National Nutrition Incentive Network: Partnering With Your Local/State SNAP Agency

Local and state agencies that administer SNAP can be important allies in promoting your nutrition incentive program directly to people receiving federal benefits. Caseworkers typically meet with individuals and families receiving SNAP at least twice a year and many offices regularly send mail to SNAP households. How can you partner with your local and state agencies to promote your program?

Getting Started:
FIND YOUR LOCAL & STATE SNAP AGENCIES

The state agency that administers SNAP differs depending on the state (e.g., Departments of Health and Human Services, Social Services, or Children and Families), and there are typically many local SNAP offices throughout the state.

Use the USDA Food and Nutrition Service’s website to find your state and local SNAP offices: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/snap-application-and-local-office-locators

Collaborating:
ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP

Schedule an appointment with your local SNAP office to introduce yourself and share the story of your program. At your initial meeting, present the agency with details on the history and impacts of your program. Share your accomplishments and vision, and highlight any stories of how your program has affected families in your area. Invite the SNAP office to visit a market to see the program in action.

Prepare for the meeting by thinking of a specific ask for how to collaborate with the agency. Whether partnering to conduct a direct mailing campaign, asking SNAP caseworkers to distribute your program’s fliers, or requesting that the agency provide a letter of support for a grant, there are a number of creative ways the agency can help your program thrive.

Moving Forward:
BUILD A PARTNERSHIP

After your initial meeting it is important that you maintain and build upon your relationship with the local SNAP offices. Add them to any newsletters about your market and program. Meet them at the end of the season to share information on the impacts and reach of your program. Invite them to attend events and fundraisers. Keeping them engaged and demonstrating how your program grows over time is crucial for maintaining a fruitful partnership.

Once you have established a relationship with your local SNAP offices, reach out to your state SNAP agency and follow a similar process to build a relationship. It is important to form relationships with both levels of government; state and local SNAP agencies can support your program in complimentary ways.
The City of Alexandria, Virginia, which operates the Old Town Farmers’ Market, has developed diverse strategies for partnering with the local SNAP agency, the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), to promote their Double Dollars nutrition incentive program at the market. These include:

- **Direct Mailing**: The market provides DCHS with approximately 900 bilingual postcards promoting the incentive program. DCHS includes the postcards as part of the information packet mailed out each month to new SNAP recipients living in the zip code around the farmers market.

- **Fliers**: The market provides bilingual fliers to DCHS, whose case workers distribute them to people who are signing up for SNAP.

- **Tabling**: The manager of the incentive program for the market sets up a booth on the first and last Monday of each month at DCHS to conduct outreach for Double Dollars. During these visits, she is helped by a volunteer who is fluent in Spanish.

- **Cooking Demos with Market Produce**: The program manager holds cooking demos at DCHS once per month during the summer using produce donated from the market, handing out recipes along with SNAP fliers.

- **Field Trips**: The program manager coordinates four field trips to the market every Spring and Summer with SNAP recipients in the market’s zip code. The manager provides a flier promoting the field trip to DCHS, who then mails them out in four installments every month. Field trip attendees receive $5 in incentive tokens. The outings have proven a successful outreach method; according to the program manager, “we’ve gotten a lot of new customers that way.”

- **SNAP Working Group**: The market partners with Healthy Alexandria and the Alexandria Department of Health, meeting monthly to brainstorm ways to promote SNAP at the market.

In spring of 2015, The Farmers Market.co — which operates markets in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, King George, and Dale City, VA — piloted a targeted direct mail campaign to bring new SNAP customers to its farmers markets. The goal was to reach SNAP households not currently using the farmers market nutrition incentive programs by providing information and issuing a call to action.

Working with the directors of Social Services from the local SNAP offices in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, and King George, they designed a bilingual (English and Spanish), black-and-white, 6 x 9 postcard, which was mailed to every SNAP household in the three counties — a total of 6,800 postcards — using a local secure mailhouse. See top of page 3 for an image of the postcard.

For privacy protection and to avoid legal issues regarding confidential mailing lists, Social Services removed all client names, replacing them with “Resident,” before releasing the list to the mailhouse.

The pilot postcard project included a response mechanism (i.e., bring the postcard to the market for a free market bag) for tracking and evaluation. The response has been encouraging and the markets continue to see new customers as a result of the campaign.
Conducting a Direct Mail Campaign

Background Information

Direct mail refers to sending marketing materials directly to a filtered set of households based on certain demographic factors. When planned and conducted properly, mailings are an effective means of directly reaching people receiving federal nutrition benefits. By sending a postcard or flier to your target audience, you can promote your program to those who will benefit from it most, propel new customers to market, and remind existing customers to return.

Example: SNAP Outreach Postcard

This postcard-sized mailer from Boston Farmers Markets in Massachusetts highlights the household’s closest market while also providing a full list of farmers markets (on the back side) where SNAP/EBT and Boston Bounty Bucks are accepted.
Key Takeaways

• Explore creative partnerships with your local and state SNAP agencies. Many will hang posters about your program at their offices, and are often willing to have their caseworkers distribute fliers directly to people applying for SNAP.

• Strong relationships with your SNAP agencies can be leveraged to support your program in many ways, from increasing program participation to being a valuable supporter in a grant application or policy effort.

• Once you have established a relationship with your SNAP agency, follow up throughout the year by inviting them to attend market or organizational events, including them on relevant listservs or newsletters, and meeting with them at the end of the season to share updates on your program’s impact and reach.

• Due to privacy concerns, most agencies will not allow you to access their mailing list of SNAP households. As a workaround, provide the agency with your promotional materials for them to address and mail, or request a list of addresses with the names listed only as ‘Resident.’

• Limiting a direct mailing to zip codes in or around the radius of your farmers markets can help you target the customers you are most trying to reach.

• As part of your direct mailing campaign, offer an additional incentive (such as a coupon for market tokens or a market bag that the recipient can redeem when visiting the market) to further motivate people to attend.

• Provide your SNAP agency with fliers or postcards (or, simply, the language you use to promote your program) that can be included in mailings they are already sending to new SNAP recipients. This can reduce the cost of outreach campaigns.

• Develop multilingual resources to a reach wide audience.

Interested in learning more?
See the Outreach Idea Book on the NNIN Online Resource Library:
www.wholesomewave.org/our-initiatives/nationalnutritionincentivenetwork/resourcelibrary