the field, provide the client a list of additional

documents needed, make a concerted effort through follow-up phone calls to set up an appointment for the client to bring or mail in the remaining documents, and finally submit the completed application via the state’s online application system, Washington Connects.

At AASCC, the outreach staff person, fluent in Spanish, will often use a similar process: start an application with an individual while out in the field, leave a list of documents that the senior needs in order to complete the application, let the senior know that she will return the following day or later that week to complete the application, give the senior time to gather the appropriate materials, and then return as promised. In another common strategy, the outreach staff member leaves stamped self-addressed envelopes with individuals for whom she has conducted an outreach event, encouraging them to complete the applications to the best of their ability and to send them to her for review and submission.

Taking Advantage of Contact with Already-Enrolled Seniors to Focus on the Recertification Process

Grantee staff members conducting SNAP outreach frequently encounter seniors who are already enrolled in the program. Instead of moving on to find not-yet-enrolled seniors, staff members use such encounters as opportunities to check in, ask about the redetermination deadline, and provide assistance with recertification.

Educating seniors about recertification is especially important given the anxiety and threat of hunger that SNAP participants face when they lose their benefit after missing a recertification deadline. While seniors sometimes have longer eligibility periods than households made up of younger SNAP participants, “Their higher likelihood of churn at the point of recertification suggests that when recertification is reached, the elderly ... may face additional challenges to successful recertification, despite the fact that their income and family situation may be more stable than those of families with children” (Mills et al 2014).

DCHS appears to be particularly proactive about taking advantage of the opportunities to assist enrolled seniors afforded by outreach efforts. In addition to checking in about recertification, DCHS staff members attempt to assess whether an enrolled senior is reporting his or her medical and housing expenses correctly and is receiving the maximum benefit award to which he or she is entitled.

Tracking Application Status and Recertification Deadlines

All of the grantees recognized the importance of keeping track of successful applications and recertification timelines, but most found doing so to be a challenge because their states lacked online SNAP application systems or their access to such a system did not include tracking capacity.

For the purpose of tracking the outcomes of applications it helped file, SCOS depends on clients returning to the office and

reporting the status of their applications. To give seniors an incentive to return to the office after receiving application assistance, SCOS offers a free emergency cellphone to those who come back to deliver the news of their application approval. Even without the offer of the cellphone, however, SCOS staff members find that many seniors come in once they get their award letter and electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card so that they can get help activating the card. AASCC staff members keep a list of individuals they have assisted with an application and call those individuals two weeks after the application is submitted to check on whether they have received award notification from the state.

Many seniors contact the grantees to seek help navigating the recertification process, and it is common for such clients to have missed the recertification window and require help re-starting their benefits. This finding indicates the importance of being able to track individuals’ recertification deadlines so that timely assistance can be offered. While all four grantees provide services to individuals seeking assistance with recertification, two demonstrated the capacity to track recertification deadlines for the seniors they helped apply for SNAP and to proactively offer recertification assistance.

SCOS staff members maintain a spreadsheet that tracks when a client will be up for recertification; depending on the circumstances of the household, this could be every six months or every year. SCOS staff members report that seniors often seek assistance when they receive

recertification paperwork in the mail, but that tracking deadlines and offering assistance proactively ensures that no client falls through the cracks.

KWA staff members also maintain a spreadsheet that tracks clients' services and deadlines and allows them to contact clients to offer recertification assistance ahead of the deadline. However, most clients receive proactive recertification assistance through another mechanism. If a client identifies a KWA staff person as his or her authorized representative on the application, the staff person receives a notice letter from the state Department of Social and Health Services 30 days before the individual's recertification deadline. Receipt of this letter spurs the staff member to contact the client and offer assistance with the recertification process.

To conclude, contacting clients with proactive offers of recertification assistance is a promising practice for helping seniors maintain continuity of SNAP benefits, but it is dependent on the ability to track individuals' recertification deadlines.

PROMISING PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND ASSISTANCE CAPACITY

The grantees cultivated a wide range of partners, from other community-based organizations to libraries, community centers, public housing complexes, medical clinics, radio stations, government agencies, and divisions within their organizations offering other kinds of services to seniors to reach different groups of seniors and assist them in applying for SNAP.

Forming Partnerships that Help Reach Different Segments of the Senior Community

KWA serves predominantly Asian seniors, and it used its first-round senior SNAP enrollment grant from NCOA to focus on better serving this population. For its second-round grant, KWA decided to broaden the scope of its reach and help seniors from a wider diversity of racial and ethnic groups enroll in SNAP. To realize this goal, it partnered with two organizations. The Latino Community Fund is a nonprofit organization focused on supporting a healthy and engaged Latino community in Washington. It awards grants to other organizations and provides direct service. Sound Outreach, based in Pierce County, provides services to seniors and to disabled, homeless, and economically vulnerable individuals. It serves more African-American and white seniors than KWA does. By working with these partners, KWA was able to expand its senior SNAP enrollment efforts to reach Latinos, African Americans, and whites in addition to those in its traditional Asian constituency.

Taking Advantage of Intra-Agency Service Breadth to Target Individuals Eligible for Other Senior Services

The concept of partnering can be extended to the different divisions that often exist within larger social service organizations and agencies. Both KWA and AASCC are multi-service agencies with different divisions and services. In particular, both run extensive home care services. These other services are important sources of referrals for potential SNAP enrollees

because of the large number of seniors they bring into contact with the agency. Leaders at KWA have instructed its home care workers to refer potentially eligible seniors to the social services division for screening, as the division provides all benefits assistance, including that for SNAP. The social services division in turn refers individuals who come to them for benefits assistance to the home care services. KWA outreach workers mentioned receiving referrals for seniors potentially eligible for SNAP from other internal sources besides the home care division, such as the breast cancer screening service and the citizenship classes.

INTERFACING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH SNAP PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

A relationship so central as to merit its own section is the relationship with the state SNAP program—the place where all applications go to be processed and the entity that disseminates benefits to seniors and other SNAP enrollees. Promising practices in this area include developing close working relationships with SNAP administrators at the state or local level to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the state’s benefits application procedures, including any online benefits application platforms.

Gaining Access to Information about Pending Applications by Cultivating a Relationship with State SNAP Staff

At AASCC, the outreach staff member has developed a relationship with some of the state SNAP administrators at the Department of Social Services because they are all participants on the Food Policy Advisory Group for the City of New Haven. As a result of this relationship, AASCC outreach staff members are able to hand-deliver SNAP applications to the local DSS office in New Haven. Upon submission, the AASCC staff person receives a contact sheet that lists details about each application submitted. This “receipt” functions as a



CONNECTICUT'S DSS RX-XPRESS BUS

The Connecticut State Health Insurance Assistance Program, CHOICES, purchased a satellite-equipped vehicle that helps the state conduct benefits screenings and enrollment assistance for multiple public benefits programs, including SNAP, across the state. AASCC outreach staff can request to have “The Bus” make an appearance at outreach events such as health fairs, thereby expanding the state’s capacity to offer on-site application and enrollment assistance. See more about the bus at <https://www.ncoa.org/centerforbenefits/promising-practices/finding-people/getting-benes-on-the-bus/>

follow-up tool; the state will not inform the AASCC outreach worker of the outcome of the submitted applications but enables her to follow up with seniors on the list to determine the status of their applications.

At DCHS, staff members scan clients' applications and email them directly to a specific contact person at the Economic Security Administration (ESA) at the DC Department of Human Services. While DCHS staff members cannot access ESA's database to see the outcome of applications, they can ask the contact person at ESA for information about specific applications if the applicant has granted permission for DCHS to reach out to ESA on their behalf. By contrast, if DCHS staff members did not have this direct contact at ESA, they would not have the confidence that the application was seen immediately by a specific person. Without a time-stamped email submission, they also would not be able to contact a specific person to find out where an application is in the processing pipeline.

KWA's connection to the state SNAP agency is somewhat different from those just discussed. Washington state has an online benefits portal called Washington Connections, through which individuals can apply for a variety of Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) programs. In addition, KWA has a special status in relation to the portal that allows it to provide timely and targeted assistance to the seniors that it assists with SNAP enrollment. See the text box below for a more detailed description of this relationship.

As an "assisting agency" with Washington Connection, KWA receives email and mail from the state providing critical information about individual applications and SNAP enrollees—requests for additional documentation, for example, or notices about mid-point reviews or upcoming redeterminations. This connectivity with the state SNAP system helps the agency ensure clients' continuity of benefits, as a key issue for many seniors is missing the redetermination deadline or the mid-year review interview.

KWA's status as an assisting agency also permits its staff members to access information about seniors for whom they have not provided application assistance. When KWA staff members log in to Washington Connection, they can search by client ID number or name, birthday, or Social Security number. The search will show whether the client is enrolled in any benefit programs, including SNAP, Medicaid, Medicare Savings Program, or General Assistance. Having access to this search function is an efficient way to help seniors who are already enrolled in SNAP but do not realize it or who have an upcoming recertification for which they need to prepare.

Not all states have online benefits enrollment for SNAP. Washington, DC, and Texas, of the grantee states reviewed, lack online systems. And states that do have online systems provide different amounts of access to information in that system to staff members from community-based organizations.

Connecticut has an online system, but AASCC staff members have yet to start using it because they feel it does not allow applicants to provide the same level of detail about their financial situations as the paper version, and thus tends to yield lower benefit awards. AASCC staff members can log on to the DSS database to find out if an individual has already applied for SNAP, but they cannot find out if an application they have assisted with has been approved.

Thus, while KWA's access to client and application information on Washington Connection is clearly a best practice, it is not a practice that all agencies assisting seniors with SNAP enrollment can replicate at this time.



STRATEGIES FOR HELPING SENIORS APPLY FOR SNAP VIA THE STATE'S ONLINE SYSTEM

Washington state maintains an online benefits portal, Washington Connection, through which individuals can apply for a variety of Department of Social and Health Services programs. The system has a feature wherein community-based organizations and other organizations can register to become “Community Partners.” KWA is registered as an “assisting agency”—the higher of two access levels for Community Partners—allowing it to assist applicants in completing and submitting the online application and, importantly, allowing its staff members to view the status of the applications that KWA helped complete. To protect the confidentiality of client information, assisting agencies are required to fill out a data-sharing agreement and a non-disclosure form. When assisting seniors, a KWA staff member logs in to her own member page. There, she can review all applications with which she has assisted.

ADVOCATING FOR POLICY CHANGE

While support for advocacy efforts was not expressly included as a feature of the grant, grantees highlighted the importance of advocacy and policy change efforts as a strategy for increasing senior enrollment in SNAP.

Both AASCC and DCHS staff members noted that their organizations work for policy changes that will make SNAP and other benefits programs more effective for their clients. AASCC staff members participate in multiple policy networks that strive to improve benefits programs or increase outreach to specific groups. DCHS was involved with policy networks that succeeded in increasing the monthly minimum SNAP allotment for DC residents. DCHS

staff members consider this a major accomplishment given that many seniors did not think it was worth applying for SNAP before the agency administering SNAP in the District made this change.

While SCOS staff members did not say directly that they were interested in advocating for policy change, they did repeatedly mention changes that they would like to see, such as development of a shorter state SNAP application in general or a simplified application for seniors. Other grantees may also be interested in advocating for similar application improvements or even for an increased minimum monthly SNAP allotment as is done in DC.

CONCLUSION

NCOA's Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is designed to fight senior hunger by increasing the effectiveness of the community-based organizations and agencies that help older adults enroll in SNAP. In addition to funding grantees, NCOA is committed to sharing the findings and best practices of this Initiative with organizations across the country that work with older adults to enroll them into SNAP and other benefits programs. This guide, along with NCOA's *Seniors and SNAP:*

Best Practices Handbook, are meant to be used and shared widely to help organizations improve their success in benefits outreach and enrollment. Only by learning and sharing what works will all of us achieve our common goal of getting every eligible older adult the benefits they deserve to afford healthy food.

For more information on the NCOA Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative, please visit www.ncoa.org/SeniorHunger.

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Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) provides customized services in evaluation, organizational development, and facilitation and training. We work collaboratively with clients to bring innovative approaches to new or existing strategies, programs, and initiatives. SPR is a small business with the capacity, experience, and expertise to handle large sophisticated analyses, which means expert advice and personal service. The SPR team has in-depth expertise in a wide range of methodologies, intervention strategies, and fields. Our staff consists of more than 40 professionals with backgrounds in diverse disciplines, including education, sociology, public policy, and economics.



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retail stores, online and through their mobile devices. In 2014, Walmart and the Walmart Foundation gave \$1.4 billion in cash and in-kind contributions around the world. The Walmart Foundation serves the underserved through charitable giving in five core areas of focus: hunger relief and healthy nutrition; sustainability; women's economic empowerment; career opportunities and special interests which can include disaster relief. To learn more about Walmart and the Walmart Foundation, visit www.corporate.walmart.com or www.foundation.walmart.com.

Walmart helps people around the world save money and live better—anytime and anywhere—in

APPENDIX



CASE STUDIES OF THE FEATURED NCOA GRANTEES



AGENCY ON AGING OF SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT

GRANTEE BACKGROUND

The Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AASCC) is one of five independent nonprofit area agencies on aging in the state of Connecticut. It opened in 1974. Its mission is to empower adults to remain as independent and engaged as possible within their communities through advocacy, information, and services.

It offers a host of services: support for seniors who desire to stay in their homes, support for families to care for the seniors in their lives, health and wellness programming, volunteer opportunities, and an employment program known as STEPS. It offers access to a wide variety of community services and advocacy, including elder abuse and fraud information, information about Medicare and Medicaid via the SHIP program, advocacy for Hispanic/Latino elders, financial counseling, legal assistance, nutrition and other health assistance and education, senior centers, a speakers bureau, and housing and transportation resources. It also provides Social Security Disability assistance, assistance accessing other benefits, and a connection to a wider local network of support called Care Network Link. Overall, the agency has a staff of 145 and a \$13 million annual budget.

SNAP Application Policies in Connecticut

Joint Application: No

Elderly Simplified Application: No

Standard Medical Deduction: No

Income Eligibility: The gross income limit does not apply to households in which at least one person is 60 years of age or older.

Net income limit is equal to the current Federal Poverty Level.

Online Application: Yes

Interview Type: There is a mid-term review at the one-year point of a two-year certification period. It entails filling out a form to report if anything has changed in family composition, income, or expenses. No in-person interview is required.

Length of Benefit Approval Period: Recertification periods vary. Approval can last as long as 36 months.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

According to the 2014 census, 15.6% of New Haven County's population of 861,277 is aged 65+. Sixty-five percent of the population is white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 17% Hispanic/Latino, 14% African-American, and 4% Asian. From 2009 to 2013, 12.4% of the population lived below the poverty level.

In Connecticut at large, 442,000 residents—12% of the state's population—participated in SNAP in 2015. Of these, 32% were in households with elderly or disabled members. Ninety percent of eligible individuals participated in SNAP in Connecticut in 2013. In 2014, the average SNAP benefit for households with seniors was \$155.

GRANT STAFFING

The Outreach Coordinator is the primary staff person assigned to the grant and for whom the grant pays salary. She has one assistant whose salary is paid for out of other organization resources. At least one other staff person provides regular referrals to the Outreach Coordinator via her use of NCOA's BenefitsCheckUp® tool. This staff person works two days per week for the AASCC in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), part of the Corporation for National and Community Service programs. Volunteers also offer the BenefitsCheckUp® service in libraries and senior centers on a regular basis. Individuals who are found to be potentially eligible for SNAP are referred to the Outreach Coordinator.

AGENCY ON AGING OF SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT'S GRANT GOALS

OUTREACH

Engage in a coordinated SNAP outreach campaign, including multi-media and in-person information distribution, such as:

- Broadcast weekly SNAP spot on Spanish-language radio
- Broadcast weekly SNAP spot on senior-oriented TV show
- Post SNAP and information BenefitsCheckUp.org link on AASCC website
- Distribute SNAP literature to the 20 senior centers and 72 subsidized senior housing complexes in AASCC's region
- Distribute SNAP literature to all 723 older adults on AASCC's home delivered meals program
- Present on SNAP benefits at senior housing resident council meetings, church gatherings, H.O.P.E. (Hispanic Outreach Plan for Elders) meeting, congregante dining sites
- Staff SNAP table at 5 large (3,000–5,000 participants) senior fairs

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

- Assist at least 500 seniors in completing applications for SNAP
- Conduct at least 5 activities with the CT DSS Mobile Benefits Office to assist with application assistance



DC HUNGER SOLUTIONS

GRANTEE BACKGROUND

DC Hunger Solutions (DCHS) is an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a major policy and advocacy organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.

DCHS’s mission is to eliminate hunger in the nation’s capital. The organization works on this goal through a variety of strategies, including outreach, advocacy, and direct service provision. They focus on multiple anti-hunger programs, such as SNAP, school meals, and farmers’ market benefits.

With three full-time staff members, one temporary part-time staff person, and a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA member, DCHS considers itself to be “small but mighty.” During tax season, the organization grows to include a cadre of additional volunteers that DCHS recruits and trains for its annual program to screen those accessing free tax preparation services for SNAP eligibility. They also receive some administrative and fundraising support from FRAC.

DCHS participated in both rounds of this grant and received \$25,000 from NCOA during the second round.

SNAP Application Policies in DC

Joint Application: Printed application can be used for SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, Interim Disability Assistance for the Disabled, and the Healthcare Alliance/Immigrant Child Program.

Elderly Simplified Application: No

Standard Medical Deduction: No

Income Eligibility: Seniors and the disabled are exempt from the gross income test.

DC has an elevated eligibility ceiling for all recipients—they can earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level.

Online Application: No, but the DC Department of Human Service’s Economic Security Administration (ESA) is currently designing one.

Interview Type: Seniors can request phone interviews. Interviews cannot be waived.

Length of Benefit Approval Period: Individuals over age 60 are certified for two years.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

DCHS works with nonprofits and DC residents of all ages within the city limits. However, they pay special attention to the wards that experience the highest unemployment rates and where households have the lowest incomes. DCHS staff members believe it is important to keep in mind DC's unique situation as a "district" versus a state. Because they essentially have both a local and state government contained in one city, it can be easier to reach public officials and conduct advocacy. DC is also known for residents who are engaged in the political process.

According to Census Quick Facts, in 2014 the population of DC was 658,893, of which about 11% were seniors. The poverty rate in 2014 was about 18%. Program staff members emphasized that DC has one of the nation's largest wealth gaps—the average income is comparatively high, but there are also many residents facing extreme poverty.

DC has the fourth-highest senior hunger rate in the U.S. According to the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, about 20% of seniors are facing the threat of hunger. DCHS staff members added that according to a NCOA report based on USDA data, the senior SNAP participation rate in DC is about 50%. Census Quick Fact data from 2014 shows that about 49% of DC residents are black, 44% are white, and 4% are Asian. In addition, about 10% identify as Hispanic or Latino.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that in DC as a whole, 142,000 residents, or 21% of the population, participated in SNAP in 2015. Of these, 32% were in households with elderly or disabled members. In 2014, the average SNAP benefit for households with seniors was \$115 per month.

GRANT STAFFING

One of DCHS' three full-time staff members focuses on childhood hunger, but the other two full-time staff members and the one half-time person contribute to work on this grant. In addition, DCHS also benefits from a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA member who works mostly on capacity building around senior SNAP outreach.

DCHS also recruits 30-60 SNAP outreach and screening volunteers each year for the EITC/tax prep SNAP outreach campaign. These individuals are first trained on how to pre-screen residents for SNAP eligibility and complete applications. The volunteers are then sent to free tax preparation centers around DC, where they screen individuals for SNAP, help with applications, and connect individuals to other food resources throughout the tax season.

DC HUNGER SOLUTIONS' GRANT GOALS

OUTREACH

Conduct SNAP outreach activities targeted at participants of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, at congregate meal sites, through home-delivered meals, the DC Office on Aging, and earned income tax credit (EITC) tax prep sites; develop and deliver training modules on SNAP to other agencies in DC; distribute materials for seniors on SNAP; and advocate for policies and practices that expand SNAP.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

Submit 500 new senior SNAP applications; help seniors retain SNAP benefits.



KOREAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (KWA)

GRANTEE BACKGROUND

The Korean Women's Association (KWA) is a large nonprofit organization providing an array of social services to individuals and families representing 35 nationalities throughout the 11-county Puget Sound region of Washington state.

KWA's more than 1,000 employees offer a wide range of services, including domestic violence prevention and assistance, community health care and education, low-income housing, citizenship and immigration services, basic food education and outreach, senior meal sites, and in-home health care. The agency has an annual budget of \$30 million. According to its mission statement, "KWA provides multi-cultural human services through education, socialization, advocacy and support."

KWA was a recipient of the first year of Senior SNAP Enrollment grants from NCOA via the Walmart Foundation and is a current sub-grantee, through Seattle's Chinese Information and Service Center, of NCOA's Benefits Enrollment Center grant.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

According to KWA's Round 2 grant application, there are 145,000 Asian and Hispanic American seniors living below the federal poverty level in the 10 counties with KWA offices. Most of these low-income immigrant seniors have limited English proficiency. The proposal further reports that only 6% of all individuals 65 years old and older living below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level have enrolled in SNAP in Washington state. According to NCOA, 54.9% of Washington state residents 60 years old and older who were eligible for SNAP were enrolled in 2012, suggesting that it is those most in need who are under-enrolled.

Three counties in KWA's service area—King, Pierce, and Snohomish—are urban and ethnically diverse counties accounting for more than 50% of Washington state's population. In the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Service Area, which comprises these three counties, 66% of the population is white, 12% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 5% black, according to American Community Survey data for 2014. About 18% of the people living in this area are seniors (65 years old or older), and of these 9% are living in poverty.

The eight other counties in KWA’s service area—Clallam, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston—are more rural counties where a higher percentage of the population is white and senior. Across the counties for which we were able to obtain data, about 80% of the residents are Caucasian, 25% are seniors, and 8% of those live in poverty.

According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 1,071,000 Washington residents—or 15% of the state population—participated in SNAP in 2015. Almost 30% of SNAP participants were in families that included elderly or disabled members. The average benefit for seniors was \$111.

SNAP Application Policies in Washington

Joint Application: Individuals can apply for multiple programs (TANF and other cash assistance; Basic Food Program (SNAP); Medicare Savings Program; Aged, Blind, and Disabled Medical Program; child care subsidy; and long-term care services) on Washington Connection, the state’s Department of Health and Social Services website.

Individuals who are on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) receive a notification from SSI that they are eligible for SNAP, but they still have to file a separate application for SNAP.

Elderly Simplified Application: Yes

Standard Medical Deduction: Yes

Income Eligibility: Seniors and the disabled are exempt from the gross income test.

Online Application: Yes

Interview Type: Individuals who meet the criteria do not need to complete an interview at application or review for food benefits. Criteria:

- All members of the household are elderly (age 60),
- No mandatory or applying household members have earned income,
- The paper or electronic application or eligibility review is complete,
- The household has provided all necessary verification or the verification is available through interfaces available to the department, and
- No information provided is questionable.

Length of Benefit Approval Period: Benefits are typically approved for one year, but if the applicant has a disability, the approval is for 36 months.

GRANT STAFFING

The social services unit of KWA—the division in which the NCOA grant and other basic food education and outreach programming sits—has a \$1.5 million budget. There are 40 social service staff members and 12 interns and volunteers. The grant pays for small portions of eight staff members' salaries. KWA also subcontracted with two smaller organizations, Latino Community Fund and Sound Outreach.

KOREAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS'S GRANT GOALS

OUTREACH

- 12,000 older adults educated about SNAP
- 5,500 flyers distributed
- 12 media interviews given
- 6 community education events offered

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

- 2,400 older adults screened for SNAP
- 1,200 new SNAP applications submitted for older adults
- 1,100 new older adults enrolled into SNAP



SENIOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICES, INC.

GRANTEE BACKGROUND

Senior Community Outreach Services, Inc. (SCOS) is a nonprofit Aging and Disability Resource Center in South Texas. It is known for providing culturally and linguistically competent services to seniors and disabled individuals from across the Rio Grande Valley. The organization offers benefits assistance, diabetes and immunization education, training about Medicare fraud, resources to help seniors maintain independent living so that they can age in place, and education and respite services for caregivers.

In addition, SCOS offers volunteer and work opportunities for seniors, including the Senior Companion Program and the Foster Grandparent Program. In the latter, senior volunteers tutor children and mentor teenagers. SCOS currently has 15 bilingual staff members across three offices: one each in Alamo, Brownsville, and San Benito. In addition, they collaborate with *promotoras*, or community health workers, who work with clients in the community.

Prior to the first round of the NCOA SNAP grant, SCOS staff members assisted seniors with SNAP applications as needed, but it was not a formal part of programming.

SNAP Application Policies in Texas

Joint Application: Texas has a Combined Application Project. SSI recipients meeting SNAP-CAP requirements complete a one-page form when automatically outreached by the Health and Human Services Commission if they wish to enroll in SNAP.

Printed application can be used for SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and CHIP.

Online version can also probe for MSP eligibility.

Elderly Simplified Application: No

Standard Medical Deduction: Yes

Income Eligibility: Seniors and the disabled are exempt from the gross income test.

Online Application: Yes, and applying online is encouraged.

Interview Type: Seniors can request phone interviews. Interviews can be conducted in English or Spanish.

Length of Benefit Approval Period: Recertification periods vary. Approval can last as long as 36 months.

However, staff members did spend significant time helping seniors apply for other benefits, such as the Low Income Subsidy (LIS) and Medicare and Medicaid. SCOS is a Benefits Enrollment Center and received funding in two rounds of this grant. For this second round, SCOS received \$50,000 from NCOA.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

SCOS serves four counties—Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy—that encompass both rural and urban areas. The counties include the cities of Alamo, McAllen, and Brownsville, as well as unincorporated neighborhoods called “colonias” that have poor access to services. An important element of SCOS’ context is that the Rio Grande Valley borders Mexico, and there is a large flow of trade and people over the border in both directions.

While the demographics vary slightly by county, according to Census Quick Facts for 2014, all four counties have poverty rates of at least 34% (with Willacy’s poverty rate at 40%). McAllen and Brownsville, the two largest cities, are often ranked as the two poorest MSAs in the United States. The counties’ populations of individuals aged 60+ range from about 10-13%. In addition, large percentages of people speak a language other than English at home: about 45% in Willacy County and about 96% in Starr County (in the other two counties the percentages fall between these extremes). All four counties are over 95% white and over 87% Hispanic/Latino. SCOS staff members reported that formal education levels in the Rio Grande Valley are very low, especially among seniors.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that in Texas as a whole, 3,725,000 residents, or 14% of the population, participated in SNAP in 2015. Of these, 28% were in households with elderly or disabled members. Seventy-seven percent of eligible individuals participated in SNAP in Texas in 2013. In 2014, the average SNAP benefit for households with seniors was \$146 per month. SCOS staff members did not know the exact senior SNAP enrollment numbers for the Rio Grande Valley, but they indicated that they are low, especially in the colonias. This is consistent with findings from NCOA on senior SNAP enrollment. NCOA reports that in fiscal year 2012, only 39% of eligible individuals aged 60+ in Texas were enrolled in SNAP.

STATE SNAP POLICY CLIMATE

In Texas, SNAP is implemented by the Health and Human Services Commission, which has local offices in most cities and towns. There is no senior-specific application—each individual must fill out the same 18-page application. While it is available both on paper or online, the Health and Human Services Commission encourages applications to be submitted online in the Rio Grande Valley. According to staff members interviewed at SCOS, individuals who go to a Health and Human Services Commission office for assistance applying for SNAP are simply directed to a computer to fill out the online application themselves. Following is a table of basic information about SNAP application policies in Texas.

GRANTEE BACKGROUND

At SCOS, four outreach coordinators and five *promotoras* do much of the grant's SNAP outreach and application assistance work. For the most part, the outreach coordinators focus their work in SCOS' offices, though they also attend numerous outreach events, while the *promotoras* work in the community. Each spends about 50% of his or her time working on SNAP outreach and applications. The Director of Senior Services manages the grant and the involved staff members.

In addition, the SCOS Executive Director and the SCOS Fiscal Director provide overall and fiscal oversight of the grant. SCOS volunteers include two local insurance agents who sell Medicare and Affordable Care Act plans. They help SCOS clients apply for medical benefits and donate Spanish language radio and television advertising time.

SENIOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICES' GRANT GOALS

OUTREACH

Conduct SNAP outreach activities with 5,000 seniors; create bilingual SNAP outreach material as needed.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

Provide application assistance that enables 1,000 seniors to enroll in SNAP; train staff members, especially *promotoras*, on the SNAP application process so that they can educate and empower the public on the benefit.

ABOUT NCOA

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a respected national leader and trusted partner to help people aged 60+ meet the challenges of aging. Our mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. Through innovative community programs and services, online help, and advocacy, NCOA is partnering with nonprofit organizations, government, and business to improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020. Learn more at ncoa.org and [@NCOAging](https://twitter.com/NCOAging).



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