



# National Partnership Grant Lessons

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## Executive Summary

In 2020, FNS launched the National Partnership Grant (NPG). This program funds national nonprofit organizations with networks of affiliate members to grow the number of SNAP E&T third-party providers. The general outline of the project is that these national organizations outreach to their network of members to make them aware of SNAP E&T and the opportunity to be a third-party provider. Interested organizations receive training and technical assistance to prepare an application to be a third-party provider in the state or county they are located in.

In the initial funding cycle, four grants were awarded to six organizations. One organization, AHPSA, which represents state agencies that contract with third-party providers, recognized the opportunity to meet with the other grantees and share experiences and lessons learned as the grantees navigated SNAP E&T's complex policy and program environment in multiple states. FNS did not anticipate this collaboration but did approve it.

The grantees began meeting in 2021 and expanded their meetings to include strategy meetings to tackle states where FNS encourages grantees to work but where it is challenging for organizations to get a third-party provider contract. Grantees of subsequent funding cycles were incorporated as they received their awards.

At the close of the first grant cycle, AHPSA requested that the SJI evaluator capture the lessons learned across the grantees. The evaluator carried out interviews with seven of the nine grantees active in the summer of 2023 and identified the following lessons:

### **Realistic Timelines**

Many organizations did not have in-house expertise on SNAP E&T. They had underestimated SNAP E&T's complexity and how it varies from state to state. As a result, they underestimated the time it would take to build baseline knowledge and interest among their affiliates to participate in the training and technical assistance. This did not necessarily result in being unable to make deliverables. It did, however, impact the early stages of implementation, particularly among the first group of grantees.

The underestimation of SNAP E&T's complexity led to overestimating how many affiliate members could move from interest to contracted third-party providers. This process requires aligning many components, and there are multiple veto points outside the grantees' and affiliate members' control. This was not a surprise to FNS.

### **Scope of Success**

This lesson led to a broader scope of what the grantees thought of as success, including building awareness to make the ecosystem in which their affiliates operate more supportive of SNAP E&T, the growth of communities of practice among both grantees and affiliate members, organizations determining that SNAP E&T is not a good fit for them, and growth in organizational capacity. FNS identified the growth of subject matter knowledge as a success of the project.

### **“Right” People at the Table**

Connected to the realistic timeline was the importance of having the right people at the table. As noted, there are many veto points, and organizations that are successful third-party providers have leadership buy-in, effective point people, and finance and program teams with the capacity to handle SNAP E&T complexity. They have also connected with their state or county agency at the right times to ensure their



program is a good fit with the state plan, and they are implementing their SNAP E&T program consistent with the state’s interpretation of FNS regulations.

Successful NPG projects have project leads with effective relationships with their affiliate members and the capacity to coordinate with them and the subject matter experts. They also have the capacity to support the affiliates through the exploration and application or implementation phases.

### **Relationship Building and Sustainability**

The final lessons the NPG grantees identified were the importance of these “right” people building relationships and sustainability into the project and SNAP E&T programs. High churn rates in the labor market highlighted the impact of staff turnover on momentum and capacity to engage in complex programming like SNAP E&T.

Building solid relationships with the affiliate members during training and technical assistance, between affiliates and state and county agencies, and across peer organizations creates an environment more supportive of tackling challenging programming. It helps build continuity and sustainability, so the work persists beyond the grant term.

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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	
<b>ACCT</b>	Association of Community College Trustees
<b>APHSA</b>	American Public Human Services Association
<b>CAEL</b>	Council of Adult and Experiential Learning
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>CTC</b>	Community and Technical Colleges
<b>FNS</b>	Food and Nutrition Services
<b>GII</b>	Goodwill Industries International
<b>LISC</b>	Local Initiatives Support Corporation
<b>LMS</b>	Learning Management System
<b>NAWB</b>	National Association of Workforce Boards
<b>NCAP</b>	National Community Action Partnership
<b>NGA</b>	National Governors Association
<b>NJHSA</b>	Network of Jewish Human Services Agencies
<b>NPG</b>	National Partnership Grant
<b>REDF</b>	Roberts Enterprise Development Fund
<b>SJI</b>	Seattle Jobs Initiative
<b>SNAP</b>	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
<b>SNAP E&amp;T</b>	SNAP Employment & Training
<b>USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture

## Introduction

In 2020, the USDA launched the National Partnership Grant (NPG), to expand nonprofit organizational capacity to provide Employment and Training (E&T) services to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. This three-year grant was directed to national nonprofit organizations with networks of affiliate members to provide training and technical assistance to their affiliate members so they can become third-party SNAP E&T providers or expand and improve their existing SNAP E&T programs.

The first round of funding was awarded to four organizations. Two additional awards were granted in 2021 and 2022. The most recent round of funding in 2023 included two renewals from the first cycle and two new lead awardees.

*Table 1. Grantees by Cycle*

Cycle	Grantees
<b>2020-2023</b>	Goodwill Industries International (GII)
	National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)
	Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)
	American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and National Community Action Partnership (NCAP)
<b>2021-2024</b>	Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
	Network of Jewish Human Services Agencies (NJHSA)
<b>2022-2026</b>	ACCT
	The Strada Collaborative (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, CAEL)
<b>2023-2027</b>	GII (renewal)
	REDF (renewal)
	NCAP
	National Governor’s Association (NGA)

## Overview of Project

Until this grant program was launched, FNS was primarily responsible for contacting and developing third-party SNAP

E&T providers. Given the staff capacity at FNS and the variety across both organizations and between states, this was a slow process with a low success rate.

FNS seeks to leverage national organizations’ networks and knowledge of their organizational structure, priorities, and potential to identify strong third-party provider candidates more efficiently and effectively. The national organizations also develop technical assistance and training materials designed for their affiliates.

## SNAP E&T NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

### LOGIC MODEL

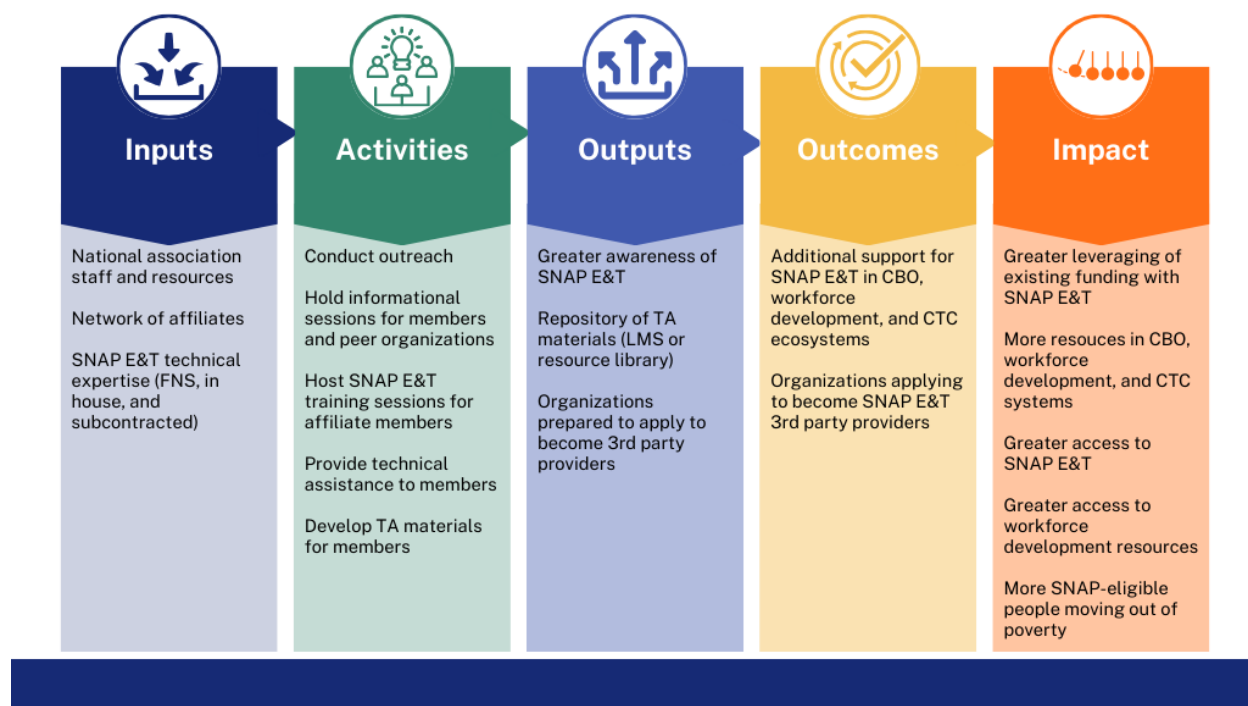


Figure 1. National Partnership Logic Model<sup>1</sup>

Each of the grantees has a similar structure:

- The national organizations, both lead grantees and subgrantees, dedicate staff to outreach and recruitment of their affiliates.
- These affiliate members are placed into cohorts.
- The grantees provide training and technical assistance to the cohort members. Some grantees subcontracted

<sup>1</sup> CBO – Community-Based Organizations  
CTC – Community and Technical Colleges



this work to an affiliate member or SJI, while others kept this in-house.

- The grantees develop a repository of third-party provider technical assistance and training materials relevant or specific to their affiliate members.

Aside from having a unique audience, the projects varied in how cohorts would receive training and direct technical assistance, the length of time the cohorts would receive training and technical assistance, the format of their materials repository, the states targeted, and the number of cohort members they planned to serve.

Because the grantees each serve unique audiences but are preparing them to engage with many of the same states, they recognized potential value in sharing notes about their lessons learned and coordinating efforts in specific states, especially states that are more challenging for third-party providers.

With FNS's consent and spearheaded by APHSA, most grantees met regularly in 2021 to identify opportunities to collaborate and share information. New grantees were invited to participate in these grantee meetings. This collaboration was entirely due to the grantees' initiative, though FNS approved the efforts.

## Overview of Evaluation

APHSA contracted with Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) to conduct an implementation program evaluation and provide technical assistance. Throughout the project, an SJI evaluator conducted periodic interviews with project staff across APHSA, ACCT, and NCAP's cohort members about what was working and not working well in the project implementation.

APHSA requested that the last round of interviews redirect the focus to the grantees and their collaboration. The grantees wanted to capture and document how their collaboration emerged and what they learned through NPG's first three years.

These interviews focused on the following questions:

- What are the grantee's motivations and goals?
- How has that changed over the course of the project?
- What worked well?
- What did not work well?
- What are your project successes?
- What are the lessons learned?

***It is really cool. Typically, when you receive a grant like this, you may not even know the other grantees. And if anything, you are in competition rather than inclined to collaborate really openly and intentionally.***  
**-Grantee**

In the summer of 2023, the evaluator interviewed 12 representatives of 7 of the 10 grantee organizations. The National Governor's Association was awarded after the interviews were completed, and Goodwill Industries International and the National Association of Workforce Boards were unavailable for interviews. In addition, the evaluator interviewed ACCT's first project team, a subgrantee of APHSA, not ACCT's second project team, when they were independently awarded a National Partnership Grant in 2022.

In addition, the evaluator periodically produced a map of the grantee's cohorts to facilitate better coordination and collaboration across grantees.

## Goals

The grantee representatives were asked what their goals for the work were. As expected, they universally indicated they aimed to:

- Serve their affiliate members
- Initiate new third-party providers
- Increase awareness of SNAP E&T

To reach these goals, multiple respondents highlighted the intermediate step of developing their organization's internal familiarity and expertise with SNAP E&T to provide ongoing support to their affiliate members.

## Evolution of Goals

Based on earlier observations, the evaluator asked grantees if their goals had evolved since they prepared the application. Most agree that, at the very least, their understanding of their own goals had evolved. Some may have revised their deliverables, but more often, respondents indicated that their goals became more nuanced as they became more familiar with SNAP E&T and engaged in outreach and training.

### Awareness

First, multiple grantees in the first two cycles acknowledged that their expectation for how many affiliate members would move from awareness to a third-party provider during the grant period was unrealistic. The importance of increasing awareness became more central to the work. This aligns with their stated need to grow familiarity and expertise with SNAP E&T in their own organization.

***I think going into it originally, maybe we didn't see the need for awareness when the proposal was being written. And then very early on, within the first quarter, we're like, oh, no, our timeline needs to be adjusted a little bit because we will have to have an awareness campaign.***  
**-Grantee**

## Number Crossing the Finish Line

Second, several, but not all, grantees indicated they had to internally revise the number of affiliates that would cross the “finish line” and become a third-party provider downward. They had not fully anticipated the complexity of the process and, thus, how long it could take even an ideal organization with motivated leadership to become a third-party provider. Again, this did not require a formal re-negotiation with FNS because the deliverables were to provide training and technical assistance to a given number of affiliates. However, internal expectations for the number of affiliates becoming a third-party provider shifted. It is consistent with FNS’s perspective that their original projections of how many affiliates would apply or become third-party providers were unrealistic.

## Organizational Fit

In addition to better understanding the timeline, several grantees came to appreciate more that SNAP E&T was not necessarily a good fit for all their affiliates, particularly those who started engaging with affiliates in 2021. These affiliates were at the height of their COVID response and were at or beyond staff capacity utilizing COVID-related funding and running emergency response programs.

Several respondents highlighted that in their role, their responsibility was pursuing this for the benefit of their affiliate organizations. This contrasts with the affiliates, whose responsibility is to their clients. As a result, respondents focused on how project success is achieved when organizations engage and later determine that pursuing a third-party contract is not a good fit for the organization at this time or more broadly.

## Existing Third-Party Providers

Finally, grantees came to appreciate that they had third-party providers in their network. Many of these providers had small or even dormant programs. Others had active programs but wanted to improve their reach. This led to the realization that the third-party provider contract was not necessarily the “finish line” in itself, and several grantees incorporated these organizations into their cohorts.

This also increased the importance and value of their internal SNAP E&T expertise. The role as an ongoing resource for their “success stories” is as important as technical assistance for preparing an application if the goal is the effective adoption of SNAP E&T. This raised the question for one grantee of how long

***...really, our eye was towards the sustainability of our [members].***

***-Grantee***

***[There are] organizations... in our network who already have SNAP E&T contracts and are just looking to improve and maximize and scale their programming and potential for reimbursement funding.***

***-Grantee***

they should plan to provide technical assistance *after* a contract is awarded.

### Third-Party Provider Continuum

The general theme of this evolution is that they changed the perspective from simply getting as many affiliates to be third-party providers as possible to moving affiliates along the continuum from aware to scaling up or improving their SNAP E&T program. Instead of focusing on a sole “contract awarded” success metric, every step in this continuum helps develop an ecosystem where SNAP E&T is a valued asset, even if individual providers do not move beyond awareness or determine it is not a good fit for their organization.

*I remember from fairly early on that shift from getting like 40 new providers to we're moving 40 organizations along the spectrum from zero to full-on provider.*  
-Grantee

## SNAP E&T Third-Party Provider Continuum

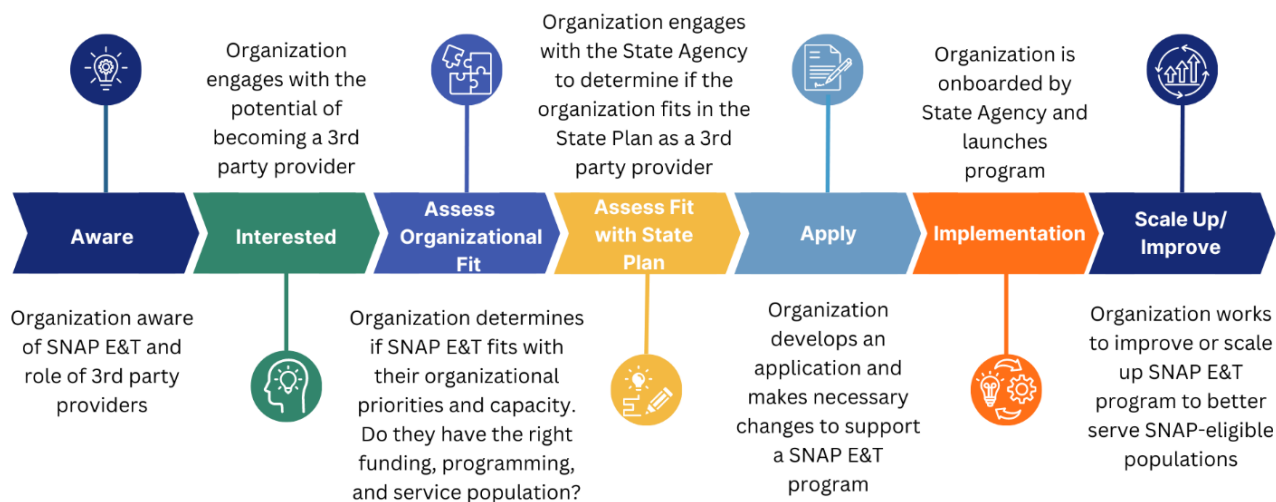


Figure 2. Third-Party Provider Continuum

### State Fit

One aspect of this continuum that was not mentioned in the evolution of goals but that respondents mentioned at other points of the interviews was assessing the fit with the state plan. This was a significant challenge for some grantees who targeted certain states because they had interest from their affiliates there but found out the state agency would not consider the organization, the type of organization, or any organization for a third-party provider contract in the near term.

*In those states where it's a not a one- or two-year timeline, it's a five- or 10-year timeline, is this a good use of capacity?*  
-Grantee

This aspect was, in fact, a significant impetus for grantees to begin meeting together. They wanted to share notes, strategizing about how to work in “challenging states,” and collectively approaching states to encourage the state to adopt more third-party providers.

## Activities

Like the goals, the grantees had very similar structures to their projects:

- Conduct outreach
- Construct cohorts
- Develop training and technical assistance materials
- Deliver training
- Provide direct technical assistance
- Host convenings of cohort members

In addition, they added the convening with the other grantees.

## Outreach

The rationale for the program is that the national organizations have pre-existing relationships with their affiliates and thus can conduct much more effective outreach to their members than FNS can directly. They have well-established communication pathways through regular e-newsletters, interactions with affiliate leadership, and periodic conferences and convenings. In addition, the national organization can tailor the message and timing for their members.

This was sound, though, as mentioned above, grantees found this step was more important and that making members aware of SNAP E&T and the role of third-party providers was a more significant part of this project as opposed to making them aware of the opportunity to get support in preparing to apply as part of a cohort of interested organizations.

## Cohorts

Constructing cohorts of interested affiliates was the second primary activity. The purpose of the cohorts was twofold. First, cohorts are a structured and efficient way to deliver training and technical assistance. Second, cohorts would create a learning community and, eventually, a community of practice within these networks of organizational staff and leadership engaged with SNAP E&T.

***[T]he collective will steer away from a state if we've heard there's no opportunity, and [FNS] will say, no, definitely go to that state. You have to push, you have to push, you have to go to that state.***

**- Grantee**

***I think just having a network of individuals that do have a common goal to be very beneficial.***

**-Cohort member**

## Cohort Members' Locations

### Number of Cohorts Members by State

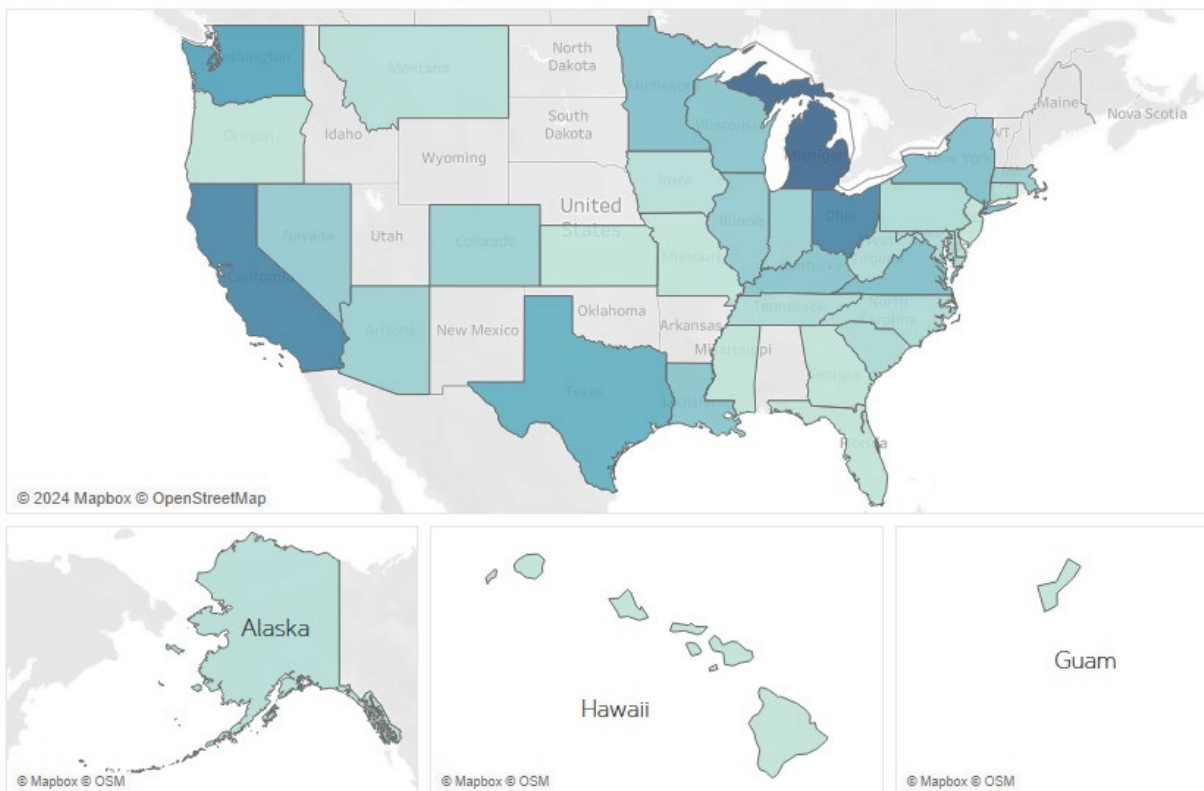


Figure 3. Number of Cohort Members by State

The nine grantees active in 2023 provided their list of cohort members was unavailable). They directly served 204 affiliate members across 38 states and territories. The highest concentration of cohort members was in Michigan (23), where LISC, NCAP, and ACCT (first cycle) all had a concentration of participating affiliates, along with two affiliates from REDF and one from GII. California (18), Ohio (18), Washington (13), and Texas (11) also have a moderate to high number of cohort members.

Minnesota, Ohio, and Washington have a large number of grantees (5) engaging cohort members in it. California, Illinois, Michigan, Kentucky, Texas, and Virginia each have four of the nine grantees engaging with cohort members (see Appendix for detailed list).

### Cohort Size

During the grant period, most grantees held multiple smaller cohorts, each lasting less than a year. However, the APHSA-

ACCT-NCAP collaboration opted to construct a single, longer cohort each for ACCT and NCAP. Those cohorts would last the three-year project duration, with cohort members leaving and entering as necessary.

The consensus is that holding multiple, shorter, and smaller cohorts is more functional. First, recruiting a smaller number at any given time allows for more targeted outreach. Second, affiliates' staff turnover meant the thread was often lost in those transitions. In addition, shorter cohorts with more intensive contact may have created a certain momentum where organizations decided to move forward or not, whether they were ready to apply for third-party contracts at the end of the training and technical assistance period, in contrast to the longer cohorts where there were cohort members still expressing "interest" after two years of being in the cohort.

Moreover, the grantees who conducted the short cohorts continued to support organizations beyond the end of the cohort. Their pre-existing and ongoing relationship allows the affiliates to reengage and access resources as necessary. However, it raised a question for the grantees: How long should they anticipate and budget to provide technical assistance for affiliates, given potentially longer timelines to get to contracting and the reality that organizations often need technical assistance for implementation as well?

## Training and Technical Assistance Materials

The training and technical assistance cohorts received were developed by technical experts collaborating with the project team. Some national organizations subcontracted with SJI, and one subcontracted with one of their affiliate members with a robust SNAP E&T program. Others drew on existing in-house SNAP E&T expertise. The collaboration between SNAP E&T experts and project teams familiar with the organization structure allowed them to build materials tailored to their specific types of organizations. These materials included informational webinars, state profiles, timelines, assessment tools, and budgeting templates.

For example, the community colleges (ACCT and CAEL) structure requires a different approach than community action agencies (NCAP) and workforce boards (NAWB), which are distinct from social enterprises (GII and REDF) and community-based organizations (LISC).

***There was a lot of staff turnover, so you lost the people that were there from the beginning, and then you kind of had to start over anyway.***

**-Grantee**

***[W]e have a repository online of resources for groups... there are tools that folks can take advantage of... a platform [with] our webinars... and different tools that the TA team has created***

**-Grantee**

The grantees planned to develop a repository for these materials to extend the impact of the initial funding further and facilitate future rounds of training and technical assistance. APHSA built a resource library. LISC integrated their training and materials into their learning management system (LMS).

## Training & Technical Assistance

Each grantee interviewed planned to deliver general training to cohort members. There was some variability in how this was conducted, but webinars with SNAP E&T experts combined with virtual meetings of the cohorts were the standard format.

In addition to the general training, each of the grantees interviewed offered individualized technical assistance to cohort participants. The SNAP E&T experts met with cohort and national organization project staff to answer questions and help craft approaches to applying for a third-party provider contract or improving or expanding the implementation of an existing SNAP E&T contract.

There was consensus among the grantees interviewed about how crucial technical assistance was to the project. As helpful as the materials and training are, the particularities of each state and each organization demand individualized support.

This individualized support also informed the project development. The project teams learned the right “dosage” of support through their ongoing support and what barriers and challenges cohort members encountered as they began the process.

## Convenings

Finally, the grantees held convenings of their cohort members. These convenings were somewhat delayed for the earliest cycles due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, as travel and in-person gatherings recommenced, the grantees brought their cohorts together to network and share knowledge. Some were national; some were regional or statewide. Some were held in conjunction with the organization’s national conference.

The aim of the convening was both community building and knowledge sharing, particularly for the state-based convenings, strategizing on how to approach or navigate the state process.

## Convening with Grantees

The grantees began meeting twice a quarter, hosted by APHSA. One meeting per quarter was an update call to discuss their

***[G]iving them all the background of SNAP E&T and the building blocks is one thing, and they all need that at the beginning, but really, it's the in-depth technical assistance that moves each agency forward.***

***-Grantee***

***[I]n-person convening... where we [had] speakers from FNS, [another grantee], and some other stakeholders... We also had that convening where there was an opportunity for our [cohort members] to do peer sharing and peer learning.***

***-Grantee***



implementation and challenges. The second quarterly call was a presentation by one of the grantees. FNS was included in these meetings.

The group determined that quarterly was not adequate and changed the cadence to monthly, and then REDF began hosting a second monthly meeting without FNS and formed working groups to address states where there were a large number of cohort members and, in particular, where cohort members were finding the state process difficult to engage in. The working groups in these “challenging states” were working to coordinate their approach with the state, leveraging the relationship with APHSA to explore opportunities to make it easier for different types of third-party providers to contract with the state.

In addition, the grantees noted how helpful connecting to other types of organizations their affiliates may have to work with was. For example, connecting with NAWB because workforce boards often serve as intermediaries in state plans and APHSA because they represent and connect to the state agencies that administer SNAP E&T.

***It's been helpful for us to learn from other groups as well and their networks are all different. It's been great to have NAWB... who tend to be intermediaries and connect them with providers. It's been nice to streamline that process.***

**-Grantee**

## What Worked Well

The grantees were asked what worked well during the project. Their responses coalesced around four themes:

- Community
- Individualized technical assistance
- Outreach
- Materials development

### Community

Across both grantees and cohort members, the theme of having a community was cited as something that worked well during this project. Cohort members spoke about the value of having a community of learners, both for the benefit of knowing that others are doing the same work and because they had a network to reach out to for support and troubleshooting.

Grantees emphasized the importance of their community of practice. Much the same as the cohort members, they valued being able to learn from each other. However, they also strategized how to approach or work with various states, particularly those where it is more challenging to become third-party providers.

***The grantee community has been one of the most interesting things to see. ... [P]ersonnel has changed... and where foundations were laid by one partner, another partner picks up.***

**-Grantee**

## Technical Assistance

Equally important to the community was the individualized technical assistance. Grantees emphasized how important this was for both the cohort members' progression and the project development in that they better understood how to support their organizations through the process.

## Outreach

Outreach and awareness are a gratifying part of this project for many grantees. They had not anticipated, despite many of the project teams themselves being unfamiliar with SNAP E&T at the outset, how many of their peer organizations, affiliate members, and other players in their spaces were also unfamiliar or even completely unaware of SNAP E&T and the potential funding stream it offers for SNAP-eligible clients.

One grantee emphasized how doing the outreach and awareness more broadly and not just to affiliate members became an important part of making the ecosystem more supportive of SNAP E&T implementation.

## Training and Technical Assistance Materials

Finally, the grantees cited the materials they developed to conduct training and technical assistance as an activity that went well. Grantees produced recorded webinars, technical assistance tools, and state profiles to help cohort members navigate state plans that will persist and be of use to the affiliate members beyond the original term of the grant. This has increased the capacity of these grantee organizations and provided a model for them to build on for other work.

## What Did Not Work as Anticipated

Grantees were asked to identify what did not work as they anticipated. Three primary themes surfaced:

- Number of new providers
- State Contracting
- Lengthy cohorts

***[Technical assistance] is one of the most important things to make this kind of cohort learning work... you can't just hand someone a recording and say, have fun, watch it, and come back later. You have to kind of embed human checkpoints.***

**-Grantee**

***NGA put quite a bit of thought into standing up some partnerships through their Recovery Coalition work. And there's a lot of emphasis on SNAP E&T. I just don't think that would've happened if we weren't collectively out there talking about SNAP E&T***

**-Grantee**

***I think we just did a good job of making it something that's very complex, very digestible, and able to go through in a virtual way.***

**-Grantee**

## Number of New Providers

As noted above, many of the grantees had overestimated the number of new providers they could claim at the end of the grant period. They underestimated the complexity of the process and how much is outside of the control of the cohort members.

## State Contracting

The second theme was that state contracting was much more complicated and challenging than anticipated and that many states were not universally welcoming of all potential third-party providers.

Each state has its administration system and priorities, and they have already committed to an approved state plan. In addition, 10 states devolve SNAP E&T administration to the county level, adding another group of players with their administrative processes and priorities. Finally, many states staff their human service agencies very lean. Their bandwidth to manage the contracting process is limited.

## Lengthy Cohorts

The issue of lengthy cohorts was limited to two sub-grantees, NCAP and ACCT. However, it is important to note here that other grantees were asked how well they felt their shorter cohorts (less than one year) functioned based on NCAP and ACCT's feedback, and they all thought that the length of their cohorts worked well.

The longer cohorts seemed to lose momentum, with several cohort members stalling in the "Interested" phase of the third-party provider continuum (Figure 2. Third-Party Provider Continuum Figure 2). As noted above, progress was interrupted or reversed when there was staff turnover. But even with staff continuity, other demands often superseded the more directed work of assessing organizational and state plan fit.

## Challenges

When asked about what challenges they encounter, particularly those that contributed to things not working as anticipated, several themes emerged:

- COVID-19
- Grantee capacity

***[SNAP E&T] means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. And hearing, a get very excited... and kind of coming in like full steam ahead and then the state agency saying, whoa, hard stop. We don't want you to do that.***

***-Grantee***

- SNAP E&T complexity
- State plans
- State capacity
- Organization capacity
- Organization priorities

The first and second themes will be tackled separately. The latter six fall under a broader umbrella of the planets aligning.

## COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 is multifaceted; it impacted how the project was implemented, affiliate members' capacity, and staffing.

Grantees, particularly in the first cycle, could not conduct in-person convenings for their early cohorts or, in the case of NCAP and ACCT, early in the cohort process. While virtual meetings helped bridge the gap, there is no argument that they do not entirely replace an in-person meeting where attendees have made an effort to attend, have minimal distractions, and can interact with each other face-to-face. This impacted early momentum.

Second, many affiliate members were at or beyond capacity absorbing and dispersing COVID-relief funding and running COVID-relief programs. Though SNAP E&T may have been a valuable addition to help further meet client and community needs, many affiliate members did not have the capacity to explore additional opportunities, particularly given SNAP E&T's complexity.

Finally, in 2021 and 2022, there was above-typical churn in the labor market as large, known as the Great Resignation. While it is not possible to definitively determine whether this economy-wide event was playing out in this specific set of workers, several grantees noted that turnover both in their project teams and at their affiliate members affected the implementation of the project.

As noted above, when there was turnover in cohort members' project teams, grantees felt they often had to "start over" with that organization. Turnover in project teams required a reshuffling to ensure that they had the right skills and expertise represented on the team to implement the project successfully.

***COVID had a major impact on the project...the reality of like COVID rear[ing] its ugly head and really throwing a wrench in things.***

***We see the benefits that the program could offer. It's just a capacity issue in... the actual mechanics of implementation. [The] matching and tracking is still a heavy lift. So, in the midst of COVID, we are doing a lot of client-level relief to add this work to the teams, particularly in our finance department. It gives me some pause.***  
**-Cohort Member**

## Grantee Capacity

Closely related was the general grantee capacity. It took some grantees trial and error to find the right composition for their project team, particularly when there was turnover in the organization. The “right people” on the team were cited as important to the project's overall function.

## Planets Aligning

The final constellations of challenges are interrelated. These components must align for an organization to move from an interested to a successful third-party provider. Any individual component out of line and an organization will either not submit a successful application or not implement SNAP E&T successfully. This is the primary reason so many grantees had to adjust their expectations about what “success” looked like in their project: any of these areas can cause even an ideal potential third-party provider to stall out.

*[T]here are so many things that are outside of the grantee’s control and the provider’s control. There are so many veto points in the process that it’s not up to just one entity to make it happen.*

*-Grantee*

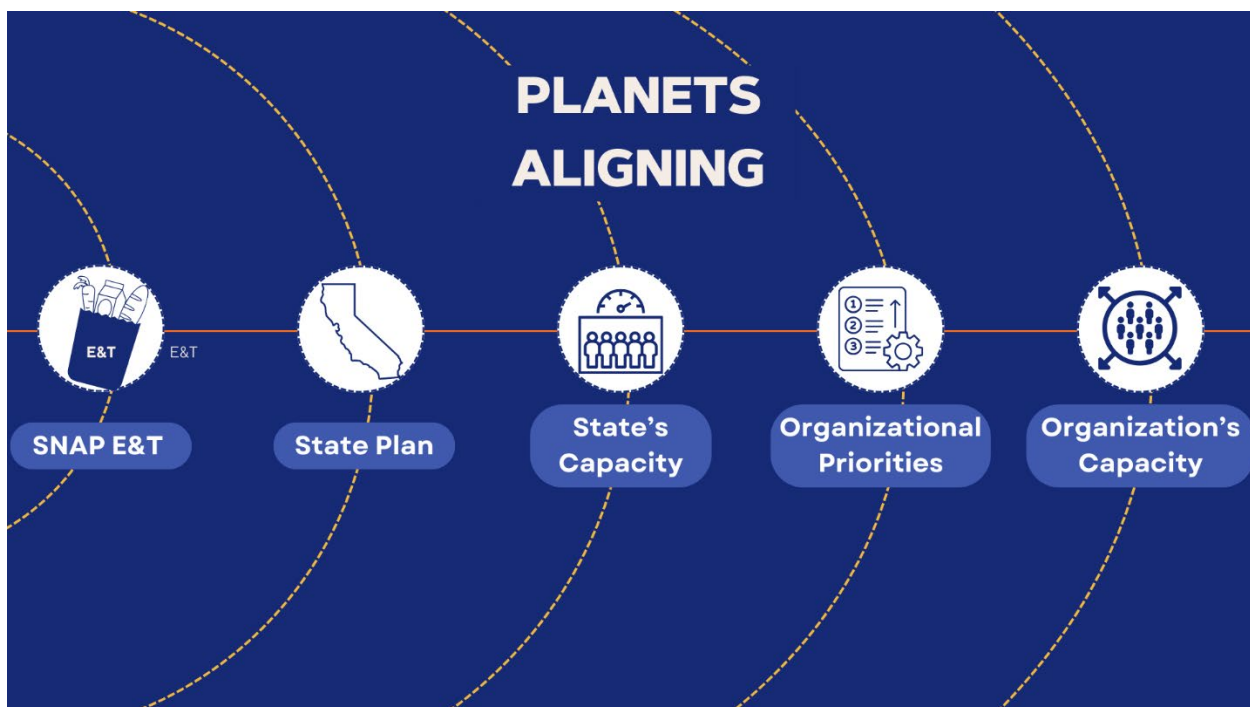


Figure 4. Planets Aligning for a Third-Party Provider

An additional layer of complexity in aligning these components is the relationships between the players involved. In some cases, there has been a bad experience implementing SNAP E&T or some other program in the past that may make the organization or state hesitant to engage with each other. In others, the barrier

*[T]his is complicated because there's a lot of players involved because it's so nuanced and state specific.*

*-Grantee*

to overcome is the lack of a relationship and shared understanding of goals and priorities.

## SNAP E&T Complexity

The first element is the complexity of SNAP E&T itself. As SJI's technical assistance team has outlined, you must have the right population, programming, and funding. Third-party providers must also have the administrative capacity to track SNAP eligibility and allowable expenses and a program staff trained to follow the requisite documentation, which may differ from the requirements of their match funding.

### *SNAP E&T Language*

In addition, there are some areas, particularly related to community colleges, where the language on the SNAP E&T material is misleading. For example, at the time of the interview, the FNS website says that generally speaking, students are not eligible for SNAP, and that is at the forefront of much of the SNAP eligibility communication. There is a list of exceptions that mean many students are eligible, and therefore, community colleges are viable third-party providers. However, colleges and students can be deterred by the USDA's prohibitive language.

### *Inconsistency between States*

In addition to the complexity of SNAP E&T at the federal level, each state interprets the regulations and guidance differently. This creates additional challenges when working with multi-state cohorts and limits the transferability of knowledge.

## State Plans & Capacity

The next component that needs to be aligned is the state plan. To be third-party providers, organizations must be in the state's approved SNAP E&T plan. States vary in how often and readily they add new organizations or types of organizations to their plan, and some only periodically open their plans to new providers. Some states were not opening up their plans to new organizations when cohorts explored the feasibility of applying to be a third-party provider. In contrast, others would only consider certain types of organizations.

Often, this concerns the priorities outlined in the state plan. States may have dedicated resources to providers in line with those priorities. Challenges can also be attributed to the lean staffing at state and county agencies. Like many affiliate members, state agencies do not have the capacity to consider

***I think [our original plan] wasn't taking into account just how complex Snap E&T is. It really is like a full-time job to even understand what it is, how it works in your state and how to connect partners to it. And... our local staff members already are at capacity...  
-Grantee***

***In the second cohort... we were building a proposal that could be submitted. If the state plan did open, they would have it ready to go.  
-Grantee***

all available options for third-party providers, particularly amid a pandemic.

## Organization Priorities

The fourth component that must be aligned is organizational priorities. Because the most significant funding opportunity for organizations is the SNAP E&T 50/50 funding and 50/50 funding is reimbursement for allowable expenses rather than primary program funding, it takes considerable planning and foresight to maximize an organization's use. If the SNAP E&T programming, population, or funding are not priorities for the organization, the additional administrative burden of pursuing SNAP E&T funds is not likely worth it to the organization. Even if the organization focuses on SNAP-eligible populations, and SNAP E&T-eligible programming and match funding, organizational leadership may not prioritize investing in the additional administrative capacity needed to take advantage of SNAP E&T.

## Organization Capacity

The final component to align is organizational capacity. One of the more frequent comments about what it takes for organizations to move along the continuum is having the right people at the table. There is a significant investment of staff capacity to get to the point of developing an application. Leadership must buy in. However, the staff responsible for the nuts and bolts of application development, as well as implementation and finance staff, are also crucial to have involved.

These organizations also need to plan ongoing program and finance staff capacity needed to develop and commit to SNAP E&T programming.

## Successes

The grantees were asked what project successes they identified. Despite the challenges, grantees experienced many successes. There were five main areas of success that they identified:

- Organizations becoming new or better providers
- Growing communities of practice
- Increased awareness and understanding of SNAP E&T
- Cohort members' initiative
- Growth in organizational capacity

***Some [cohort members] decided not to pursue the program after realizing that they just didn't have the capacity at the time. They just may have been stretched too much, or some were in transition, and some were down on staff and looking to hire. So capacity is one of the main things***

***-Grantee***

***[O]bviously there's been a lot of third-party providers that have come in a lot of states, and that's great, but there's been more success than just that.***

***-Grantee***

## New & Better Providers

Despite the complexity and the number of things that must align for an organization to become a new provider, several organizations have reached that milestone.

In addition, several cohort members had existing contracts and wanted to start implementation or improve implementation. It is more difficult to speak to the improvement of functional plans. However, several contracted providers had not launched a program prior to participating in this project. Grantees cite getting these programs off the ground as a significant achievement.

## Increased Awareness and Understanding of SNAP E&T

While many of the grantees noted that going into the project, they had underestimated the role that outreach for awareness was going to play in the project, it was cited as a success for many. Growing awareness among their affiliates and their peer organizations has been an achievement.

They have also increased the subject matter knowledge at their organization and among their cohort members, even if those cohort members never become third-party providers.

## Growing communities of practice

Grantees noted the value of their community of practice, where they can share, collaborate, and celebrate each other's and their cohort members' successes. This collaboration has spilled over into other areas where their grantees' organizational interests overlap.

Grantees value the opportunity to connect and support each other and generally understand this to improve their project. They also recognized how cohort members learned from their peers and used each other as resources.

## Cohort members' initiative

The cohort members' initiative is closely related to the cohort's community of practice. Leveraging the lessons learned and spurred by this project, some cohort members have independently engaged their state agency and workforce boards to get their programs off the ground.

***We've seen that we have proof of concept, we know agencies can do this and that's a major success.***

**-Grantee**

***[I think their instinct is just to be collaborative, and they're all motivated by the same underlying goals.***

**-FNS**

***I love seeing how they collaborate with each other, and how they learn from one another, and how they have ideas to take things forward the next step.***

**-Grantee**



## Growth in organizational capacity

Finally, grantees point to the growth of their own organization's capacity. This is related to growing subject matter expertise and collaborative relationships with other grantees that extend beyond NPG. However, it also includes the tools and resources, the project structure, and the work with the affiliate members, whether or not it leads to a third-party provider contract.

## Lessons

Finally, grantees were asked about the lessons they learned through the project and their collaboration that they would share. They had four main lessons:

- What is a realistic timeline
- Have the "right" people at the table
- Build for sustainability
- Build relationships

### Realistic Timeline

Grantees, particularly those in earlier grant cycles, highlighted how different their expected timelines were from the actual timelines. This includes the project timeline and the timeline for an organization moving from being interested in SNAP E&T to a contracted third-party provider.

First, the project timeline, early grantees in particular, underestimated the time it would take their project staff to build the necessary baseline knowledge in SNAP E&T and the time required to create interest in participating in a cohort.

Second, as mentioned above, grantees often underestimated how long it would take an affiliate to be ready to apply, mainly due to being unable to anticipate when all necessary components would align. A central sticking point for several otherwise prepared organizations is whether the state agency has the capacity or interest to engage with them. But it was also very challenging for many organizations to align their priorities and capacity to be ready to engage with the state.

### The "Right" People at the Table

Another regular lesson grantees learned is that having the right people at the table is critical when undertaking this process. For this project, it means having the right project staff who are familiar enough with SNAP E&T and the particulars of how their

***[W]e know that these programs will take more than a year or two, or even three years to get into... our, our agencies will lose access to technical assistance. So, if there were funding streams that allowed that to continue, that would be beneficial.***  
**-Grantee**

affiliates function to facilitate the work. In addition, someone with deep technical expertise must be on or available to the team.

It also means that organizations are sending the right combination of people to cohort training sessions, technical assistance sessions, and conversations with state agencies. There must be ongoing leadership buy-in, finance department participation, and an organizational point person who can attend to the details of preparing an application and launching a program.

Finally, as highlighted above, an applicant has to fit into the state's plan. So, the state agency and intermediaries must be brought into discussions. Having conversations with these agencies at the correct times can help ensure that the application and program are developed to fit, or it can prevent organizations from sinking time and resources into an application that cannot be brought into alignment with the state plan.

## Sustainability

Given the longer timelines and the broadening of their scope of successes, many grantees highlighted how important it was to plan for sustainability. Growing and launching SNAP E&T programs are not short-term projects, and thus, the project needs to incorporate growing institutional knowledge of SNAP E&T, how that functions in their affiliates, and how that varies from state to state if they want to be an ongoing SNAP E&T resource for their cohort members.

They must also build continuity into the program and foster the same among their cohort members. Turnover in the project team and at cohort member organizations was cited as a significant challenge for grantees in maintaining momentum with their cohorts. Building systems to ensure continuity when someone on the project leaves, particularly during high labor market churn, is worth the investment.

## Relationship Building

Finally, grantees learned that they are rarely working from a blank slate. Organizational staff, state agency staff, and intermediary agency staff have often interacted and crossed paths and have had varying experiences with SNAP E&T. It is crucial to recognize this and tend to these relationships, particularly when there have been failures in the past. Part of

***I think when we first started, because... we weren't convening like this, a lot of groups were knocking on the same dorm multiple times and collectively getting frustrated with some of the responses we were hearing. Or one group got farther than the other. And so, finding value as coming at as a group and hoping that we can still approach it that way as long as it makes sense because we're all knocking at the same doors. We're all, I'm sure... finding [the same] challenges... And so, the more insights that we share and the more we're on the same page collectively, we'll get a lot farther. And I think we have gotten farther in many ways by tackling it as a group.***

***-Grantee***

tending to these relationships is using the right messaging depending on the players' shared history to facilitate a common understanding of each other's interest in and goals for SNAP E&T.

# Appendix

Table 2. Cohort Members by Grantee and State

Grantee Name	State	Organization
ACCT	GU	Guam Community College
	MA	Massachusetts Association of Community College
	NY	Mohawk Valley Community College
		Ulster Community College
	WV	Bridge Valley Community College
APHSA, NCAP, and ACCT	DE	Delaware Opportunities Inc.
	KY	Audubon Area Community Services
		Blue Grass Community Action Partnership
		Central Kentucky Community Action Council
		KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.
	LA	Baton Rouge Community College
		Bossier Parish Community College
		Fletcher Technical Community College
		Louisiana Delta Community College
	MA	Berkshire Community Action Council, Inc.
		Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Inc.
		Making Opportunity Count (MOC)
		Worcester Community Action Council
	MI	Grand Rapids Community College
		Human Development Commission (HDC)
		Jackson College
		Macomb Community College
		Mott Community College
		Muskegon Community College
		Oakland-Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA)
		Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency (SMCAA)
	MN	Community Action Partnership Lakes & Prairies
		Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership, Inc.
		Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership
		Tri-County Action Program, Inc. (Tri-CAP)
	MS	Hinds Community College
	NV	College of Southern Nevada
		Great Basin College
		Truckee Meadows Community College
		Western Nevada College
	NY	Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency

Grantee Name	State	Organization
APHSA, NCAP, and ACCT	NY	Pro Action of Steuben & Yates, Inc.
		Schoharie County Community Action Program, Inc.
		St. Lawrence County Community Development Program, Inc.
	OH	Clark State College
		Columbus State Community College
		Lorian County Community College
		Northwest State Community College
		Southern Community College
	TX	Alamo Colleges
		Amarillo Community College
CAEL (Strada Collaborative)	IA	Iowa Western Community College
	IL	College of Lake County
	LA	Delgado Community College
	MN	St. Cloud Technical & Community College
	WA	Bellingham Technical College
		Whatcom Community College
		Yakima Valley College
WI	Moraine Park Technical College	
	Northeast Wisconsin Community College	
GII	AZ	Goodwill of Central and Northern Arizona
	CA	Goodwill Industries of Orange County
		Goodwill Industries of Southern California
		Goodwill of Orange County
		Goodwill of San Francisco Bay
		Goodwill Serving the People of Southern Los Angeles County
	CO	Discover Goodwill of Southern & Western Colorado, dba Goodwill of Colorado
	HI	Goodwill Industries of Hawaii, Inc.
	IA	Goodwill Industries of the Heartland
	IL	Goodwill of Central IL, Inc.
	IN	Evansville Goodwill Industries, Inc.
		Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana
	KY	Goodwill Industries of Kentucky, Inc.
	LA	Goodwill Industries of North Louisiana
		Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Louisiana
	MD	Goodwill Monocacy Valley
	MI	Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids
	MT	Easterseals Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain
	NC	Goodwill Industries of Central North Carolina
		Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont

Grantee Name	State	Organization
GII	NV	Goodwill Industries of Southern Nevada
	OH	Goodwill Easterseals Miami Valley
		Goodwill Industries of Central Ohio Inc.
		Goodwill Industries of Erie, Huron, Ottawa and Sandusky Counties, Inc.
		Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland and East Central Ohio, Inc.
		Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries
		The Goodwill Industries of Akron, Ohio, Inc.
		Youngstown Goodwill
	PA	Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania
	SC	Goodwill Industries of Upstate/Midlands South Carolina, Inc.
		Palmetto Goodwill
	TX	Goodwill Central Texas
		Goodwill Industries of Central East Texas
		Goodwill Industries of East Texas, Inc.
		Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth
		Goodwill Industries of South Texas, Inc.
		Goodwill-West Texas
		Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries, Inc.
	VA	Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, Inc.
	WA	Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
WV	Goodwill Industries of Kanawha Valley	
LISC	AZ	Arouet Empowers
		Guadalupe Centers
		Live and Learn
		RAIL CDC
	CT	Community Action Agency of New Haven (CAANH)
		Open Doors
		The Village for Families & Children
	GA	Atlanta Center for Self Sufficiency
	IL	Center for Changing Lives
		Metropolitan Family Services
		Urban League of Springfield, inc
	IN	John Boner Neighborhood Center
		Pathfinder Services
	KY	Brighton Center
	MI	ACCESS
		Center for Employment Opportunities
Focus: HOPE		
Greening of Detroit		

Grantee Name	State	Organization
LISC	MI	International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit
		Operation ABLE
		Payne Pulliam School
		SER Metro Detroit
		Southwest Economic Solutions
		St. Vincent Sarah Fisher
		The Greening of Detroit
		Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency
	MN	Karen Organization of Minnesota
	MO	CMCA
	MT	HRDC
	NJ	New Community Corporation
	OH	GLCAP
		May Dugan Center
		Pathway Inc.
		Urban League of Greater Cleveland
	TN	Clinch-Powell RC&D Council
	TX	Legacy Institute for Financial Education
	VA	AppCAA
		Humankind
		SCDHC
		Southside Community Development and Housing Corporation
WA	South Sound Outreach Services	
WV	Highland Community Builders	
NAWB	CA	Stanislaus County Workforce Development
	IN	EmployIndy
	KS	Workforce Alliance
	KY	KentuckianaWorks
	MN	Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, Inc.
	NV	Workforce Connections
	PA	Partner4Work
		Philadelphia Works
	VA	New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board
		Western Virginia Workforce Development Board
	WA	Pacific Mountain WDC
		Workforce Southwest Washington
	WI	Employ Milwaukee, Inc.
		Fox Valley Workforce Development Board
Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board		

Grantee Name	State	Organization
NJHSA	CA	JVS SoCal
	FL	Gulf Coast, JFCS
	MN	Jewish Family & Childrens Service of Minneapolis
	OH	JFS Columbus
	PA	JEVS Philadelphia
	TX	JFS Dallas
REDF	AK	Bread Line, Inc.
		MY House
	CA	Conservation Corps of Long Beach
		Covenant House California
		Downtown Women's Center
		Food Shift, Earth Island Institute
		Homeward Bound of Marin
		Juma Ventures
		LA Conservation Corps
		Neighborhood Industries
		New Earth Organization
		Salazar Landscaping
	San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps	
	CO	Bayaud Enterprises
		Focus Points Family Resource Center
		Mile High Workshop
		Purple Door Coffee/ Dry Bones Denver
	DE	Food Bank of Delaware
	IL	New Moms
	MD	Franciscan Center Inc.
		Paul's Place, Inc.
	MI	Empowerment Plan
		The Light House - A Homeless Prevention Support Center
	NC	TCK Providence, Inc.
	NY	Hot Bread Kitchen
		The Osborne Association
	OH	Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland and East Central Ohio, Inc.
	OR	Catholic Charities of Oregon
	PA	Chester County Food Bank
		Kitchen of Grace
		Manna on Main Street
		Opportunity Construction LLC
		Samuel Staten Sr. Pre- Apprenticeship Program (SSSPAP)



Grantee Name	State	Organization
REDF	SC	Turn 90
	TN	Crossroads Campus (dba Crossroads Pets-Shop & Adopt) Project Return, Inc.
	VA	Together We Bake
	WA	Bridgeways
		Catalyst Kitchens
		Columbia Industries - Opportunity Kitchen
		Evergreen Goodwill
		Unloop
		Uplift Northwest
	WI	Northern Valley Industries
		Riverview Gardens, Inc.