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Food Stamp Access for Immigrants: How States Have Implemented the 2002 Farm Bill Restorations

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Executive Summary

In the eight years following welfare reform, immigrant eligibility for the Food Stamp Program has undergone significant change. Many legal immigrants lost eligibility to the program as a result of federal welfare reform in 1996. Since that time, the federal government has restored eligibility to specific categories of legal immigrants twice, in 1998 and in 2002. States, the entities responsible for administering the Food Stamp Program, have been faced with the challenges of implementing these federal changes as well as responding to the increased language and cultural diversity of the immigrant population.

This report explores how states have responded to the most recent change to the Food Stamp Program, brought about by the 2002 Farm Bill: the restoration of eligibility to legal disabled immigrants, immigrants that have resided in the U.S. for at least five years, and children of immigrants. Selected states were surveyed, representing “traditional” and “new” immigrant states, states that had implemented a state-funded food replacement program, and those that had not. The report describes their approaches to restoring eligibility and highlights promising practices in language access and in conducting outreach to immigrant and non-English speaking communities.

Promising models that states have implemented include partnerships within state government and with the non-profit sector. State food stamp agencies have joined with school districts, health departments, and other immigrant-serving agencies to conduct outreach for the Food Stamp and Child Nutrition programs. Food Stamp agencies have also worked closely with a variety of non-profit organizations. For example, states have worked with food banks and food pantries to produce outreach guides in various languages and to conduct outreach clinics at sites within the community. In addition, states have contracted with community-based organizations to conduct culture-specific outreach and have facilitated the use of web-based screening tools by local non-profit agencies. These partnerships within states and with a range of non-profit agencies have led to effective methods for conducting outreach and ensuring language access for minority and non-English speaking populations.

Background

Food Stamp benefits are fully funded by the federal government, with states covering fifty percent of the administrative costs. For much of the 30-year history of the Program, *legal* immigrants had been eligible to receive assistance on the same basis as citizens. However, as a result of federal welfare reform in 1996, most legal immigrants lost eligibility to the program simply on the basis of their immigration status.

In response to this loss of federal benefits for legal immigrants, many state governments allocated additional funding to provide nutritional assistance to this population. Seventeen states enacted food stamp replacement programs and others provided greater funding for food banks and other locally-funded emergency assistance programs. State funds were used to provide food assistance to a population which had previously received benefits funded by the federal government, and a population whose entry to the United States was authorized by the federal government. Thus, the 1996 food stamp eligibility restrictions for legal immigrants represented a cost-shift to the states.

In 1998, Congress restored eligibility to legal immigrants who were in the country when federal welfare reform was passed on August 22, 1996 *and* who were elderly, children under 18, or disabled. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171), known as the 2002 Farm Bill, restored food stamp eligibility to all disabled immigrants, all immigrants in the country for five years, and all immigrant children. While eligibility has not been restored to all immigrants that were able to receive Food Stamps before 1996, the majority of legal immigrants are once again able to access Food Stamp benefits.

Categories of Immigrants Eligible for Food Stamp Benefits

- Legal immigrant children (benefits restored October 1, 2003)
- Legal immigrants with 5 years residence in the U.S. (benefits restored April 1, 2003)*
- Legal immigrants with 40 work quarters
- Refugees (including asylees, Cuban-Haitian entrants, Amerasians, and those whose deportation has been withheld)
- Elderly immigrants residing in the U.S. on or before 8/22/1996
- Disabled or blind immigrants, regardless of entry date
- Veterans, active military and their spouses and dependents

*Sponsor-to-immigrant deeming will apply to legal immigrants who have signed a legally binding affidavit of support on or after December 19, 1997. The income and resources of the sponsor are counted as available to the immigrant when determining the immigrant's eligibility.

Although the 2002 Farm Bill specified categories of immigrants eligible for the Food Stamp Program, states were left with important choices about how to implement the 2002 restorations. In addition, state decisions about publicizing immigrant eligibility and making social services accessible for language and culture minorities have a significant effect on the extent to which eligible immigrant groups participate in the Food Stamp Program.

Current Issues

Serving a Diverse Population

Immigrant Diversity From Many Countries

During the 1990s, the foreign-born population increased by 57 percent to 31 million foreign-born residents. This group now accounts for 11 percent of the U.S. population. In addition, immigrants come to the U.S. from a variety of countries. The top ten source countries are Mexico, representing 28 percent of the foreign-born population; Philippines and India at 4 percent each; China, Vietnam, El Salvador and Cuba, at 3 percent each; the Dominican Republic at 2 percent; Nicaragua at 1 percent; and all other countries representing 48 percent.¹ Just as immigrants originate from many countries, the 2000 Census indicates that more than 300 different languages are spoken in the United States. Nationally, nearly 18 percent of the U.S. population – 47 million citizens and noncitizens – speak a language other than English at home. This is an increase from 31.8 million in 1990. Of these, 4.2 percent, or 11 million individuals, say they speak English not well or not at all. States that exceed the national average include Arizona at 6 percent; California, 10.7 percent; Florida, 5.6 percent; Hawaii, 5 percent; Illinois, 4.7 percent; Nevada, 5.8 percent; New Jersey, 5.4 percent; New Mexico, 5.0 percent; New York, 6.5 percent; and Texas, 7.4 percent. The language and cultural diversity of the U.S. immigrant population presents a challenge for providing social services to this group.

New Growth States

In addition, the immigrant population in the U.S. is increasingly settling in non-traditional immigrant-receiving states. Analysis of Census data by the Urban Institute indicates that immigrants are no longer settling primarily in the “traditional” receiving states of California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey and Illinois. Instead, immigrants are going to “new growth” states, such as North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, and Arkansas.² Because new growth states are not as accustomed to providing services to culturally and linguistically diverse populations, immigrants face a particular challenge in accessing nutrition benefits in these states.

Food Insecurity

The challenge of providing food and other social services to the immigrant population is evidenced in data showing that immigrants report higher rates of food insecurity and hunger than citizens. The 1999 National Survey of American Families found that 37 percent of children in immigrant households lived with food affordability problems, compared with 27 percent of children in native citizen households. Similarly, in 2000, a study conducted by the *American Journal of Public Health* in California, Texas, and Illinois showed relatively high levels of food insecurity among low-income immigrant families with children. Food stamp agencies that effectively implement restorations to legal immigrants can reduce hunger and food insecurity among immigrant populations and maximize the amount of federal dollars coming into the state.

¹ Demetrios Papademetriou and Brian Ray, Migration Policy Institute, “Immigration and the Foreign-Born in the United States.” Presentation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, in November 2002.

² Randy Capps, Michael Fix, Jeffrey Passel. *The Dispersal of Immigrants in the 1990s*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, November 2002.

Confusion and Fears

The numerous changes in immigrant eligibility to the Food Stamp Program over the past seven years have resulted in a great deal of confusion among immigrants about their eligibility. In addition, increased reporting requirements, which require a state agency to report to immigration authorities their knowledge of an immigrant that is unlawfully in the United States, have caused immigrants to fear that use of public benefits will negatively affect their immigration status or that of a family member.

Concerns about being declared a “public charge” (that is, primarily dependent on government assistance) often keep many immigrants from accessing benefits for which they are eligible. An immigrant declared to be a public charge within five years of entering the U.S. can be deported. In 1999, in an attempt to combat public charge fears, immigration officials issued guidance clarifying the term. This guidance stated that nutrition programs, including Food Stamps, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), school meals programs, and other supplementary and emergency food assistance programs would not be considered when making a public charge determination.³ Despite efforts by immigration officials and advocates to publicize this guidance, fears of being declared a public charge continue to exist.

New sponsor deeming and liability rules also deter many immigrants from accessing benefits for which they are eligible. In the 1996 welfare reform law, sponsor deeming and liability rules were strengthened, making citizen and legal immigrant sponsors legally responsible for use of public benefits by immigrants they’ve promised to support. However, states had not yet implemented the more stringent rules because the first group of immigrants to be affected (certain family-based immigrants who entered the United States after December 19, 1997 and who signed a Form I-864 Affidavit of Support) were not yet eligible for social service programs, including food stamps. The 2002 Farm Bill restored eligibility to this group, triggering implementation of the new rules and adding to confusion and fear within immigrant communities about use of public benefits. Misunderstanding of the rules leads to a belief that any use of public benefits by an immigrant will require the sponsor to repay the government.

Purpose and Methodology

This report examines the actions certain states have taken to re-involve their immigrant populations in the federal Food Stamp Program and identifies some promising practices. The survey asked about state efforts to conduct outreach in immigrant communities, to improve customer service for immigrant applicants, and to reduce the overall number of steps necessary to receive food stamp benefits.

The survey included both traditional immigrant-receiving states (California, New York, Florida, Illinois,) and new growth states (North Carolina, Tennessee, Kansas). In addition, the survey included both states that implemented a state-funded replacement food stamp program (California, New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Washington) and those that did not (Arizona, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kansas). Chart 1 describes the non-citizen population in each of the survey states.

³ “Questions and Answers: Public Charge,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, May 25, 1999: http://uscis.gov/graphics/publicaffairs/questsans/public_cqa.pdf.

Chart 1: Non-Citizen Population in Survey States⁴

State	Total Population	Non-Citizen Population	Non-Citizen Population as % of Total	Non-Citizen Population Below Poverty	% of Non-Citizen Population Below Poverty
Arizona	5,130,632	462,239	9.0%	136,341	29.5%
California	33,871,648	5,390,989	15.9%	1,309,925	24.3%
Florida	15,982,378	1,463,326	9.2%	318,603	21.8%
Illinois	12,419,293	925,537	7.5%	150,034	16.2%
Kansas	2,688,418	89,972	3.3%	21,055	23.4%
Massachusetts	6,349,097	435,366	6.9%	78,585	18.1%
New York	18,976,457	2,084,389	11.0%	466,343	22.4%
North Carolina	8,049,313	317,178	3.9%	69,736	22.0%
Tennessee	5,689,283	105,819	1.9%	23,745	22.4%
Wisconsin	5,363,675	117,528	2.2%	26,388	22.5%
Washington	5,894,121	356,809	6.1%	24,698	6.9%

Implementation

The 2002 Farm Bill staggered immigrant food stamp restoration in three phases. Eligibility was restored to elderly and disabled immigrants in October of 2002, to adult immigrants residing in the United States for five years in April 2003, and to all immigrant children in October 2003. The survey responses showed that states followed the same administrative procedure for implementing food stamp restorations for each of the three phases. Approaches to implementation did, however, differ between states based on whether or not the state operated a state-funded food stamp replacement program.

Replacement Program States

In response to states' concerns over the effects of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) food stamp restrictions, Congress passed legislation in 1997 that gave states the option to provide state-funded replacement programs for immigrants by purchasing federal food stamps. In order for states to take advantage of this option, it was necessary to pass legislation affirming the eligibility of immigrants for food stamp benefits. Although one-third of states (17 states) took advantage of this option, there was significant variation between the categories of immigrants covered by these programs. Some states chose to provide food stamp benefits only to vulnerable populations – elderly, disabled, and/or children, while others funded food stamp programs for all immigrants who would be eligible for federal food stamps, but for their immigration status.⁵ The type of programs operated by states in our survey is found below:

⁴ All data obtained from the U.S. Census, Census 2000

⁵ In addition to the replacement food stamp programs offered in 17 states, state governments also provided food support to immigrants in a variety of other ways, including appropriating state funds to food banks and food pantries. For the purpose of this report, "replacement programs" refer only to state-funded food stamp programs.

Chart 2: Types of State Food Stamp Programs

Limited Groups	Broad Eligibility
<u>New York</u> - immigrant children legally present as of 8/22/96, elderly immigrants older than 60 years of age, but born after 8/22/31	<u>California</u> - all legal immigrants not eligible for federal food stamps
<u>Florida</u> - immigrant children legally present as of 8/22/96, elderly and disabled immigrants	<u>Massachusetts</u> - all legal immigrants not eligible for federal food stamps
<u>Illinois</u> - immigrants that were present as of 8/22/96 and are 1) elderly or 2) parents of eligible children	<u>Wisconsin</u> - all legal immigrants not eligible for federal food stamps
	<u>Washington</u> - all legal immigrants not eligible for federal food stamps

In general, states operated their state-funded replacement programs until the 2002 Farm Bill restorations were implemented. As a result of budget shortfalls, Florida and Massachusetts ended their state programs before full implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill.

Seamless Transition States

The remaining states with a state-operated food stamp program in effect at the time of the 2002 Farm Bill restorations were able to achieve a seamless transition to the federal Food Stamp Program. States in this survey that can be categorized as “seamless transition states” are California, Illinois, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin. For these states, restoring federal Food Stamps to immigrants was simply a matter of accounting; the change was internal, affecting only the way in which immigrants were tracked by the state food stamp agency. Immigrants participating in a state food stamp program in these states likely would not have known that there had been a change. In many of the states in this study, these state programs continue to exist. Information on the status of these programs can be found in Chart 3.

Florida and Massachusetts

Although Florida and Massachusetts operated a state food stamp program, they were unable to implement a seamless transition to the federal program because the state program had expired or had run out of funds by the time the federal restorations went into effect.

When it was created in 1997, Florida’s BRIDGE program was authorized for a temporary amount of time. Although the program was extended once, it ultimately expired in November 1998, causing the state to face challenges similar to non-replacement program states when implementing the 2002 Farm Bill.

Massachusetts’ program was officially terminated in January of 2003. It was possible to implement a seamless restoration to elderly and disabled immigrants; however, the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) faced greater challenges in restoring food stamps to immigrant adults and children.

Chart 3: Current Status of State Food Stamp Programs

	Program Status	Eligible Categories of Immigrants	Number Served by Program
California- California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)	Currently in operation	Legal noncitizens who otherwise are eligible for federal Food Stamps, except that they have legal residency for less than five years	Approximately 20,000 recipients a month; Average cost of \$1.5 million a month
Illinois- Nutritional Services to Noncitizens	Program ended in 2002		
New York- Food Assistance Program (FAP)	Currently in operation	- Legal noncitizens that have been in the country since 8/22/96, but have not yet reached "qualified" status - Elderly individuals over age 60 that were not age 65 in 1996 and have since aged into FAP	4 individual-person households; total cost of \$550 a month
Wisconsin	Currently in operation	Legal noncitizens who otherwise are eligible for federal Food Stamps, except that they have legal residency for less than five years	Approximately 350 households with at least one eligible member; \$27,000 annually in state money
Washington- Basic Food	Currently in operation	PRUCOL immigrants ⁶	In May '04 Basic Food served 1,119 individuals.

Since the state program ended so close to the April 2003 restoration to adults, DTA took several steps to ensure that these recipients did not become disconnected from the social safety net. First, DTA reviewed recipient's files and determined who would again be eligible once federal food stamps were restored in April 2003. For individuals that would likely be eligible, a notice explaining the restorations and encouraging the individual to re-apply was included with the closing notice sent for the state food stamp program. Then, DTA applied to USDA for a waiver to keep recipients' files open. This enabled DTA to begin accepting applications for the April 2003 restorations in February 2003. When the adult restorations went into effect, DTA was able to do an automatic turn-on of benefits for those clients who had already completed the application.

DTA faced a greater challenge in implementing the October 2003 restoration to immigrant children. Since the state program had been inoperable for 10 months, it was not possible to do an automatic turn-on.

⁶ PRUCOL refers to Persons Residing Under the Color of Law. These are individuals that immigration officials are aware of and do not have any plans to deport.

Instead DTA approached this as though a state program had not been in existence. DTA relied heavily on an active advocacy community to inform immigrants of the change.

Non-Replacement Program States

While traditional immigrant-receiving states and those with a history of having a strong social safety net implemented state-funded replacement programs in response to the immigrant restrictions of PRWORA, many new-growth states did not. This survey also asked responses of Tennessee, Arizona, Kansas, and North Carolina to the 2002 Farm Bill.

These states, along with Florida, responded similarly to the challenge of implementing the 2002 Farm Bill. In the case of states without an active state food stamp program, immigrants would seem disconnected from social services. In response, states focused their efforts on adding newly eligible immigrants within already active households. Specific responses are explained below:

- Arizona and Kansas: At each stage of the restoration process, the food stamp agency reviewed the files of all active households. Those households with an immigrant to which food stamps had been restored were classified as eligible and the benefit level was adjusted.
- North Carolina: The food stamp agency notified all active Food Stamp households of the restorations. Newly eligible members of the household were added either by the family coming into the food stamp agency or at the time of re-certification.
- Tennessee and Florida: At the time of re-certification, newly eligible members were added to the household.

Outreach

States were also surveyed about outreach efforts that would result in increased immigrant participation in the food stamp program. Relatively few states in this survey conducted outreach directly to immigrants; however, many states emphasized that immigrants benefited from general outreach activities. Traditional immigrant receiving states and those with the strongest social safety nets tended to be the most familiar with how to best communicate with immigrant populations.

Immigrant-Specific Outreach

When asked about immigrant-specific outreach, states reported the following types of activities:

- Working in conjunction with the state office for refugee assistance to inform the immigrant community about food stamp restorations. (Illinois and Washington).
- Partnerships between the state food stamp office and community based organizations serving immigrant communities. (Illinois, Massachusetts, California New York, Tennessee, Arizona, Washington)

- State-funded mailings to previously denied individuals and/or currently active households, with information about the restorations. (New York, Arizona, Massachusetts)
- Combating fears of public charge by publicizing statements made by immigration officials, confirming the right to use benefits programs. (California)

General Outreach

In addition to outreach specifically targeted towards immigrant communities, states reported a variety of innovative outreach efforts that they believe also help immigrants to more easily access benefits programs. Activities include:

- Partnerships between the food stamp office and local food banks/food pantries. (Wisconsin, California)
- Contracting with community-based organizations to conduct outreach with the use of web-based screening tools. (Illinois, New York)
- Work by an active advocacy community to conduct outreach. (Florida, Tennessee)
- Partnerships with the local school district to conduct outreach for the Food Stamp and school meals programs. (Illinois)

Language Access

When asked to discuss their efforts to ensure access to services for limited-English proficient clients, states highlighted their efforts in two areas: availability of materials (applications and notices) and in-office services.

Materials

All states included in this study had materials available in at least English and Spanish; many states had materials in additional languages as well. While some states, such as Arizona, have developed the technology to code the primary language of a given client into their computer system, many states are faced with the challenge of targeting language-specific materials to the appropriate client. A method used by some states, such as Massachusetts and Washington, is to include a “Babel card” with all notices. This card contains a simple sentence in many different languages indicating that the notice is important, it deals with the person’s food stamp benefits, and that the person should have the notice translated.

In-Office

The availability of providing language appropriate services within the food stamp office was a particular challenge for new growth states. In traditional immigrant-receiving states, such as California and Florida, bilingual staff work in food stamp offices in proportions that mirror the community. This is not as likely in new growth states because immigrant populations have increased at such a dramatic rate. For example, in

the state of North Carolina the immigrant population increased by 274% in the decade between 1990 and 2000.⁷

These states adapted by contracting with colleges and community-based organizations to provide translation services, or, as a last resort, using a language bank. However, a common problem that arises with the use of a contracted translator is that translation services are only available at certain times.

Promising Practice: State-Federal Partnerships

USDA Food Stamp Program Participation Grants

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the United States Department of Agriculture to award \$5 million in grants for fiscal years 2003 – 2007 to state agencies, public health and educational entities, and private nonprofit organizations such as community or faith based organizations or food banks for the purpose of simplifying the food stamp application process or improving access to the food stamp program by eligible households.

The Illinois Hunger Coalition has been the recipient of two of these USDA grants, and the work supported by these grants has helped to improve access for immigrant populations. The first grant was used to develop the “Real Benefits” web-based screening tool and then train nearly 200 community organizations on its use. Nearly half of the community organizations that were trained work primarily with immigrant and ethnic groups. The second grant funds a joint project between the Illinois Hunger Coalition, IDHS, and the Chicago Public Schools. Through this project, designated outreach workers coordinate with the school system to publicize information about the food stamp program and Kidcare, Illinois’ health insurance program for children. These Kidcare Coordinators attend parent meetings at the school to provide eligibility information and assist parents with filling out applications. Also, eligibility information about the programs is sent home as an attachment to students’ report cards. The Illinois Hunger Coalition tracked applications that resulted from this outreach program, finding that at least 50% of the family’s applications they assist with are eligible for benefits.

Promising Practices - State

New York

The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) is a joint project of the New York State Department of Health and the Nutrition Consortium of New York State. The program, using state funds and federal USDA matching funds, is administered by the Nutrition Consortium which subcontracts with local non-profit community-based agencies to conduct outreach for the Food Stamp Program and several child nutrition programs.

Every three years, the Nutrition Consortium issues a Request for Funding Proposals to establish contracts with local non-profit community organizations. These NOEP subcontractors perform a variety of activities with the goal of reducing barriers to federal food programs. In general, the work includes: media outreach, prescreening, and barrier reduction through communication with food stamp office workers. While a majority of the subcontractors work with the general low-income population, approximately a quarter of the

⁷ Randy Capps, Michael Fix, Jeffrey Passel. *The Dispersal of Immigrants in the 1990s*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, November 2002.

organizations (15 out of the 56) specify that they target their work towards Spanish-speaking or eligible immigrant groups. Activities aimed at reducing barriers for ethnic and non-English speaking clients include clarifying eligibility guidelines (helping immigrant families know which members of the household are eligible), and publicizing information to reduce fears of public charge.

Illinois

Outreach and Interpretation Project

The State of Illinois' Outreach and Interpretation Project is a partnership between the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), immigrant-serving agencies in the State of Illinois, and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR). It is a multi-program effort to ensure that immigrant families and other limited-English proficient individuals are able to access a variety of public benefits and social services, including nutritional, medical, housing, psychological, childcare, employment, and cash assistance programs.

The Project targets its work at reducing the following six barriers:

1. A lack of clarity regarding eligibility for safety net programs and services, among both immigrants and service providers;
2. Concern that receipt of public benefits will interfere with the immigration and citizenship processes;
3. Language and communication barriers that prevent immigrants from applying for and receiving benefits and services;
4. Complex application and re-certification processes for benefit programs;
5. Transportation difficulties; and,
6. Complexities in serving mixed-status families, requiring agency knowledge of a wide range of referral agencies.

The Outreach and Interpretation Project provides funding to community-based organizations that work to eliminate one or more of the targeted barriers, such as:

- Information and referral services to immigrant families about benefits and other services;
- Case management services to immigrant families who need assistance accessing and maintaining benefits and services;
- Accurate interpretation and/or translation services for immigrants who have difficulty communicating with IDHS and other agencies offering supportive services;
- Outreach activity to inform immigrants about the availability of public benefits and other services that support well-being and economic self-sufficiency; and,
- Outreach activity to inform immigrants of the eligibility criteria and immigration issues (such as public charge) related to applying for and receiving benefits and services.

The Outreach and Interpretation Project currently partners with 34 community agencies, including ethnic organizations, to provide services. The current annual operating cost for the Project is \$1.5 million.

Community Quality Councils

Another promising practice is the establishment of Community Quality Councils within local IDHS offices. Comprised of members of the office staff, CBOs serving immigrants in the community, advocates, and others, the Council goal is to resolve barriers and problems affecting the specific office. According to Diane Doherty of the Illinois Hunger Coalition, the benefit of Community Quality Councils is the formation of relationships between members of the community and IDHS workers, improving accountability and follow-through with attempts to resolve problems. Community Quality Councils have addressed issues such as the mistreatment of immigrant applicants by IDHS workers and clarification of public charge guidelines.

California

The Alameda County Food Stamp Promotion and Outreach Campaign is a partnership between the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) and the Alameda County Community Food Bank. The campaign is led by a Food Stamp Promotion and Outreach Committee which includes community based organizations and SSA staff. The committee is responsible for identifying target groups and developing outreach materials. Specific programs of the campaign include:

- **Food Stamp Trainings for Community Organizations:** Staff from the Alameda County Community Food Bank and SSA are available to provide trainings for community organizations. These 2-hour intensive trainings help community organizations to provide their clients with accurate and up-to-date information about Food Stamp eligibility requirements and application procedures. According to Julie Martinez from the Alameda County Social Services Agency, these trainings empower community organizations that want to help, while also improving the overall process by ensuring that accurate and up to date information is provided to the community.
- **Food Stamp Community Clinics:** Approximately seven to eight times a month, Food Bank staff go to different sites within the community (WIC Clinics, food pantries, etc.) to conduct pre-screening for the Food Stamp program. Spanish-speaking staff are available, and a computer pre-screening program is utilized. When someone is pre-screened as eligible to receive benefits, they are entered into a database and assisted with filling out the first part of the Food Stamp application. Individuals also fill out a time preference card, which lets SSA know good days and times to schedule the eligibility interview. Finally, using the database to track individuals, clinic staff are able to follow-up on the status of food stamp applications. Clinic staff track information about whether or not an individual completed the application process and reasons why benefits were denied (even though the individual was pre-screened as eligible).
- **Outreach Materials:** The Food Stamp Outreach and Promotion Campaign also develops outreach materials that are specific to the needs of Alameda County. Last year the Campaign produced the brochure "Free Food Within Your Reach" in both Spanish and English; Cantonese and Vietnamese versions are being produced. They are also working to develop an application envelope with a checklist of the necessary documents to complete a food stamp application. This tool would be distributed at screening sites.
- **Staff Newsletter:** This newsletter highlights positive stories so that Alameda County Social Services Agency staff know the importance of their work.

According to Jessica Bartholow, who oversees the Alameda County Community Food Bank's role in the Food Stamp and Outreach Promotion Campaign, the campaign has been successful in targeting Latino immigrants. Since the program began, Food Stamp participation by Latino immigrants has increased, while general participation and participation by other immigrant groups has gone down. The campaign is working to repeat this success in other immigrant communities, specifically within the Vietnamese community.

Washington

Under Washington's general outreach plan, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has targeted migrant and seasonal workers and immigrants. In order to reach these communities, DSHS contracts with community organizations that already work with these populations. Under this outreach program, representatives from the community organizations go to places such as food banks, senior meal sites and migrant health sites to help clients fill out applications for the food stamp program. The outreach workers have received training on eligibility guidelines and application procedures, and DSHS is working to improve a method to track applications filled-out at these sites.

Conclusion

Over the past eight years, federal policy changes regarding eligibility to the Food Stamp Program combined with increasing diversity in the origin and destination of the immigrant population have posed significant challenges for states in providing necessary food support to immigrant households. Despite these challenges, states have discovered effective methods for conducting outreach and ensuring language access for minority and non-English speaking populations. An expansion of promising methods, including partnerships with food banks or cultural organizations, the development of state-specific outreach materials in a variety of languages, and close interaction between state social service agencies and state refugee agencies can do a great deal to provide necessary food stamp benefits to eligible immigrant families. As diverse immigrant groups continue to settle in "new growth" states, improved sharing of effective models and information can give states the tools they need to provide necessary food support to this vulnerable population.

Additional Resources

NCSL's Immigrant Policy Project – Food Stamps/Nutritional Assistance issue briefs at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/immigbenefits.htm>

The Food Research and Action Center: Food Stamp Implementation Resource and Action Center <http://www.frac.org/html/actioncenters/fsindex.html>

United States Department of Agriculture: Food and Nutrition Service- Food Stamp Outreach <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>