



Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative

Request for Proposals

2014



National Council on Aging



Two competitive grant opportunities:

Senior Center SNAP Access Grants
SNAP Enrollment Center Grants

Webinars for Potential Applicants:

December 11, 2013, 2:00pm ET
December 13, 2013, 2:00pm ET

Letter of Intent to Apply Due:

December 17, 2013

Applications Due:

January 3, 2014, 5:00pm ET

Grant Period:

February 14, 2014 – January 31, 2015

Please direct questions to:

HungerInitiatives@ncoa.org

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Program Overview

The National Council on Aging's (NCOA) Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is a national program that supports efforts by community-based organizations and agencies to assist older adults (i.e., age 60 and over) in applying for and enrolling in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This program is supported by a generous grant from the Walmart Foundation.

Only 1 in 3 eligible seniors currently participates in SNAP, leaving nearly 6 million elders without the nutrition assistance for which they are eligible. At the same time, senior hunger—America's "hidden hunger"—is on the rise and adding to the strain on charity food providers. SNAP, which provides an average of \$1,464 in benefits each year to low-income seniors living alone, can put adequate nutrition within reach and help older adults remain independent longer in their homes and communities.

Through this program, NCOA will award \$1,000,000 in grant funding to community-based organizations and agencies, including senior centers, to assist low-income older adults in applying for and enrolling in SNAP and other benefits.

One aspect of this competition (Grant Area A) will seek to award 30 grants of \$10,000 each to senior centers that are members of the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC), for a SNAP-focused application effort. A second program (Grant Area B) will seek to award 8 grants of up to \$50,000 each, focused on increasing the SNAP enrollment capacity of organizations (including possibly senior centers) that are already dedicated to helping older adults access public benefits and programs. A third area of the program, which is non-competitive, and therefore not subject to this RFP, will provide \$300,000 in grants to organizations currently partnering with NCOA in a systems change initiative in Alabama, Colorado, and Cook County, Illinois.

Applicants must be a public or nonprofit organization, faith-based organization or coalition, state or local government entity, or a consumer and community advocacy organization or coalition, with a focus on serving older adults and/or providing nutrition programs.

Key Dates and Deadlines

- Release of RFP: December 2, 2013
- Online application available for proposal submission: December 9, 2013
- Letter of intent to Apply due: ~~December 17, 2013~~
- Full Proposal due: January 3, 2014
- Notification of awards: early February 2014
- Award performance period: February 14, 2014 – January 31, 2015

How to Apply

NCOA is using an online application for this initiative. The online application will be available at www.ncoa.org/SNAPgrant on or around December 9, 2013.

NCOA will host an optional webinar to answer questions about the RFP process on two dates, to accommodate busy schedules. You are welcome to register for one of the webinars at the links below. We will record one of the webinars and make it available at www.ncoa.org/SNAPgrant for those who are unable to attend either webinar.

Webinar dates and registration details:

- **December 11, 2013 at 2:00pm ET**
 - Registration [link](#).
- **December 13, 2013 at 2:00pm ET**
 - Registration [link](#).

Background

Senior hunger is on the rise in America, with nearly 5 million adults aged 60+ considered food insecure or very food insecure, according to the [Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement](#). Food banks report increasing numbers of elderly becoming repeat clients each month.

Yet senior hunger does not exist independent of economic insecurity. In the long recession, many older adults who had anticipated a comfortable retirement find themselves struggling to make ends meet. Over the last five years, interest rates on savings have declined dramatically and jobs are harder to find, while the price of food and fuel has risen.

In stark terms, this means that for a senior pushing a half-empty grocery cart at the checkout, the choices go beyond clipping coupons and counting pennies. She may ask herself, can I cut my pills in half to make my prescription last an extra month? Can I leave my health conditions untreated just a little bit longer, until I can afford that Medicare copayment? Should I turn off the air-conditioning during this heat wave to keep my costs down? Given these pressures, sufficient food intake and a healthy diet can be difficult, even impossible, to maintain.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that only 1 in 3 eligible older adults is enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, the backbone of America's federal anti-hunger programs. As a result, an estimated 6 million low-income elders are missing out on this vital program, which provides an average annual benefit of \$1,464 to elderly participants.

Multiple studies have documented the reasons why older adults tend not to participate in SNAP. Key among these are the stigma of “welfare” programs; lack of knowledge about programs and eligibility, when compared to other population groups; and misconceptions about the value of the benefit. In recent years, government agencies, aging service providers, and anti-hunger organizations have stepped up efforts to reach seniors and enroll them in SNAP.

Through NCOA’s work on SNAP enrollment, we have found that the barriers to increasing senior participation fall under four general categories:

- **Awareness:** Senior hunger is often called America’s “hidden hunger.” The public awareness of senior hunger is low, and seniors may not self-identify as needing, or being eligible for, SNAP. The public face of hunger in America is that of a child, not a retiree.
- **Misconceptions about the SNAP program and benefit:** Many seniors believe that they would only be eligible for the minimum benefit of \$15, while the average benefit for a senior living alone is \$122/month. In addition, many elders still equate SNAP with paper Food Stamps, and do not realize that the benefit is loaded onto inconspicuous debit cards.
- **Points of access:** Many older adults live in isolation from centralized services, whether due to geography, physical or cognitive disability, or language/cultural barriers. They may be unlikely to travel beyond the doctor’s office, place of worship, grocery store, and local senior center. Traveling to a “welfare” office to apply for SNAP is unappealing at best, and impossible at worst, for many eligible seniors.
- **Policy/program silos:** Traditionally, many aging services providers, while expert in Medicare and senior programs, may know very little about SNAP, while SNAP agencies may not work at all with the statewide aging network. Without an integrated approach to policy and practice across the aging and hunger fields, huge gaps in service remain. For example, even seniors who participate in nutrition programs like home-delivered meals or congregate dining may not be aware of their eligibility for SNAP, the value of the benefit, or how to apply.

The Program

The Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is a national program of the National Council on Aging. The goals of the initiative include:

- Significantly increasing the participation of older adults in SNAP through community-based outreach and enrollment initiatives.
- Identifying, analyzing, and disseminating replicable, cost-effective, and scalable strategies for senior SNAP enrollment.

- Increasing public awareness of senior hunger as an issue of national and local importance, and of SNAP as an effective strategy for reducing food insecurity among older adults.

The overall goal of NCOA's national Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative is to find and assist at least 35,000 eligible seniors in filing new SNAP applications during the grant period. NCOA aims to regrant \$1 million to 41 community-based organizations and/or agencies to engage in SNAP outreach and application assistance. These organizations will be expected to submit at least 20,000 new SNAP applications overall. NCOA will be responsible for assisting an additional 15,000 seniors to apply for SNAP through an enhanced BenefitsCheckUp® and by providing technical assistance and other resources to the broader aging services and anti-hunger networks.

Application completion and submission is the chief goal

NCOA recognizes that outreach and education, as well as application assistance, are needed to achieve the goal of maximizing the number of seniors enrolled in SNAP. However, the primary success metric for this grant is the number of people who actually complete and submit applications for SNAP. Proposals that focus solely on outreach and/or education and that do not have a strong focus on application completion and submission will not be considered.

In addition, we recognize that while the use of effective online tools to screen, track, and assist individuals applying for benefits is critical to developing an efficient system of benefits enrollment, some geographic areas will lack broadband or other capabilities to use technology in these ways. Where the capabilities do exist, we would expect technological solutions to play an integral role in proposals. However, it is not the intent of this grant to fund major purchases of technology or equipment.

The competitive grants will be awarded in two categories.

Grant Area A: Senior Center SNAP Access Grant:

- **Awards:** 30 grants of \$10,000 each / Total awards = \$300,000
- **SNAP enrollment goal:** Submission of at least **200** new senior SNAP applications / Total SNAP applications = 6,000
- **Eligibility requirements:** Applicants *must* be members of the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC), or must begin the membership application process, in order to be considered for awards. See page 12 for more information on NISC.

Senior centers generally serve limited geographic areas and have limited resources; many have not previously engaged in SNAP enrollment. Senior centers awarded grants through this RFP would be expected to use the funds for a combination of staff support and for engaging and supporting teams of senior volunteers who will organize themselves to develop and implement peer-to-peer strategies to find and enroll seniors in SNAP.

One example of this model of civic engagement, WisdomWorks, was pioneered by NCOA and NISC. WisdomWorks teams are based on diverse, multi-skilled volunteer groups of older adults who work together in self-directed teams to identify and address a challenge in their community. NCOA and NISC believe that the issues of senior hunger and SNAP enrollment are an excellent opportunity for the deployment of these teams in peer-to-peer outreach and enrollment activities.

Learn more about engaging older adult volunteers at the following links:

- Wisdom Works is designed to help organizations build their capacity and extend their reach by developing self-directed teams of seniors who address vital community issues.
- The Aging Network's Volunteer Collaborative serves as the central place within the Aging Network for coordination, integration and sharing of older volunteer program practices, tools, and information,
- The Self Directed Volunteers Network is a community for training, tips, tools, and on-going support to develop, grow, and sustain effective self-directed teams.

Grant Area B: SNAP Enrollment Center Grant:

- **Awards:** 8 grants of \$50,000 each / Total awards = \$400,000
- **SNAP enrollment goal:** Submission of at least **1,000** new senior SNAP applications / Total SNAP applications = 8,000
- **Eligibility requirements:** Applicants must be a public or nonprofit organization, faith-based organization or coalition, state or local government entity, or a consumer and community advocacy organization or coalition, with a focus on serving older adults and/or providing nutrition programs. NISC members are also eligible to apply for Grant Area B.
- **Note 1:** NCOA grantees, including those receiving federal Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC) grant funding, may apply for funds under Grant Area B, but must show how this funding will be used to assist an additional 1,000 seniors in submitting new SNAP applications.
- **Note 2:** Organizations that are not currently Benefits Enrollment Center grantees are eligible to apply for these grants. However, applicants must demonstrate capacity to meet the SNAP application and enrollment goals as described in this RFP, as well as a plan for integrating SNAP into an overall enrollment strategy that encompasses other key benefits for senior economic security.

NCOA's Person-Centered Model of Benefits Assistance

One in three older adults in America is considered economically insecure, meaning that they struggle to make ends meet, often making tradeoffs among paying for healthcare, housing, transportation, utilities, and food. Thus, seniors cannot be truly food secure until they have also achieved economic security. For many vulnerable older adults, this requires holistic and person-centered assistance in accessing the full spectrum of public benefits for which they are eligible.

Grant Area B, the SNAP Benefits Enrollment Center Grant, provides funding to *expand the SNAP enrollment capacity of organizations that are already dedicated to helping older adults access public benefits and programs*. The concept is modeled after NCOA's 21 existing Benefits Enrollment Centers (BECs), local agencies and organizations funded through a competitive federal grant to provide comprehensive screening and assistance to seniors and disabled adults in applying for at least six core benefits:

- Medicare Part D Extra Help (LIS)
- Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), or a state-based energy assistance program (where applicable)
- Optional: other state and local benefit programs, such as property tax relief, or State Pharmaceutical Assistance Programs (SPAPs)

The BEC model is defined by its “person-centered” approach to benefits access, which includes:

- Taking the total needs and circumstances of a person within his or her family and community into account, not just the need for a particular benefit.
- Informing people about multiple benefits and eligibility criteria.
- Screening clients for multiple benefits and assisting in completing and submitting the appropriate applications.
- Assisting them in navigating the application and recertification processes.
- Recognizing that one call or meeting with an individual may not be sufficient to meet all of his or her needs, and thus having systems in place to sustain contact with and continue assisting the same individual over a period of time.

This type of comprehensive system is more seamless for consumers because it reduces their burden and duplication of effort. Research has consistently demonstrated that community-based organizations, using a one-on-one person-centered approach, are the most effective at successfully identifying and assisting potentially eligible individuals for need-based programs.

Successful applicants in Grant Area B must demonstrate:

- Organizational capacity to meet or exceed the application goal of 1,000 new SNAP applications submitted during the grant period; and,

- How this SNAP enrollment initiative will be integrated into a broader benefits access strategy that provides comprehensive and person-centered application assistance for seniors.

There are many tactics that can be used to accomplish this goal, and applicants are encouraged to incorporate (and customize) those that will be most effective in their proposed target area. Some examples of these strategies include:

- Utilizing list-based, data-driven outreach, in which an organization partners with state government agencies to share personally identifiable data on individuals enrolled in certain benefits. This data-sharing allows for highly targeted phone and mail outreach to individuals who are enrolled in one benefit and likely eligible for, but not enrolled in, another. See the Center's issue brief, "[Data Driven Strategies](#)," for more information.
- Deputizing community-based organizations, in which a state agency establishes a collaborative relationship with organizations, partnering with them to complete and submit applications on behalf of clients, troubleshoot problems that can develop after submission, and assure that clients understand, use, and retain these important benefits. For more information, see the Center's issue brief, "[Deputizing Community Organizations](#)," for more information.
- Employing effective targeted outreach methods that use multiple media (such as outbound calls and mailings) to inform seniors and adults living with disabilities about benefits they may be eligible for and encourage them to seek assistance. For examples of effective outreach strategies, visit our [Promising Practices Clearinghouse](#).

Selection Criteria

Key selection criteria for Grant Area A and Grant Area B include:

- Strong commitment and demonstrated capacity of the applicant to meet or exceed the designated SNAP application and enrollment goals.
- Demonstrated ability to develop and/or expand partnerships with other community organizations and local government agencies to effectively implement SNAP outreach and enrollment work. *This is particularly important for applicants in Grant Area B, the SNAP Enrollment Center Grant.*
- Community factors, such as: rates of risk for senior hunger, rates of senior economic insecurity, rates of isolation, and low statewide senior participation rates for SNAP. Data on these measures have been compiled by NCOA for your use in writing your proposal:
 - State level data can be found [here](#).
 - Economic vulnerability data are available at the [county level](#) and by [zip code](#).
 - Linguistic isolation data are available at the [county level](#) and by [zip code](#).

- Specific commitments by grantees to:
 - Meet or exceed SNAP application goals set forth in this RFP.
 - Engage in coordinated SNAP outreach campaign and messaging efforts, including use of materials developed by NCOA.
 - Help disseminate findings and best practices among grantees and broader networks of partners.
 - Adhere to NCOA's proposed donor recognition plan.
 - Participate in regular grantee telephone calls.
 - Use BenefitsCheckUp® for screening and data collection for all clients served through this initiative. (If your organization already uses another online benefit screening tool, you will be asked to provide relevant information about the tool and how it is used.)
 - Collect and track quantitative and qualitative outcomes data, including compelling stories, using NCOA's online system.
 - Participate in regular trainings, via webinar or in person, on topics such as: screening and data collection with BenefitsCheckUp®, best practices for enrolling seniors in SNAP, partnerships between aging and anti-hunger organizations, etc.
 - Appropriateness of proposed budget.

Evaluation and Monitoring

NCOA will evaluate this program to determine performance, to identify and assess the cost-effectiveness of grantees and various strategies, and to develop knowledge that will facilitate further scaling of senior SNAP outreach and enrollment efforts nationwide.

Grantees will be required to provide information on a timely and periodic basis to assist in the evaluation process, monitor performance, and aid in program management. This information includes, but is not limited to:

- Screening, application, and enrollment data.
- Narratives spotlighting effective practices or compelling client stories.
- Financial reports.

This information may be provided to a private evaluation consultant, in addition to NCOA staff.

Other NCOA Resources Provided to Grantees

- Access to customized BenefitsCheckUp® tools that collect your screening performance data automatically.
- Powerful customized online data collection and performance tracking tools.
- Training and technical assistance from experts at NCOA and other organizations.

- Access to NCOA's three-part senior nutrition education video and materials, developed with Walmart Foundation.
- Customizable templates for SNAP outreach materials targeted to older adults.
- Data on the needs of seniors in your community and state, and your impact on senior hunger and economic insecurity.

Use of Grant Funds

Grantees must use the full amount of the grant for the purposes set forth in their proposal. Grant funds may not be used for the following purposes:

- To influence any member of Congress, State, or local legislator to favor or oppose any legislation or appropriation with respect to this agreement.
- For publicity or propaganda purposes, for the preparation, distribution, or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet, publication, radio, television, or film presentation designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress or state and local legislatures.
- To pay the salary or expenses of any grant or contract recipient, or agent acting for such recipient, related to any activity designed to influence legislation or appropriation pending before the Congress or state and local legislatures.

How to Apply

NCOA is using an online application for this program. The online application will be available at www.ncoa.org/SNAPgrant on or around December 9, 2013.

Proposals will include:

- An executive summary;
- Description of community factors and population focus;
- Description of current and proposed efforts, including timeline;
- An example of your organization's success in a similar effort that indicates the likelihood that you can succeed in this initiative;
- Budget and budget narrative;
- Resume of project lead and other key staff; and,
- Letters of commitment from partner organizations who will be involved in your proposed efforts.

While a Letter of Interest (LOI) is not required, we request that you please submit the optional LOI at www.ncoa.org/SNAPgrant by December 17, 2013, in order to make the proposal review and awards process more efficient. The LOI form will be posted with the online application form on or around December 9, 2013.

Proposals and Letters of Interest submitted via email will not be considered.

Application Timetable

Key Dates and Deadlines

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Informational Webinar (optional)

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About NCOA

The National Council on Aging (NCOA), founded in 1950, is a nonprofit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCOA is also one of the nation's most highly rated charities. Our mission is to empower millions of older adults to be healthy, independent, and financially secure. NCOA has committed to making significant improvements in the lives of 10 million older adults, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, by 2020.

NCOA works with thousands of organizations across the country to help seniors find jobs and benefits, improve their health, live independently, and remain active in their communities. NCOA is the national leader in developing innovative programs that meet important needs of older Americans and taking them to "scale" nationwide. For example, NCOA developed the first pilot project for the Foster Grandparent Program and conducted the first federal evaluation of Meals on Wheels. In both of these examples, NCOA was instrumental in making these programs part of the fabric of every community in the United States.

National Institute of Senior Centers

Every day, one million seniors use services at the nation's 11,000 senior centers, which provide congregate meals, exercise classes, educational activities, recreation, and much more. NCOA's National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) is the national leadership group for senior centers and is the only membership organization that recognizes standards of excellence in senior centers and accredits centers that meet those standards. For more, go to www.ncoa.org/nisc.

BenefitsCheckUp®

Since 2001, NCOA has provided a free service to the general public called BenefitsCheckUp® that enables older adults, their families, and caregivers to learn about and apply for more than 2,000 different public and private benefits. Since its inception, BenefitsCheckUp® has helped more than 3.6 million people find over \$13.3 billion in annual benefits. For more, go to www.benefitscheckup.org.

Center for Benefits Access

NCOA's current efforts to increase senior participation in SNAP have built on our expertise in benefits enrollment for seniors and our long relationship with the national aging network. Since 2008, NCOA has operated as the Center for Benefits Access (formerly the National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment). The Center is the national "hub" to inform and coordinate federal, state, and local efforts to enroll vulnerable seniors and younger adults with disabilities into benefits using a person-centered, cost-efficient approach. For more, go to www.centerforbenefits.org.