

INSTRUMENT I.4

**SNAP EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (E&T) FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

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**MATHEMATICA**  
Policy Research

# SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Participant Focus Group

## Discussion Guide

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**FINAL**

*September 11, 2014*

Location:

Group:

Date:

Time:

<b>Purpose Statement:</b> To assess the needs and challenges of SNAP E&T participants in obtaining employment and/or training.
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## I. INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

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[Moderator: Confirm with participants that they have completed the consent form]

Thank you very much for speaking with us today. My name is [Name], and I work for [organization]. We're an independent research organization and do not work for the SNAP [name of state program] agency or other governmental agency.

We are, however, conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. The reason we invited all of you to join us today is because each of you was, or is currently, in an Employment and Training Program through SNAP [name used by State]. We're here today to learn about your experience with that program. We are doing these focus groups in several States around the country in order to better understand how the SNAP [name used by State] employment and training programs can meet the needs and goals of people like you. We're also interested in learning about some of the things that might make it hard for you to participate in such programs. As you may know, some people who participate in an employment and training program are required to participate. These people applied for SNAP, and the training is meant to help them find work. Other people who participate in an employment and training program are not required to participate, but they choose to because they want help finding work.

- Before we start, I want to discuss the guidelines for today's discussion. Your participation today is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can leave at any time. At the end of the group, you will receive \$40 as a token of our appreciation for your time.
- What you say in this room will be considered private. We will summarize what we talk about today and put it together with information that we will gather from other groups like this. Nothing you say will ever be linked to your name. Also, nothing you say will affect your eligibility for SNAP [name used by State] or any other programs.
- Please respect the privacy of others' comments.
- We want to hear different opinions, so if the rest of the group feels one way and you feel differently, please speak up. That information is really important to us because everyone here has probably had different experiences. There are no wrong answers.
- Please talk one at a time in a voice at least as loud as mine.
- You can add to something someone else says but please don't have side conversations with the person next to you.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. We need to hear from all of you, but you don't have to answer every question. We may call on you to participate.

- We have a lot to cover today, and may need to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; we have to make sure we get through all the questions we have for you in a short amount of time.
- If you haven't done so already, please turn off your cell phones or set them to silent.
- The session will last about 90 minutes. We don't have a planned break, but please feel free to get up at any time to stretch, use the restroom, or help yourselves to something to eat or drink. We ask that only one person be out of the room at a time for a bathroom break.
- We would like to record our discussion to help us remember what everyone said when we go back to write our report. Does anyone have an objection to us recording the discussion?

Are there any questions before we get started?

Let's start by getting to know each other a little bit. Please, one at a time, share your:

- First name
- What type of work you're interested in
- When you enrolled in the Employment and Training program, what did you hope to get out of it?

## II. E&T PARTICIPATION [15 MINUTES]

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- Let's begin by talking about the last SNAP [name used by State] Employment and Training program that you participated in. Going around the table, I'd like each of you to tell me the name of the program and how long ago you participated.  
**[Moderator note:** Ensure SNAP E&T programs are named. If not, provide clarification.]
- Now can someone describe for me what your program was like? For example, what types of activities were offered? What did you learn? Who would like to start?
- Did any of you have to pay fees to attend your E&T program? If so, how much did you have to pay and what did they cover? Were these fees difficult for you to pay?  
**[Probe:** [If not mentioned, ask:] Did you have to pay for books or other materials required by the course?]
- What kind of support services, if any, were offered as part of the program (e.g., transportation assistance, child care, clothing allowances, etc.)?
- How does this compare to some other people's experiences?
- Did anyone have to pay for the services that were just mentioned? If so, how much? Does your E&T program offer full or partial reimbursements for these costs?
- Did any of you end up leaving the program before it ended? What were some of the reasons for leaving?

**[Moderator note:** This question does not apply to individuals who participate in programs without a defined length (e.g., job connection programs). If the group is mixed, direct the question to those participating in a fixed-length program by adding the phrase, "For those of

you who participated in training programs aimed at building your skills” to the start of the question]

- For those of you who finished the program, did you get any type of certification or degree at the end?
- Now I’d like to talk about how easy or difficult it was for you to participate in the employment and training program. For example, was it easy or hard for you to get there?
- What were the hours of your training program? How convenient were these hours?

### III. EMPLOYMENT GOALS [10 MINUTES]

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- **[For volunteer groups, ask:]** Sometimes people enroll in a training program because they want to improve their chances at getting a better job, whereas others may want to break into a new line of work. When you last enrolled in a SNAP training program, what were your goals? Where did you hope the training would take you?

**[Probe:** Are you looking for a new career or do you hope to upgrade your skills in your current job?]

**[For volunteer groups, ask:]** For those of you with specific career goals:

- a. How did you decide on this goal?
- b. What steps have you taken, or plan to take, to reach your goal? Did you meet your goals?

### IV. PERCEPTIONS OF E&T PROGRAM [15 MINUTES]

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- Now I’d like to talk about how well the SNAP [name used by State] Employment and Training programs are meeting your needs. In your opinion, is the SNAP [name used by State] E&T program helping you develop the skills you need to get a job/did you get a job afterwards (if no longer participating in training)?

**[Probe:** [If respondent says no, ask:] How easy or difficult will it be for you to get the skills you need?]

**[Probe:** [If respondent says yes, ask:] Do you think you could have gotten the job without going through the Employment and Training program?]

- What parts of the program worked best/were most helpful for you? In what ways?

**[Probe:** What skills they taught you were the most important? How have you used them? Did you find classes or hands-on experience more helpful for you?]

- What parts of the program could be improved to better help you find work? In what ways?

**[Probe:** What skills they taught you were the least important or have you not used at all?]

- What additional support services could be provided to better help you complete the program? Which are the most important?
- Are there certain skills you wish the program could help you build?
- Has anyone participated in any other job-preparation programs?

**[Probe:** Has anyone received job training or education through another State program, or through a charitable or community organization such as Goodwill?]

**[If yes, ask:]**

- Can you tell me a little bit about that program?
- How did it compare to the one you participated in through SNAP [name used by State] (or the Food Stamp Program)?
- Did it help you find a job?
- Are there specific aspects of those programs you wish were offered in SNAP [name used by State] E&T?

## V. WORKFORCE PREPAREDNESS [10 MINUTES]

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Let's talk a little bit more about what happened after your SNAP [name used by State] Employment and Training ended or you stopped participating in the program.

Earlier, X of you mentioned that you had found work. Are others working?

**[If yes, ask:]** Did you find this work during or right after completing the program?

- What type of work are you doing (note type of industry and occupation)?
- How many hours are you working each week? Is your job covering your living expenses (food, housing, bills, etc)? Do you need help from other programs/people to cover your expenses?

**[Probe:** Are you working the number of hours you would like? If working too few, ask Why? (e.g., the employer is not able to give them more hours, they couldn't find a full-time job and took part-time work in the interim, etc.)]

- What are some of the reasons you were able to get this job?

**[Probe:** Was it because of the Employment and Training program, previous experience, networking, luck, etc.?)

## VI. PERCEPTIONS OF LABOR MARKET [10 MINUTES]

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- Let's brainstorm about some of the work available around **[location]**. Take a minute to think about some of the jobs you've been applying for. While you're thinking, I'll write some of the ones already mentioned on the easel.

**[Moderator note:** Ask what industry a particular job is in, if not clear.] Are there jobs that used to be available around **[location]**, but are now hard to find or no longer available? If no longer available, what happened to those jobs?

- Are there new kinds of employers/jobs that have moved into the area? What are they? Have any of you applied for jobs with those new employers? Did you get offered a job? If not, why do you think you didn't get it?

**[Probe:** Do you think it's become harder to find a job than it used to be, easier, or is it about the same? If easier or harder, why do you think that happened?)

**[Probe:** Are there jobs that you think you could get with some more training or preparation? If so, what training would you need?)

## VII. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT [15 MINUTES]

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- [A few/some/most] of you have found work, others are still looking. Whether or not you have a job or are still looking, I'd like you to tell me about the things that make it difficult to find the kinds of jobs listed. I'll write them down on the easel.

**[Probe:** As people name challenges, ask them to provide context.]

**[Probe:** If no one is describing challenges, offer some examples. Ask if anyone has had difficulty due to taking care of dependents, health problems or injuries, lack of transportation, unstable housing, language or literacy barriers, immigration status, etc.]

- **Go down each item on the list.**  
How many other folks have experienced [specify challenge]?
- Would additional support services (like transportation assistance or child care) have been helpful? If so, what services are the most important?
- Let's do this exercise again, but this time I want each of you to think about some of the challenges you've encountered in *keeping* a job. What are they?

**[Moderator note:** To get things started, reference barriers previously mentioned]

**[Probe:** As people name challenges, ask them to provide context. Can provide specific probes on barriers of interest to USDA (e.g., health issues, literacy, etc.)]

- **Go down each item on the list.**

How many other folks have experienced [specify challenge]?

By a show of hands, how many of you experienced *more* than one of these challenges at the same time?

Ok, let's talk a little bit more about **[the 2-3 challenges most often mentioned in the group]**. Why does [barrier] make it difficult to find or keep a job in this area? What did you do to address these barriers? Did the E&T program provide help in overcoming these barriers? If so, how; if not, why not? How could it have been more helpful?

#### VIII. FINAL EXERCISE [5 MINUTES]

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I just have one final question before I let you go.

- Thinking back over the discussion we've just had, how useful do you think the program was in building skills/getting you a job (whatever the goal was)? Would you suggest others participate in the program if it's available to them?
- **[If time remains, ask:]** Is there anything else about the program you would like to share that didn't come up already in the discussion?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas with us today. This discussion has been very helpful in learning more about SNAP [name used by State] E&T. We appreciate your time.

