

Washington State SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment Phase 2

Federal Fiscal Year 2024

Prepared by the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Team
Nora Downs, Ankita Henry, and Shelby Winters



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Introduction

Background

FNS guidance requires that SNAP-Ed conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every three years. This needs assessment should be used to identify the barriers and facilitators to program access for SNAP-Ed eligible residents, inform appropriate programming, and support the state priority goals.

For this three-year needs assessment cycle, Washington SNAP-Ed partnered with Washington WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) to conduct a statewide needs assessment on the nutritional and health needs of low-income people throughout Washington state. Both programs have similar goals in promoting healthy individuals and families across the lifespan and offer their own unique expertise in working with this population. The partnership between WIC and SNAP-Ed allowed Washington SNAP-Ed to address equity concerns and reimbursement for participation that otherwise would not have been possible for one program alone.

The purpose of this assessment is to gather state-level information on WIC and SNAP-eligible populations that will be used to guide program planning, to enhance program equity and for program improvement. State-level findings from this report should be considered in conjunction with population-level and local-level data when tailoring local SNAP-Ed programs.

Evaluation Approaches and Timeline

To have enough time to properly assess needs and assets from program-eligible people, staff, and partners, this assessment will be conducted in three phases. At the end of this cycle, the WIC and SNAP-Ed evaluation teams will assess whether to continue with the phased approach or switch to a more integrated needs assessment approach with narrower research questions. This initial three-phase plan allows the WIC and SNAP-Ed programs to gather more data from each group, as well as use data collected in previous years to inform the research questions in subsequent years.

Phased Timeline:

- FFY 2023: WIC and SNAP **eligible people** of Washington, including those currently participating in either program. Additionally for SNAP-Ed, define core principles for principles-focused evaluation.
- FFY 2024: WIC clinic staff, SNAP-Ed **providers and statewide supports** (e.g. Leadership Team).
- FFY 2025: WIC vendors and SNAP-Ed **partner organizations** (e.g. schools, corner stores, low-income housing, etc.).

Research Questions

Research questions are high-level questions that help guide the needs assessment methodology and tool development. The questions we hope to answer through this multi-phased assessment were designed considering SNAP-Ed and WIC priorities, the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, and the Data Equity Framework from We All Count (an organization that teaches and promotes data equity):

1. What could SNAP-Ed and WIC do to reduce the environmental and systemic barriers to healthy eating and physical activity among eligible populations?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators for SNAP-Ed to successfully partner with existing community members?
3. How can WIC and SNAP-Ed make nutrition education valuable to participants?
4. What are the barriers and facilitators to fully utilizing WIC benefits?
5. What changes could Washington WIC make to make it easier for participants to fully utilize their WIC benefits?
6. Why do or don't people participate in both WIC and SNAP? For people who are enrolled in both programs, how does that impact their participation on WIC?
7. How can SNAP-Ed and WIC encourage meaningful participation in their programs? How do the eligible populations hear about SNAP-Ed and WIC, and decide if the program(s) are right for them?

Interview Recruitment and Participation

For provider interviews, the evaluation team developed a recruitment and interview plan. Before implementation, the plan was presented to the SNAP-Ed Statewide Leadership Team to gather feedback. The evaluation team also presented at a Friday Forum, an opt-in meeting open to Washington state SNAP-Ed staff, where this phase of the needs assessment was announced to providers. Recruitment was primarily carried out by reminders in the WA SNAP-Ed Weekly Newsletter with a sign-up form. When recruitment slowed, Implementing Agencies were asked to provide names of providers the evaluation team could specifically invite to interview. Through these recruitment strategies, 30 interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed.

At the beginning of each interview, providers verbally gave consent to participate and to being recorded. All questions were voluntary, and providers could decline to answer or end the interview at any time. Participants were asked to describe their work and history with SNAP-Ed. The interview guide then covered three topics, including healthy and active living, program successes, and programmatic growth opportunities and challenges. Interviews were all conducted virtually and took an average of 44 minutes.

Participants represented 16 counties, with an additional 10 statewide perspectives from leadership and state support staff. Interviewees had a range of SNAP-Ed experience, with 67%

having more than 5 years of experience. Many SNAP-Ed roles were also represented as well, including managers, coordinators, educators, and statewide support staff (see [Appendix A](#) for participation visuals).

Major Findings Sections

SNAP-Ed Geographic Reach

Geographic Reach Strengths, Limitations, and Gaps

In FFY23, the SNAP-Ed program reached 1,156,246 people across Washington state through PSE projects, with the largest reach in Region 2 followed by Region 5. For direct education, the overall reach was 5,422 with the greatest reach in Region 1 (Table 1).

Table 1: FFY23 Reach by Region for PSE and DE projects

Region	PSE Reach	Direct Education Reach
Region 1: Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens Counties	161,522	3,600
Region 2: Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Walla Walla, Whitman, Yakima Counties	469,079	640
Region 3: Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom Counties	65,659	478
Region 4: King and Pierce Counties	113,921	461
Region 5: Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Klickitat, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum Counties	346,065	243
Total	1,156,246	5,422

SNAP-Ed had Direct Education and/or PSE activities in 34 of Washington’s 39 counties. SNAP-Ed did not conduct any activities in Columbia, Klickitat, Okanogan, Pacific, or Skamania Counties. SNAP-Ed had partnerships in 35 counties; with one partnership in Okanogan County, but no activities recorded.

Additionally, providers recorded conducting PSE activities at specific sites, such as USDA summer meal sites, Indian reservations, and military bases. In FFY23, there were 41 PSE activities completed at USDA summer meal sites within 17 counties. There were 22 PSE activities at sites within Indian Reservations in 8 counties; and 1 PSE activity completed at a military base in 1 county. The most common site setting for both PSE and Direct Education activities are schools (87 PSE, 226 Direct Education), most likely because “schools have a captive audience, but housing sites and community centers, you don’t have a captive audience ready and it’s harder.” While this is an effective way to reach youth, it also indicates an important limitation with reaching adults in the community (see [Appendix B](#), Tables 8-11 for additional site setting details).

When planning activities in the community, providers face challenges with “*timing, people’s schedules, [not knowing] where people are going to be at certain times of the day.*” One provider makes this difference explicit: “*This is why we know the after-school programs would be successful is because it is a transition time and there’s a high chance people will be there. This is not the case with adults, some people don’t go anywhere and are at home all day, some people are out all day, some people have kids to deal with.*”

Geographic View of Eligibility and Reach

In 2024, the Federal Poverty Guidelines set by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)¹, were 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for a household of one at \$15,060 a year, and \$31,200 a year for a family of four. The Basic Foods program, which includes SNAP and the Washington state Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants (FAP) who are not eligible for SNAP, and SNAP-Ed eligibility in Washington is set at 200% of the FPL, which would be \$30,120 for a household of one and \$62,400 for a household of four. Of note, the 2023 projected median household income in Washington state is estimated at \$94,308, ranging from \$54,412 to \$116,044 across all 39 counties².

The American Community Survey (ACS), conducted by the US Census Bureau, estimated that in 2022 10.0%³ of individuals in Washington were living in poverty (at 100% FPL), and that 1,709,507 individuals in Washington (22.3% of the state’s population) were living at or below 200% of the FPL⁴. However, the number of individuals living at or below 200% FPL varies widely across the state, with some counties having less than 20% of their population at or below 200% FPL and others having more than 40% of their population at 200% FPL. Image 3 displays the count and percent of estimated eligible population by Washington state counties. The filled map colors show the *percent* of individuals at or below 200% FPL and the proportional circles show the *count* of eligible individuals by county. Counties with darker fill color have a higher percentage of individuals at or below 200% FPL. Counties with larger proportional circles have higher counts of individuals at or below 200% FPL.

Of note, the Puget Sound region has high count estimates of eligible individuals (largest proportional circles) even though the ratio of those who are eligible in that region are some of the lowest in the state (lightest county fill color) For example, King County has the largest population of eligible individuals with an income <200% FPL, but of King County’s total population, 18% are eligible. On the other hand, Okanogan County, where there were no recorded SNAP-Ed activities in FFY23, has a moderate count and high ratio of eligible individuals (41%).

Image 3 also shows that Yakima County has a high number of eligible individuals, both in ratio and count (42% or 105,276 individuals), however there was a much smaller reported reach (3,223 people reached) than other counties with comparable counts of eligible people. Conversely, Thurston County, with a smaller percent and count of eligible individuals had the

¹ [Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines](#)

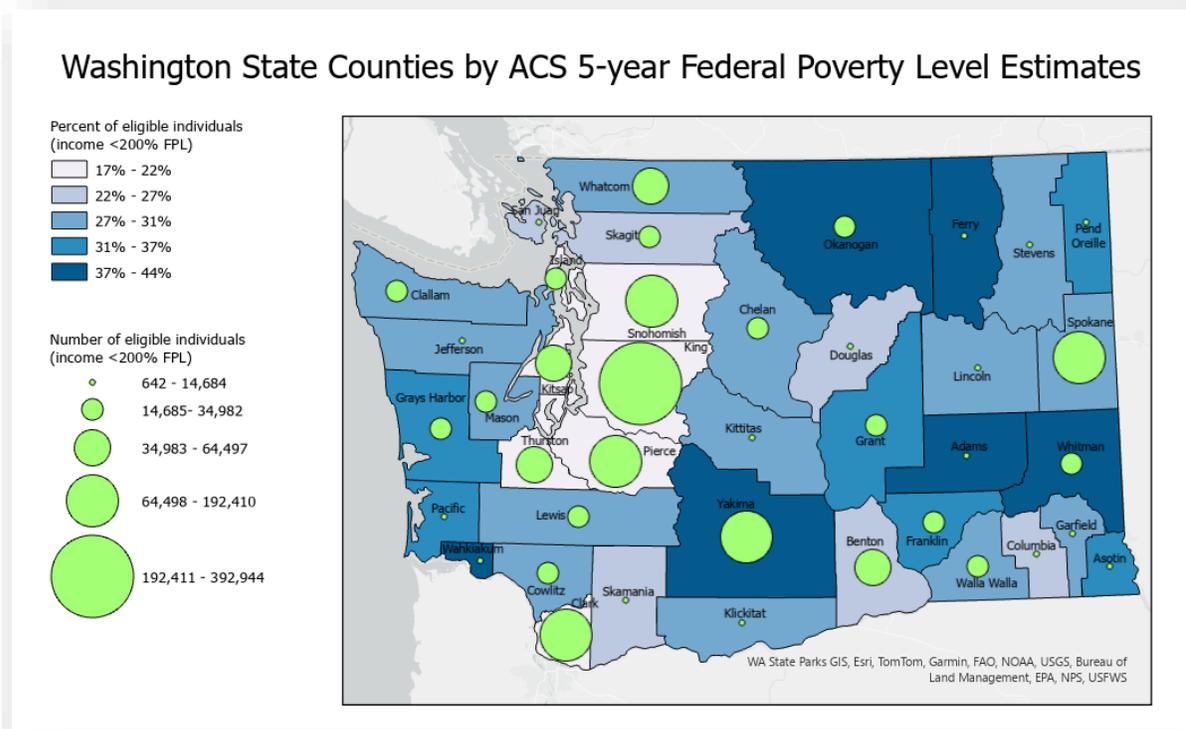
² [Washington State Office of Financial Management, Median household income estimates](#)

³ [US Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates subject tables](#)

⁴ [US Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates subject tables](#)

largest reach in the state last fiscal year (378,370 people reached).

Image 3: Estimated SNAP-Ed Eligibility, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates, 2022



Upon further investigation comparing estimated county eligibility and reported PSE and Direct Education activity reach in FFY23, the top 10 counties with the highest proportional reach were Clallam, Franklin, Grays Harbor, Mason, Pend Oreille, San Juan, Spokane, Thurston, Wahkiakum, and Walla Walla (Table 2). The counties where there was the lowest proportionality ($\leq 5\%$) or no activities were Asotin, Benton, Chelan, Columbia, Douglas, Grant, Klickitat, Okanogan, Pacific, Skamania, and Yakima Counties (Table 3). Note, reported reach does not depict the actual unduplicated reach within a county (to view all counties, see Appendix A, Table 3).

Table 2. Highest SNAP-Ed Reach and Estimated Eligibility Comparison

Counties	SNAP-Ed Activity Reach (FFY23)	Number of Estimated Eligibility (ACS 2022)
Clallam	107,190	21,626
Franklin	114,789	32,552
Grays Harbor	81,508	24,764
Mason	16,158	17,887
Pend Oreille	3,091	4,570
San Juan	7,042	4,467
Spokane	154,595	150,911
Thurston	378,370	64,497

Wahkiakum	1,480	1,731
Walla Walla	19,400	17,852

Table 3. Lowest SNAP-Ed Reach and Estimated Eligibility Comparison

Counties	SNAP-Ed Activity Reach (FFY23)	Number of Estimated Eligibility (ACS 2022)
Asotin	222	8,169
Benton	1,621	51,017
Chelan	1,142	22,729
Columbia	0	1,023
Douglas	215	11,523
Grant	1,907	34,982
Klickitat	0	7,024
Okanogan	0	17,118
Pacific	0	7,783
Skamania	0	2,747
Yakima	3,223	105,276

According to the most recent Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCC) released by the USDA⁵, 8 of Washington’s 39 counties are categorized as rural based on the USDA’s definition of “places with fewer than 5,000 people” (Image 4). Of those rural counties, two did not have any reported SNAP-Ed activities or partnerships (Columbia and Klickitat Counties). However, other rural counties have high reach compared to the estimated eligibility, including Pend Oreille, San Juan, and Wahkiakum Counties (Table 4).

⁵ [USDA ERS Rural-Urban Continuum Codes](#)

Image 4: RUCC Map, USDA ERS 2023

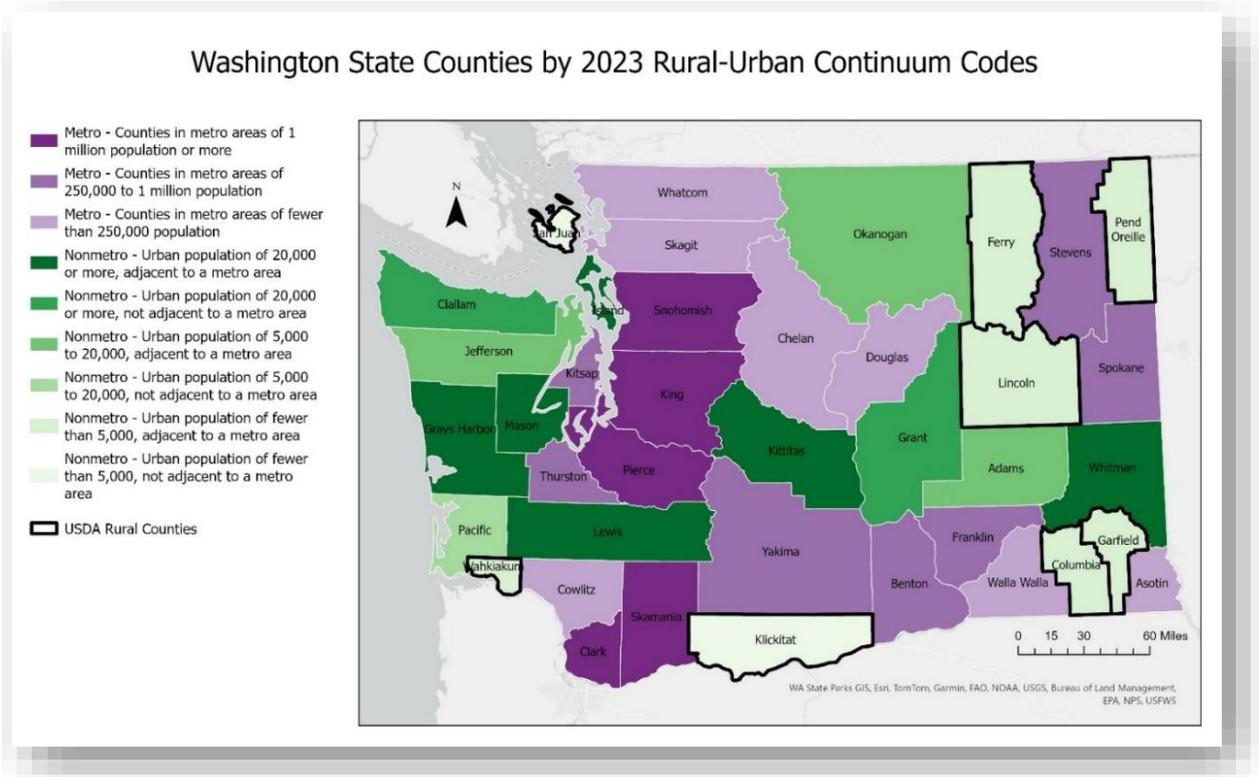


Table 4. USDA Rural Counties and SNAP-Ed Reach and Estimated Eligibility

Rural Counties	SNAP-Ed Activity Reach (FFY23)	Number of Estimated Eligibility (ACS 2022)
Columbia	0	1,023
Ferry	839	2,955
Garfield	382	642
Klickitat	0	7,024
Lincoln	212	3,116
Pend Oreille	3,091	4,570
San Juan	7,042	4,467
Wahkiakum	1,480	1,731

People living in rural areas of the state are particularly affected by the lack of SNAP-Ed programming. One provider noted that the value of SNAP-Ed for residents in rural communities who often feel isolated is that there is *“an appreciation that there are these services out there that care about the health and lifestyles of people outside of cities.”* Because people are more spread out in rural counties, mobile projects, like a food truck or mobile farmstand, are particularly successful. However, another provider mentioned that even after local authorities prioritized a rural food bank to carry high quality fresh food, the lack of frequent public

transportation meant that people were still not able to get to the food pantry within working hours. There is also the challenge of finding appropriate places to hold SNAP-Ed activities *“that isn’t just food pantries or schools.”*

Another example from Whatcom County is a partnership between local farmers and a corner store to offer food at an affordable cost in an otherwise food dessert area. Using a produce debit card system, SNAP eligible people can access local foods close to home, farmers have increased demand for their goods, and the grocery store is incentivized to carry more food choices.

To maximize reach, providers recognize that a mix of different activity types is most efficient because of each activity’s unique strengths. One provider shared that *“direct education can be a way to get ‘in the door’”* with one-on-one experiences in a smaller group setting that builds relationships. Meanwhile, PSE has *“a more lasting and meaningful mark on communities,”* and aims to address the root cause of the problem. Other strategies that may improve geographic reach is *“being accessible and supportive,” “being embedded in the community,”* and *“making it community oriented as opposed to just saying here’s some numbers and I think we need to do this.”* The site at which SNAP-Ed activity is conducted is also indicative of where people’s interests lie.

Addressing Geographic Reach Gaps

To address the limitations of geographic reach, more programming and financial resources can be dedicated to rural parts of the state. While it makes financial sense to prioritize areas that have more people who are eligible for SNAP-Ed programming, being able to provide resources in areas where there are not as many people but just as much need would support a more equitable distribution of resources. It’s also important to note that while county views have been provided for understanding geographic reach, further exploration of smaller areas, like census tract, will be important for determining equitable resource distribution.

Further, stronger partnerships between different state and local services would further support gaps in geographic reach. One provider noted that they were not allowed to use a local CSO office for SNAP-Ed programming even though this would be an ideal venue to reach SNAP-Ed eligible people. For SNAP-Ed staff to be able to help navigate the paperwork to enroll participants for SNAP benefits would further increase reach, particularly in areas where a CSO might be too far away or have maxed out capacity. Being able to collaborate with other entities in this way would allow for more integrated and wide-reaching SNAP-Ed services. Beyond collaboration with CSOs, SNAP-Ed leadership is also making thoughtful progress toward establishing a Tribal Implementing Agency in Washington State to expand the breadth and depth of SNAP-Ed work with tribal populations.

SNAP-Ed Programming Access

Access Strengths

In response to questions about barriers and facilitators to participants leading healthy lifestyles, many providers mentioned access as a key determining factor. It was described through a broad

perspective, such as systemic barriers of poverty, time, and bureaucracy, but also on a programmatic level, such as language translations, scheduling, and transportation. Factors that support access to SNAP-Ed programming address the environment where participants live and work in, ultimately enabling healthy decision-making in nutrition and physical activity. As one provider summarized, “... we’ve been more focused on PSE, so we look at more the environment in which people are making decisions. Making sure that foods that are healthy are available, culturally relevant, fresh foods.”

Because eligibility to conduct SNAP-Ed programming is not at the individual level, providers note the value of destigmatizing services by offering to wider audiences with no separation of people receiving SNAP benefits from people that do not. Oftentimes, programming that simply encourages socialization and building connections with the community is valuable in and of itself for reaching more people. Many providers spoke of the value of holding space where participants can build skills, share resources, engage with content, even if nutrition is not the primary focus. One provider noted that while virtual services are beneficial, “*coming together and actually being in a place together is impactful in ways outside of just food resources.*” Positive characteristics are described as “*reduced-barrier access,*” “*learning about a new resource that could help them have access to food or healthcare,*” and a “*friendly safe space*”. Consistent and sustained efforts are also key for increased access, because, as one provider explains, “*shifting of the system happens because of the smaller steps of ... people experiencing new ways and thinking in new ways ... [which] happens only with lots of time.*”

SNAP-Ed providers reflected on creating specialized outreach strategies to engage groups of audiences with unique needs and increase the reach of the program. One provider described adapting their curricula and teaching methods for an adult transition program and how this experience has “*opened [their] eyes to ways of working with that community that can help them be successful.*” Another provider who organizes farmers market tours for Russian speakers talks about the value of services offered in different languages: “*You can feel people having tension when they have to speak in another language. But when they hear their own language, it’s different, they are more accepting of the information, more open.*” Certain spaces are more accessible for non-English speakers, and maintaining these are key to increased access: “*There are a lot of families who don’t feel a sense of belonging at school, and we often find that those families show up in the gardens really joyfully.*”

Access Limitations

Limitations to accessing SNAP-Ed programming generally involved factors beyond the control of individuals, such as time, money, and transportation. Providers talked about the difficulties participants face in accessing safe spaces for physical activity, securing childcare services so they can participate in programming, and finding nutritious foods that are affordable. Inflation and the high cost of food and services make it difficult to not only obtain nutritious food, but also to carry out the practices that are encouraged in SNAP-Ed programming. Invisible forces also present a barrier to access, namely the vast amounts of marketing targeted at encouraging consumption of sugary and processed foods, as well as the consolidation of food access outlets into businesses that reduce access, effectively limiting the use of food benefits.

Time was one of the most frequently mentioned limitations by SNAP-Ed providers. This could be anything from conflicting schedules to participants having too many other commitments such as work, children, caretaking, etc. to add on another. As one provider says, *“nutrition is a privilege, not [a] necessity.”* Similarly, money was also frequently mentioned as a limitation, which influences all decision-making. As one provider states, *“if you don’t have money, the last thing you think about is healthy eating. You’re thinking only about eating to maintain yourself.”* When basic needs are not met, participants are more likely to prioritize those over attending a SNAP-Ed activity. Even if participants do attend, there is always the consideration of higher priorities competing for concentration and focus. *“Whether or not people have the capacity to learn the new topics or start making lifestyle changes, it’s really those mental health and basic needs, economic factors, housing, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs...”*

Another limitation that providers mentioned was transportation, which can affect different populations in different ways. For older adults with mobility issues, the energy it takes to find transportation to and from sites can be a determining factor in whether they use SNAP benefits. One provider explains that *“lots of seniors are on the cusp of being eligible and because of their income, they would only be eligible for a small amount of SNAP benefits. [They] don’t apply because it’s too far or too much work for the amount of benefits they would receive for that effort.”* Providers also add that migrant families and people living on tribal reservations experience greater difficulty with transportation.

Although food banks present an opportunity for outreach to eligible populations, there can be limitations that determine who can access and benefit from them. Several providers mentioned that participants are not able to get to food banks if they are only open once a week, or only during work hours. Limited availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, foods with short expiration dates, low-quality produce, and not finding culturally relevant foods could all contribute to a less-than-desirable experience and discourage future participation in SNAP-Ed programming.

While efforts are made to translate materials and resources into multiple languages, providers mention that this remains an area that needs work. Common languages, like Russian and Spanish, do not cover the entire SNAP-Ed eligible population in Washington and only providing services in those languages excludes a significant percentage of the population. One provider adds that misunderstanding differences between non-English speaking communities can lead to ineffective services: *“Some communities speak Mixteco, Trique, Mam, and they aren’t very comfortable in Spanish, but that is the only other language besides English that we have outreach in, which makes them feel isolated because people are assumed to be Spanish-speaking.”*

Eligibility requirements for SNAP-Ed programming pose another limitation for access. Some providers note areas that fall under a grey zone, for example colleges and universities where students might not be able to afford nutritious food but are categorized by their parent’s income, or areas that are just below the 50% cutoff. By excluding them, we are missing out on a large group of SNAP-Ed eligible people who would really benefit from SNAP-Ed. Restraints in eligibility also make it difficult to partner with other programs and community facilities. One provider described how they were unable to pair SNAP-Ed with WIC services being offered at a library because even with a food pantry across the street, the geographic area itself did not meet

eligibility requirements.

Addressing Access Gaps

To address access limitations, especially given many of the barriers are beyond the control of participants and providers, it seems critical to start with the right mindset. By simply “*having compassion for where folks are and not expecting them to seek you out*”, providers can begin to fill the gaps that prohibit participants from accessing SNAP-Ed activities. Strategies include increasing activities in rural areas, creating more common places for people to gather and interact, and prioritizing activities that garner interest and excitement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many services moved to a virtual format. While this has been helpful and even removed the transportation barrier for participants, it remains vital to hold in-person space for SNAP-Ed programming. Further, making these spaces as destigmatizing as possible will increase the likelihood that people will participate. For example, food banks could adopt a grocery store model whenever possible to offer participants the choice to pick produce that fits their needs. Another strategy, as some providers have already reported doing, is to pair recipes and tastings with produce available in food banks.

Access can be improved by making it easier for providers to determine eligibility and conduct programming in any location. Requirements can be lowered and made more flexible so that more areas can be exposed to programming. One provider suggested having more than one or two ways to determine eligibility, in case some data is out of date or unavailable. Additionally, some overlap of programming should be allowed and encouraged so that agencies feel comfortable working in areas where another agency is present.

SNAP-Ed Programming Relevance and Responsiveness

Programming Strengths

Providers and staff were asked their opinion on the strengths, values, and most successful components of the SNAP-Ed program and their work. Their responses show that SNAP-Ed programming has grown to address the multi-faceted needs of target audiences using family-centered and community-integrated programming. By centering the participant’s perspective, one provider notes, it “*helps contribute to that sense of self-actualization power that we’re not just acting upon them, that they’re with us.*”

Washington state SNAP-Ed providers have recognized that programming that involves the whole family is more likely to be successful in attracting and retaining participants. Whenever possible, activities are held in locations such as community and school gardens where all family members are welcome. This also removes the barrier of finding childcare if kids stay at home. Getting the whole family involved is especially important considering, as one provider puts it, “*no matter how much we impact [students’] learning, they don’t buy the groceries.*” Because of this, providers try to make it easier for kids to share what they learn at school with their parents at home. One provider noticed that switching from an electronic bulletin to printed recipes in classrooms led to increased feedback that kids were making the recipes at home, possibly as a result of removing the onus from parents of finding recipes on the school website.

Another strength of SNAP-Ed programming is its ability to foster human connections, which providers explained in two different capacities. First, by collaborating with other community organizations, participants are given a chance to interact with them, get linked to other resources they are seeking out, and *“help stretch the limits that participants may have.”* Working with partners that have already established a trusted relationship allows participants to engage more meaningfully with SNAP-Ed resources. An example of this is a project using community representatives as trusted messengers who promoted SNAP Market Match through social media. Participants had a positive experience of being welcomed into a new and unfamiliar farmers market space and were shown how to use a resource in a way that was relevant to them. The other way in which human connections are fostered is socialization with other participants. Providers note that having a social component attracts more adult participants, that having a space for multigenerational community connectedness is a facilitator to a healthy lifestyle, and that SNAP-Ed activities often serve as a space for much of this engagement. One provider added that attending events regularly and seeing the same people can help ward off feelings of isolation, particularly among older adults. Another provider notes that common spaces like this are a necessary place of interaction for parents to share resources and information with each other.

SNAP-Ed providers recognize that eligible audiences face many barriers to living a healthy lifestyle and try to reduce barriers through SNAP-Ed programming. One provider stressed the importance of using SNAP-Ed for *“making the healthy choice the easy and joyful choice.”* Many providers talk about meeting people where they are at to increase participation as well as *“wanting to limit fatigue on participants”*. One strategy used is to identify sites that people are already going to, like food banks, so that activities like food demos and recipe tastings can be paired with an activity they were going to do anyway. An example of this was the distribution of spice packets at a smaller food bank that didn't have space for demonstrations, but that allowed a discussion around recipes that utilized the spice packets and foods available at the food bank. Reinforcing the pipeline between local farmers and gleaned produce to farmers markets and food banks also connects participants to other members of their community. Providers who have been with the program for a long time notice that the gradual shift to PSE-focused programming has helped increase the relevance of content, *“making a more lasting and meaningful mark on communities.”*

A large part of SNAP-Ed programming is identifying where the community interest and need lies. Conducting local needs assessments resulted in projects like setting up a mobile farmstand and submitting a proposal to create a bicycle lane. Having the flexibility to adapt curricula and programming allows providers to offer activities that participants will want to attend. For example, some providers mentioned doing more garden work and building community garden beds because of the interest in growing fresh produce and families feeling welcomed in the garden space. A critical component of allowing participants' interests to guide SNAP-Ed programming is enabling them to make choices for themselves. This is reflected in the network of organizations that work together with SNAP-Ed so that participants can decide which resources are most useful to them. It is also reflected in the participant-choice model at food banks and pantries, moving away from pre-packaged bags of produce and offering more fresh produce. By being resourceful and creative, providers are able to find ways to maximize SNAP-Ed programming to meet participant's needs. One example of this is a mobile food truck that distributes meals made from gleaned produce. When the program noticed that families unfamiliar with the foods were wasting the meals, they came up with a new idea. *“...One of the things we're really excited to do this summer is that we're doing our meal distribution which is not SNAP-Ed programming [along with]...some taste testing which is SNAP-Ed programming, so kids can try this thing and then be offered it and hopefully be more enthusiastic about taking it home and eating it.”* By integrating diverse funding streams, providers can make SNAP-Ed programming more impactful for their target audiences.

Programming Limitations

Although flexibility is cited many times as a facilitator in SNAP-Ed programming, there remain some areas where it is limited. Some providers note that *“curricula are not varied enough to cover different types of adults and communities, for example, parents of children vs a single person with a fixed income on a housing site, or curricula for people entering adulthood isn’t appropriate for seniors.”* Another example is that MyPlate emphasizes dairy consumption when dairy is not a regular part of the diet for some target audiences, leading to this part of the curriculum feeling *“irrelevant and antiquated.”*

Several providers also note the difficulties with evaluating their programs. First, success is hard to define when thinking on a systemic level of the barriers that participants face to healthy foods and physical activity. PSE projects, by nature, can be complex and multi-faceted, making it difficult to track and measure their effectiveness. Second, many providers find reporting in PEARS confusing, time-consuming, and overall burdensome. Not only does this affect the quality of evaluation, it also takes away from the time and effort that providers have to put into participant-facing programming. Some providers note the discrepancies in how numbers reflect direct education activities and PSE activities, for example, *“doing six cooking classes ... counts as six, which is the same as handing out six flyers.”* Finally, some providers report that administering SNAP Happy surveys at the beginning of each direct education class is burdensome for younger aged children and hinders rapport-building with adults.

Another limitation to SNAP-Ed programming relates to how funds can be used. Many providers note the frustrations with not being able to purchase food or compensate people for their time at meetings that have proven critical to gathering community feedback. This is particularly relevant for programs that use community members as trusted messengers, ambassadors of the program, or participants of a focus group. For providers that contract out to partners, many note the contractual hurdles that impact the effectiveness of programming: *“The fact that there is hesitation, extra review of requests, getting funded from different places makes it taxing to accomplish our goals.”* One example is the annual contracts for long-term projects, where only getting enough funding for one year makes it very difficult to plan, hire for, and implement a three-year PSE project.

Addressing Programming Gaps

SNAP-Ed can work to make programming more equitable and applicable for target audiences by allowing for more flexibility to adapt curricula for specific audiences. The Curriculum, Training, and Website (CTW) team recently developed a new curriculum rubric to help providers determine the most appropriate curricula to use for their audiences. We can expand on this effort by assessing current curricula as well as working to improve new curricula that might be more applicable.

Providers and implementing agencies note limitations with funding mechanisms that can be addressed with support from state and federal leadership. Staff members note that having such extensive administrative responsibilities discourages contracting with smaller community-based organizations because *“they have a hard time dealing with [everything] that comes with working on a SNAP-Ed grant.”* Removing the annual contract element for multi-year projects would improve efficiency by allowing for better staffing and planning, reducing the administrative burden, and increasing the scope of extended PSE projects. Blanket approvals for purchasing

routine items would further reduce administrative burden, reduce the time it takes to acquire items, and increase the efficiency of programming. The use of funds towards providing meals and compensating community members for their insight would go a long way in forging stronger relationships with communities, integrating participant voice, and ensuring continued relevance of programming for our target audiences. For agencies struggling with inadequate financial resources, providing grant writing support could help in acquiring additional funds and improving the impact of SNAP-Ed programming.

As more projects shift towards PSE, more effort can be put towards making sure they are evaluated accurately. Measures should reflect the shifting priorities, goals, and objectives of SNAP-Ed, and providers should be briefed on how the data they report is being used. PEARS reporting remains a confusing and time-consuming process for providers, especially with the recent updates to the online tool. The Evaluation team developed a checklist to help implementing agencies review PEARS entries for completeness and plans to create a detailed guidance document to help providers with data entry. Support can also be provided for finding ways to make SNAP Happy surveys less cumbersome to administer, including reducing the frequency, updating questions for language and cohesiveness, and developing non-survey evaluation methods.

SNAP-Ed Coordination and Partnership

Coordination and Partnership Strengths

SNAP-Ed providers were asked, ‘are there any really great things, with the work you directly work on, that you’d like to highlight?’ Partnership and relationship work were the most frequently mentioned topics. Providers highlighted partnerships with other statewide organizations that cover a multitude of sectors including, but not limited to: WIC, schools and districts, parks, libraries, healthcare facilities, and food access sites such as grocers and food pantries. Providers also highlighted internal SNAP-Ed coordinated efforts across the state that foster partnership and coordination. For example, connecting through training opportunities, Friday Forums, coalitions, and communities of practice. One provider said *“A lot of my successes come from coalition participation. Collaborative work from diverse perspectives.”* Similarly, a member of SNAP-Ed Leadership said, *“sometimes we can’t do something alone, but can do a better job together [(e.g. with other statewide programs, not just SNAP-Ed)]. For example, promoting the Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Programs. How can SNAP-Ed amplify great work? How can we support great work that already might be in place but needs, like, people on the ground to spread the word.”* Both these quotes capture how coordinated efforts through either a collaborative mechanism and/or direct partnership enhance their SNAP-Ed work.

There were many characteristics of successful SNAP-Ed coordination and partnerships that providers identified, but most discussed communication, consistent staffing, shared goals/values, and the ability to identify how each organization could mutually benefit from each other— all in an effort to create sustainable systems. One provider nearly summed up all these characteristics, sharing *“Like-minded CSOs, sharing knowledge or tools [with each other]. Those connections are key to success. Identifying our intersections, how we enhance or add*

value...finding sustainable systems.” Another provider emphasized the importance of communication and establishing goals with their partners, *“Sitting down with partners to find out what their goals [are] and what they can meet us halfway on. In the past, we tried programs that were 100% SNAP-Ed effort, and the partner wouldn’t meet us halfway, and in the inevitable situation where [a] staff person moves on or funding isn’t available [which is unsustainable].”* And to reiterate this point, a member of SNAP-Ed leadership shared how they recognize the impact staff attrition can have on partnership work, *“Staff turn over is really challenging making some projects start from scratch.”*

Additionally, partnerships are enhanced when partners are embedded in their communities. As one staff member reflects, *“I’ve seen our partners be most successful when embedded and involved in their community. Providers that are providing other community support services, that have connections to our SNAP-Ed participants and other community partners in other ways than SNAP-Ed. So in addition to doing SNAP-Ed, they’re doing other direct services with SNAP-Ed eligible people. That has seemed to go a long way in terms of building trust and where programs are most successful with participants.”* A leadership member also provided that coordination and *“cross-collaboration is critical because SNAP-Ed staff can’t do everything, especially when it comes to young people, and we really need the leadership of these other organizations to support healthy growth...but also to support people in ways that SNAP-Ed can’t, like housing, VA resources. We can be there alongside them, and make sure that people know they have access to benefits. But the key is that the different entities are working together, not just doing their own thing, so that it feels more like a community is supporting them vs. just one person.”* As this quote emphasizes, coordinated efforts and partnership are important to the success of SNAP-Ed work because with them, staff are able to link resources to provide more holistic or wrap-around services to eligible people. As another example, *“having these partnerships is successful because it fosters that sense of community support and wanting it to be successful for the person in more than one way. If we work on sidewalks, people can be encouraged to use them to go walk to gardens and to stores to get fresh foods.”* Other providers share that they have dreams of expanding and strengthening their partnerships to improve access by *“[pairing] our services with others that supports the whole person [or] whole child approach [that would include] SNAP, SNAP-Ed, WIC, Child Safety, Child Immunization, all in one.”*

Coordination and Partnership Limitations

Through the interview process, SNAP-Ed providers identified barriers or limitations to their partnership work, the most frequent being the amount of time, energy, resources, and care that it takes to establish strong partnerships. For example, one staff member shared *“Partnering with a large group – like all the CSOs [community service offices] across the state, is very hard. Takes a lot of time to build these relationships.”* Similarly, another staff member adds *“SNAP-Ed work takes a long time. So I think that’s just a good thing to know and acknowledge and think about as we like plan our programming. Some of the work was started, you know, five years [ago]...”* In addition to these reflections of time-intensity, there was another provider who specifically discussed how their education sector partners are dealing with dwindling resources; and when you have to rely on partners to carry out policy, systems, and environment level work, resource scarcity becomes a major hurdle.

Providers also discussed that some physical boundaries such as county lines or more nuanced boundaries like invisible zones or rules, block partnership work. For example, one provider mentioned that they “*feel like there are invisible lines drawn because of the risk of duplication*” with other providers or partners in the state even though this provider believes each group can provide different types of support or expertise. Another staff member mentioned how eligibility in Washington feels inconsistent and it affects where they do SNAP-Ed work “*...each [SNAP-Ed] national region gives its own [eligibility] rules...region by region rules is a very strange phenomenon.*” While another provider expresses that they are “*locked into [our] county*” even though they work for a healthcare system spanning the state. Being confined to this physical boundary limits their ability to scale up the great work they are doing or that other counties are doing in their same organization – essentially preventing their ability to collaborate.

There are also some administrative limitations that slow down coordination with internal and external partners. There were many Leadership Team members that expressed a need for process improvements (e.g. contract management, community compensation) and improvement to our use of technology (e.g. file sharing, PEARS, etc.) to “*make it impactful and not more confusing.*” Providers elaborated on the specific needs their community partners have, and how administrative rules become hurdles to their work, “*SNAP-Ed has clear requirements that don't always allow for collaboration with community members. SNAP-Ed is a mechanism for directing funding in certain ways. But anytime we deviate from discreet needs, it becomes difficult.*” Likewise, this staff member discussed the multi-layered impact of delayed procurement “*... purchases of different types of equipment, and what's allowed and what's not allowed. Because of the admin rigmarole...getting special permission for equipment and resources takes months and months, and we're half way through the 12-month funding period. It takes a lot of our time to get it approved, and then impacts contractors because they spend months without the equipment that they requested and wanted to do. It's also challenging for partners on the ground, limitations on what they can purchase, it hinders partnerships they're building with other organizations, it can stall a project.*”

Addressing Coordination and Partnership Gaps

Statewide leadership is already working on addressing some partnership barriers. For example, one staff member shares hopefulness for the outreach work to CSOs that has started, “*...now that [DSHS is] presenting SNAP-Ed to them [CSOs] ... they want to meet us all at the smaller levels, micro levels and get providers very, you know, much more involved and I think that's a great opportunity to partner. Those are groups that should have centered us from the beginning, but they just, you know, they didn't, and that's fine. We're going with it now.*” Beyond CSOs, SNAP-Ed leadership is continuing to work toward getting a Tribal Implementing Agency on board to expand the breadth and depth of SNAP-Ed work with tribal populations. Additionally, this year CTW has been working diligently to get Box.com access to SNAP-Ed staff to better coordinate file sharing; “*the move to Box.com has been wonderful,*” one provider exclaimed. Also, multiple providers called out last fiscal year's PSE eCornell training and other general professional development trainings as beneficial to continued improvement of their SNAP-Ed work.

Throughout interviews, SNAP-Ed staff provided many partnership improvement strategies. One major improvement suggestion was creating clear ways for folks to access information and

connect with each other. One newer provider shared, in terms of risk of duplication, *“I wish I knew what the actual rules are,”* highlighting the practical need for further guidance and clarity on SNAP-Ed allowability. Another staff member expressed their desire for an easier mechanism to know who they should be connected to, *“I only really learn by talking to others, but sometimes wonder if I’m talking to the right people. How do I get into the conversations that I should be in? It’s so easy to miss things, hard to stay on top of things.”* There are many ways to address these information sharing suggestions and one provider gave a great example of building connections and sharing information in practice – with the hope of expansion: *“At the SNAP forum, I had a presentation...[and discussed how food coalition building] was really pivotal in building the vision and informing the project. Lots of people after the presentation were interested in how to build coalitions. I think that could be a cool training to come from the state level, how to build coalitions, how to community organize, especially as SNAP-Ed is gravitating towards PSE work. Coalitions are really important, especially for getting community ownership for a project.”*

Finally, as seen above in the coordination and partnership limitations section, community compensation and process improvements are two major limitations that providers and leadership want to address—and are starting to address this fiscal year. As this provider suggests: *“... support community networks to coordinate around food systems, especially BIPOC growers, farmers, sellers, emergency food related people, people who have historically been disconnected from the network in the past, to work in the space of food systems. Being able to provide compensation to farmers for their time is valuable because for farmers, their time is livelihood.... Caveat is that it’s much easier to be able to give a three year contract instead of going through an annual contract process each year... SNAP-Ed is relatively stable so we can provide that three year funding, but the annual process could be made easier,”* which shows the need for improved contract processes. In an effort to improve these processes, a member of leadership shared, *“[I’m] excited about the RFQs (Request For Quotes and Qualifications) [being developed]...It goes back to kind of this community compensation difficulty that we’ve been having. Let’s try and marry the state law with federal guidance ... create community work groups that are meaningful, and reimburse them in a way that is useful to them and a good use of their time.”*

SNAP-Ed Workforce Capacity

Workforce Strengths

Many providers shared how the program’s greatest workforce capacity asset is each other, the SNAP-Ed staff. One provider shared, *“passion drives the work,”* and in Washington SNAP-Ed there are many passionate staff that program with great intention and skill. There are numerous examples of providers and leadership members describing each other with great admiration, including:

“The SNAP-Ed providers who join our programs are typically dedicated individuals. They want to work with people, to support people, to meet people where they’re at.”

“Generally, people are our best resources.”

“We have people who have been a part of this work for a long time, so we’ve got staff expertise or subject matter experts that keep things moving – folks coming into the program right now at the provider level are go getters. They’re good partnerships makers – very open, willing and connected in their communities. I’m really proud of a lot of the providers that we have and all of the great things they do.”

In line with having passionate staff comes the desire to share successes with each other and to scale effective strategies. Through interviews, providers were either highlighting ways they’ve shared with each other in the past or asked for more venues to share successful projects/activities/strategies. A few venues that were highlighted throughout interviews were the statewide Forum, CTW newsletter, agency calls, communities of practice, and Friday Forums. For example, one provider explained, *“I learned so much last year at the SNAP-Ed forum. It was the first time I was made aware of the breadth and depth of the programming and the different things that people were doing in the state,”* while another highlighted, *“Friday forums, being able to host/provide platform for SNAP-Ed Providers to share their work, but also outside resources [like the] department of transportation).”* Even with these various ways to connect, providers called for more ways to share information like, *“Having a more centralized way of sharing information and knowing where things are. Can be confusing to find things.”* At the same time, it is important to note there were a few providers that felt like they either did not know about certain opportunities to share or they express not having capacity to plug-in to meetings *“This is where I struggle. My guess is that you’re having a fascinating journey talking to all these different programs all of which have different models. On the one hand I really like that because being responsive to the local community is hugely important and I don’t think nutrition education or teaching people about physical activity is a one size fits all kind of thing...Maybe there’s a lot that’s already going on and I don’t pay good enough attention because there’s always too many things happening.”*

With these various opportunities to share information, some staff members discussed learning about a successful strategy from another provider and implementing it in their service area. For instance, a newer provider shared that *“I really like hearing from other rural counties – and all their cool ideas...It’s been invaluable to hear other peoples, what their doing in their small areas”* and was inspired to implement a similar strategy, *“[we’re] starting to implement the spice packets and information to go along with spices at these food pantries.”* Another example of leveraging great work comes from this leadership team member: *“You know, I think one thing that is been exciting to see- and this is just me observing other people doing great things- is umm, it seems like there’s some models that people have tried out and then are scaling up- or other people are scaling up.”*

Another key workforce strength in Washington SNAP-Ed is the thoughtfulness around equity and serving marginalized communities. Providers discussed carrying out community needs assessments, holding listening sessions, and having participants and eligible individuals inform staff of their experiences. A leadership team member emphasized the importance of *“Allowing local communities to use evidence-based [Needs Assessment] strategies to learn their community’s needs.”* Providers also identified and discussed the marginalized groups they work with regularly and the desire to provide appropriate/culturally relevant services to them all, including, but not limited to: immigrant and refugee families, those experiencing homelessness,

Veterans, LGBTQ, those with disability, English language learners, Indigenous families, and more. One example of a provider's thoughtfulness is shared through their observation: *"Noticing that Spokane's large API community may not be connecting to the recipes or foods being highlighted in the curriculum."* And another provider directly asks for *"More information or SMEs (subject matter experts) for LGBTQ outreach/participation, older/aging adults, [and other] intersectional identities."* Further, this provider shares that working within an adult transition program for those who have behavioral or developmental differences has increased their capacity and knowledge of working with this population. *"Being involved with this community opened my eyes to ways of working with that community that can help them be successful. Being present with them and knowing that I am making changes."*

Workforce Limitations

The two major workforce limitations, as identified through provider interviews, are staff diversity (experience and perspective) and staff retention. A leadership member directly expressed that there is work to do to improve our workforce diversity, *"Our staff is often not reflective of the communities we serve even though we strive to hire folks who reflect each community. We do our best with our networks to recruit/get the word out- but sure we're missing folks."* There was also a large frequency of providers specifically calling for hiring staff that are multilingual, as expressed through these quotes, *"...getting folks hired that represent the community – different languages (Russian and Spanish),"* and *"We need staff that speaks more than just English. Not sure if that is realistic, but would be nice to embed that in the hiring process."* By focusing on hiring folks with lived experience and language skill, we could better foster a *"sense of belonging or connection"* with our SNAP-Ed eligible population.

In terms of staff retention, many providers highlighted the value of staff longevity, institutional knowledge, and consistency. For example, one provider emphasized how being a consistent presence to the eligible population is an important element to their programming success. *"As a SNAP-Ed provider, giving those opportunities [e.g. implementing activities to eligible individuals]. And giving them in a consistent manner. Used to do social work, so definitely feel that consistency and presence is key to any success;"* however, if there is staff turnover, that presence does not remain stable to participants. Another longer-term provider reflects on their overall experience working with SNAP-Ed and how that's been valuable to their work, especially with building connections: *"Thinking about all projects, relationship building and prolonged relationships is very valuable...Duration of the work is very important."* And while these providers both gave examples of the importance staff longevity, another provider discusses the inevitability of staff turnover, and how to prepare. *"Something we struggle with in this field is institutional memory. Inevitably, people move on from their roles, especially with grant funded roles, but having a practice of developing systems that would outlast the staff and having staff understand the best practices for doing that would be really cool. It's a lot easier said than done, but if it were encouraged at the state level, it would be really effective for succession."*

Addressing Workforce Gaps

To address staff attrition, many providers discussed more equitable staff funding being a helpful solution. One provider exclaimed that, *"there are organizations that are ready and excited to do more and they don't have capacity based on the funding."* A few providers from the same organization shared the concern that their required organizational budget allocations aren't increasing at the same rate as the SNAP-Ed funding they receive (and, in fact, got cut by 20-30% in recent years), and they are having to stretch dollars further than ever before. *"Our staff is part*

of a system that does COLAs, performance increases, salary increases. Cost of benefits also goes up in price. But the budgets don't increase, so each year we have to cut FTE funding because fundings going toward salary increases...actually making [SNAP-Ed] services less and less." Additionally, one leadership member highlighted their observation that *"we have a lot of turnover at the educator level in SNAP-Ed and part of that is [they're] not compensated super well at that level."*

While addressing staff funding could also impact staff diversity, a few staff members provided suggestions on recruiting staff that are more reflective of our communities. For example, one provider called for reviewing hiring processes at the policy level, really exploring *"education requirements vs. lived experience. Where do we hire from, how to reach folks, [how to] support people to stay."* Another provider suggests *"being more thoughtful about where jobs are advertised [to] reach more people, maximizing reach and access"* to job posts.

There were a few providers that mentioned that the onboarding processes could be improved as SNAP-Ed is *"an overwhelming program, and has such a broad scope."* One provider even mentioned that onboarding is such an important process that, as a state, we could consider hiring someone to do onboarding full-time. Not only were there suggestions for programmatic level onboarding, but specific positions were highlighted as needing role specific training up-front, *"...additional training for our direct educators...when I became an educator, we hire you, we give you the stuff, you go. Getting more supports on like how to do really effective adult training...we aren't getting that information in the forefront of new staff hires. Really like solidifying good public training and education practices before sending them [new employees] out into the public."* Another provider shared a similar attitude, *"With the background of going from one state SNAP-Ed to another state SNAP-Ed, felt very much like I was thrown to the wolves."* However, during this phase of the needs assessment, interviews were being conducted at the same time as a new onboarding process was being developed and released by the CTW team. At the time of interviewing, this manager was able to share that *"the new [CTW onboarding] training that just wrapped up was great! New staff member learned a lot!"* While this was the only mention of positive feedback, CTW and leadership are actively working toward onboarding improvements.

Many providers are seeking training and professional development opportunities that are comprehensive in topics of anti-racism and trauma to better support our eligible populations. For example, one SNAP-Ed staff member noted that *"it's difficult because we often come in contact with trauma in audiences and we don't have the resources to address the impact of that trauma...SNAP-Ed staff work really hard to recognize this trauma, even if we can't do much. Like racism, can work as educators to address and be aware of and reach out to services that would better address it if needed."* On the other hand, another provider shares that finding time to participate in training opportunities is hard, even with the desire to learn. *"I think our staff are really busy and so like they try to be involved in trainings and forums and that kind of stuff. And I think they do the best they can...staff time to do their work and do any professional development...I know there's a lot of like the webinars and stuff that I signed up for and I can't make it to because [a] meeting gets put on there."* To address workforce training gaps, the statewide leadership team will need to not only provide trainings, but also find a solution to help local providers prioritize training.

Key Considerations

Comparing Provider and Statewide Support Perspective

Twenty of the 30 interviews conducted were with local providers while the other 10 were with statewide support staff and leadership team members. A few things stand out from interviewing staff with different SNAP-Ed roles that could reveal differences in perspective.

While several providers spoke about the importance of choice, not many statewide supports mention it at all. Participants having the ability to choose their own produce and resources is a level of autonomy and agency that providers recognize as critical for a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, PSE work embedded in communities is impactful when it creates an environment where participants “[have] the resources to make the choice themselves.” It would be beneficial for this on-the-ground programming perspective to be elevated to leadership team members. Providers also talked about needing improved onboarding processes in order to get new employees up to speed in an efficient way. These challenges with onboarding new staff was not mentioned by statewide support or leadership team members, indicating another aspect of programming that would be worth sharing with the wider statewide team.

There were also differences in the way providers and statewide support talked about funding issues and considerations. Whereas statewide staff recognize the lack of funding and the limits to how funds can be used for programming, providers go further by discussing diverse funding mechanisms. Often, this strategy is spoken of as a solution to not having enough money: *“It would be great to have more money. Seriously, our level of SNAP-Ed funding doesn’t even cover one full-time employee. So we leverage a lot of other resources in order to be able to do our SNAP-Ed programming.”* This being unspecified by statewide support staff can be explained in a few ways. Leadership team members, outside of direct implementing agency staff, might not be aware of the other funding sources their local providers may have. There are also contracting process differences between the two major implementing agencies which may impact how local providers experience funding allocations. While there may be further explanations, it is worth exploring this as one of the many ways that providers are being resourceful and creative in order to maximize the impact of their programming.

Another way in which statewide support and providers differed was in the way they discussed activity types. Providers often talked about holistic approaches and the effectiveness of being able to offer wraparound services that address all needs of participants beyond nutrition and physical activity. On the other hand, statewide support staff talked about PSE approaches, such as the longevity of programming and the lasting impact; and more frequently than direct education approaches. When direct education was mentioned by statewide voices, it was framed as an opportunity to open the door to do future PSE work, establishing one-on-one connections, strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, and the challenges of survey fatigue. However, providers talked more frequently about direct education, including the programming strengths of direct education, comparing it with PSE, and being able to make individual connections. This difference in perspective could be reflective of the many ways that direct education is beneficial for connecting with individuals while the wider statewide shift towards PSE is becoming more recognized for community impact. Therefore, striking the balance between direct education and PSE, the impact and the effectiveness, remains a point of focus for both statewide and local staff.

Perspectives were closely aligned considering the efforts that SNAP-Ed makes to be relevant to diverse populations across Washington. Both groups call out and highlight specific population groups within their communities, such as older adults, youth in schools, immigrant populations, Native populations, and more. As one leadership member notes, *“What’s so beautiful about having many, many small organizations that we work with is that they have that kind of direct connection to the community...”* Similarly, both groups mentioned issues with addressing inequitable services in equal proportions, for example, removing bias, destigmatizing programming, helping participants feel a sense of belonging, and making programming culturally relevant.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Washington SNAP-Ed based on needs assessment findings:

Phase 1 (Participants and Eligible Audience):

- Projects should utilize community engagement and cultural tailoring strategies to ensure they are acceptable and relevant to the community.
- Projects should incorporate elements of social support and build on social ties to enhance acceptability and effectiveness (e.g., peer mentorship, family-oriented strategies).
- Projects and activities should prioritize feasibility for community participation, accounting for time and schedule constraints.
- Projects should work towards improving both physical and financial access to healthy eating and physical activity.
- Activities should build on participant motivation, including desire to be a good role model for children and interest in chronic disease prevention.
- Nutrition education should focus on older youth and adult populations in combination with PSE strategies.

Phase 2 (Providers and Statewide Support Staff):

- Programming should not only prioritize areas where the most eligible individuals live, but also rural areas that have fewer people with considerable barriers to access (food, physical activity space, transportation, etc.).
- Programming should occur in common places where people already gather.
- Evaluation plans and strategies should reflect the shifting priorities and goals of the state.
- A comprehensive review of reporting requirements should occur, with an emphasis on minimizing local provider burden.
- Improve contractual processes to stabilize projects that span multiple fiscal years.
- Improve procurement efficiency by implementing a consistent and equitable request process.
- Future partnerships should occur with organizations that have shared goals and values with SNAP-Ed.
- Prioritize partnerships with organizations that are embedded in and representative of their communities.
- Physical and invisible (more nuanced) boundaries should be minimized in an effort to encourage more collaborative projects/activities.
- Improve and expand partnerships with CSO’s to enable shared outreach, enrollment, and knowledge of all available programs (SNAP, SNAP-Ed, WIC, Match programs, etc.)

- Create a more centralized place on the Washington SNAP-Ed website for common SNAP-Ed resources.
- Prioritize hiring diverse, community reflective, bilingual staff with lived experiences in lieu of specific education or required qualification barriers.
- Encourage staff longevity through salary and budget allocations, uplifting successful work, and providing opportunities for professional development.

Project Limitations

Notable limitations to data collection for this phase of the needs assessment include participation, co-occurrence with changes being made statewide, and qualitative data collection and analysis bias. As outlined in the interview participation overview section, there were 30 total interviews covering 16 counties. Considering there are 39 counties in Washington, with active providers in every county as of FFY24, less than half the counties were represented in this analysis (41%). This is true even with extended interview recruitment period by SNAP-Ed Evaluation, weekly newsletter reminders, and direct invitations by members of leadership.

While interviews were being conducted, the CTW team released a new onboarding training. While there were multiple providers who commented on this being an area of improvement, we could not control for changes to processes during the data collection. Also co-occurring with interviews were changes to PEARS reporting requirements for capturing participant demographic data. There were many comments about cumbersome reporting at the same time changes were being released statewide. While this analysis cannot distinguish the impact of these changes, there is the possibility of recency bias.

Finally, while measures were taken to streamline qualitative data analysis and minimize subjectivity, this analysis is subject to some level of participation and analysis bias.

Appendix A. Emerging Considerations

This needs assessment emerging considerations document was released to all statewide SNAP-Ed staff at the Forum in May 2024 for providers to use as they began program planning for FFY25. [It is also posted to the Washington State SNAP-Ed Providers website.](#)

Washington State SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment - Phase 2

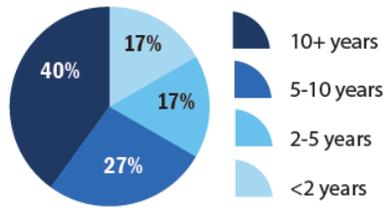
Participation:

Needs Assessment Phases

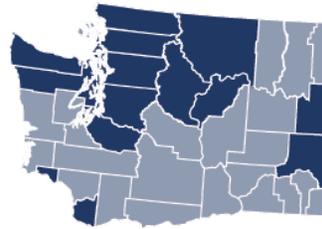
1. Participants - FFY23
- ★ 2. Providers - FFY24
3. Partners - FFY25

- Interviews: **30**
- Average interview length: **44** minutes
- Roles of participants: Managers, Coordinators, Educators, Statewide Supports
- Counties represented: **16**
- Statewide perspective: **10**

Years of Experience in SNAP-Ed



Participant County Representation



Most Frequent Interview Topics*:



Partnerships/
Coalition



Basic needs: food, access, time,
money, transport, etc.



Equitable
Services



Improvement
Suggestions

*The four topics here in addition to Direct/Nutrition Education and Policy, System, and Environment (PSE) activities.



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Emerging Considerations:

Relationships & Partnerships

- + Providers and partners being embedded in community
- + Statewide coordination between leadership teams, state agencies, providers, and partners
- + Linking participants to other community resources like food banks, housing sites, healthcare facilities, community centers, gardens, etc.
- + Venues for providers to share success and experiences
- Better collaboration and alignment between SNAP-Ed and SNAP/CSO offices



"We've found and connected to a few different community resources/partners that help folks get some of those basic needs met - leadership understands that until these basic needs are met, [we] can't try and educate about nutrition labels [for example]."

Systemic Barriers

- + Use of wraparound and complimentary approaches that address basic needs
- Not having basic access to food, housing, medical care, education, transportation, technology, childcare, etc.
- Missing social networks/support systems
- Social norms, stigma, and societal priorities that undermine health

Equitable Services

- + Programming applicable to all age groups (youth to older adults)
- + Relevance to people from different cultures, BIPOC, and historically underserved groups
- + Translated materials and multilingual staff
- + Activities being accessible to people of all abilities
- + Programming for rural communities
- Eligibility criteria that excludes people in gray zones



"With our last needs assessment, there was a huge need with young adults...if we were able to connect more with certain universities or community colleges...a lot of [young adults] fall within that 'not SNAP eligible' because they're technically their parents' dependent..."

Funding

- + SNAP-Ed has been a reliable source of funding for long term projects.
- Limitations on how funds can be used or process of obtaining permission for purchases (compensation, purchasing food, etc.)
- Annual contract processes for long term PSE projects adds to administrative burden and impacts staffing
- Staff turnover/attrition impacts sustainability of programs

Appendix B. Geographic Reach Tables

Appendix B, Table 1. SNAP-Ed DE & PSE Reach and Estimated Eligibility by Washington Counties

WA Counties	SNAP-Ed Activity Reach (FFY23)	Number of Estimated Eligibility (ACS 2022)
Adams	1,591	9,013
Asotin	222	8,169
Benton	1,621	51,017
Chelan	1,142	22,729
Clallam	107,190	21,626
Clark	37,289	108,803
Columbia	0	1,023
Cowlitz	19,702	32,333
Douglas	215	11,523
Ferry	839	2,955
Franklin	114,789	32,552
Garfield	382	642
Grant	1,907	34,982
Grays Harbor	81,508	24,764
Island	3,095	16,585
Jefferson	3,592	9,333
King	102,163	392,944
Kitsap	15,249	52,928
Kittitas	8,417	12,455
Klickitat	0	7,024
Lewis	1,650	24,694
Lincoln	212	3,116
Mason	16,158	17,887
Okanogan	0	17,118
Pacific	0	7,783
Pend Oreille	3,091	4,570
Pierce	12,219	192,410
San Juan	7,042	4,467
Skagit	2,957	31,772
Skamania	0	2,747
Snohomish	19,474	146,294
Spokane	154,595	150,911
Stevens	5,530	14,684
Thurston	378,370	64,497
Wahkiakum	1,480	1,731
Walla Walla	19,400	17,852
Whatcom	33,569	60,524
Whitman	1,785	17,342
Yakima	3,223	105,276

Appendix B, Table 2. Counties with the highest % SNAP-Ed eligible residents (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
Adams	2	1	44.37%	9,013
Whitman	1	14	42.24%	17,342
Yakima	40	27	41.67%	105,276
Ferry	3	7	41.19%	2,955
Okanogan	0	0	41.09%	17,118
Wahkiakum	2	4	39.02%	1,731
Asotin	1	3	36.87%	8,169
Grant	75	15	35.59%	34,982
Franklin	3	1	34.62%	32,552
Pend Oreille	33	24	34.15%	4,570

Appendix B, Table 3. Counties with the highest number of SNAP-Ed eligible residents (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
King	19	36	17.67%	392,944
Pierce	28	23	21.38%	192,410
Spokane	135	100	28.76%	150,911
Snohomish	28	25	17.88%	146,294
Clark	8	38	21.77%	108,803
Yakima	40	27	41.67%	105,276
Thurston	14	20	22.21%	64,497
Whatcom	32	34	27.36%	60,524
Kitsap	15	27	19.81%	52,928
Benton	4	6	24.82%	51,017

Appendix B, Table 4. Counties with the most PSE and DE activities (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
Spokane	135	100	28.76%	150,911
Grant	75	15	35.59%	34,982
Yakima	40	27	41.67%	105,276
Pend Oreille	33	24	34.15%	4,570
Whatcom	32	34	27.36%	60,524
Pierce	28	23	21.38%	192,410
Snohomish	28	25	17.88%	146,294
Chelan	28	12	29.06%	22,729
Walla Walla	23	10	30.97%	17,852
Stevens	21	27	31.69%	14,684

Appendix B, Table 5. Counties with the fewest PSE and DE activities (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
Okanogan	0	0	41.09%	17,118
Pacific	0	0	33.91%	7,783
Klickitat	0	0	30.89%	7,024
Skamania	0	0	22.88%	2,747
Columbia	0	0	25.96%	1,023
Whitman	1	14	42.24%	17,342
Asotin	1	3	36.87%	8,169
Kittitas	2	6	29.48%	12,455
Adams	2	1	44.37%	9,013
Lincoln	2	2	28.57%	3,116

Appendix B, Table 6. Counties with the most partnerships (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
Spokane	135	100	28.76%	150,911
Clark	8	38	21.77%	108,803
King	19	36	17.67%	392,944
Whatcom	32	34	27.36%	60,524
Kitsap	15	27	19.81%	52,928
Stevens	21	27	31.69%	14,684
Yakima	40	27	41.67%	105,276
Snohomish	28	25	17.88%	146,294
Pend Oreille	33	24	34.15%	4,570
Pierce	28	23	21.38%	192,410

Appendix B, Table 7. Counties with the fewest partnerships (FFY23)

County	Total PSE & DE Activities	Total Partnerships	Percent of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)	Count of <200% FPL (ACS 2022)
Okanogan	0	0	41.09%	17,118
Pacific	0	0	33.91%	7,783
Klickitat	0	0	30.89%	7,024
Skamania	0	0	22.88%	2,747
Columbia	0	0	25.96%	1,023
Adams	2	1	44.37%	9,013
Franklin	3	1	34.62%	32,552
Lincoln	2	2	28.57%	3,116
San Juan	15	2	25.13%	4,467
Asotin	1	3	36.87%	8,169

Appendix B, Table 8: Direct Education Program Activities by Site Setting (FFY23)

Setting	Number of Activities	Percent
Schools (K-12, elementary, middle, and high)	226	79.6%
Before and after-school programs	15	5.3%
Health care clinics and hospitals	7	2.5%
Community organizations	6	2.1%
Family resource centers	6	2.1%
Community and recreation centers	5	1.8%
Individual homes or public housing sites	5	1.8%
Residential treatment centers	4	1.4%
Indian reservations	2	0.7%
Other neighborhood settings where people “live” or live nearby	2	0.7%
Emergency shelters and temporary housing sites	1	0.4%
Extension offices	1	0.4%
Group living arrangements	1	0.4%
Schools (colleges and universities)	1	0.4%
Missing/Not filled out	2	0.7%

Appendix B, Table 9: PSE Access to Healthy Foods Activities by Site Setting (FFY23)

Setting	Number of Activities	Percent
Food assistance sites, food banks, and food pantries	54	32.5%
Schools (K-12, elementary, middle, and high)	46	27.7%
Health care clinics and hospitals	12	7.2%
Community organizations	11	6.6%
Family resource centers	5	3.0%
Farmers markets	4	2.4%
Group living arrangements	4	2.4%
Individual homes or public housing sites	4	2.4%
Other neighborhood settings where people "live" or live nearby	4	2.4%
SNAP offices	4	2.4%
Mobile vending/food trucks	3	1.8%
Residential treatment centers	3	1.8%
Emergency shelters and temporary housing sites	2	1.2%
Large food stores and retailers (4+ registers)	2	1.2%
Small food stores (<=3 registers)	2	1.2%
Community and recreation centers	1	<1%
Congregate meal sites & other senior nutrition centers	1	<1%
Faith-based centers/places of worship	1	<1%
FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations)	1	<1%
Parks and open spaces	1	<1%
Gardens	1	<1%

Appendix B, Table 10. PSE Farm to Community Activities by Site Setting (FFY23)

	Number of PSE Activities	Percent
Schools (K-12, elementary, middle, and high)	37	21.4%
Farmers markets	33	19.1%
Individual homes or public housing sites	29	16.8%
Early care and education facilities	24	13.9%
Food assistance sites, food banks, and food pantries	24	13.9%
Gardens	11	6.4%
Emergency shelters and temporary housing sites	3	1.7%
Extension offices	3	1.7%
Before and after-school programs	2	1.2%
Health care clinics and hospitals	2	1.2%
Adult education, job training, temporary assistance for needy families (TANF), and veteran services sites	1	<1%
Community organizations	1	<1%
Faith-based centers/places of worship	1	<1%
Libraries	1	<1%
Work sites with low wage workers	1	<1%

Appendix B, Table 11. PSE Physical Activity Activities by Site Setting (FFY23)

	Number of PSE Activities	Percent
Schools (K-12, elementary, middle, and high)	4	26.7%
Community organizations	3	20.0%
Bicycle and walking paths	2	13.3%
Individual homes or public housing sites	2	13.3%
Parks and open spaces	2	13.3%
Group living arrangements	1	6.7%
Other places people go to "work"	1	6.7%

Data Sources

[Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines](#)

[Washington State Office of Financial Management, Median household income estimates](#)

Washington State SNAP-Ed Program Evaluation and Reporting System (PEARS)

[US Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates subject tables](#)

[US Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates subject tables](#)

[USDA ERS Rural-Urban Continuum Codes](#)