

0074-A-01

A 98.2: F 73/18/FINAL/SUM.

Food Stamp Program Client Enrollment Assistance Demonstration Projects: Final Evaluation Report

Summary

Background

In the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, Congress authorized a program of grants to demonstrate and test methods of Food Stamp Program (FSP) outreach and enrollment assistance to hard-to-reach, underserved population groups. Beginning in 1993, FNS made 26 such grants totaling \$2.8 million in 17 states. The evaluation of these demonstrations posed two main questions: (1) what barriers do clients experience and perceive in accessing the FSP; and (2) what methods of outreach and enrollment assistance help overcome these barriers?

Findings

The results of the demonstrations suggest that a number of practical techniques are effective in reaching eligible non-participants; for many, this assistance may make the difference in their ability to participate in the program. Specific findings include:

- **For limited, traditional outreach efforts to be effective, potential recipients must possess a number of critical skills and attributes.** When people possess these attributes, simple informational messages or referrals are sufficient. However, for many eligible non-participating families and individuals the study identified a number of major client-centered barriers to access, including:
 - Lack of access to technical support (transportation, telephones, copying machines)
 - Lack of social support systems (no family or friends to help with child care and transportation, uncooperative employers and landlords)
 - Lack of adequate life skills (poor literacy, communication, or organizational skills; limited coping skills; low tolerance for stress; low motivation and perseverance)
 - Unstable living situations (no regular housing or employment; family violence, marital breakup or other family crises)
 - Poor health (impaired ability to travel, wait long periods, or think with clarity)

Indeed, some participants needed a level of sustained help much greater than the demonstration projects could provide. But for a sizable number of families and individuals facing these barriers, practical enrollment assistance proved both necessary and effective.

- **A comprehensive approach is most successful in assisting eligible persons.** The most effective projects included the following range and sequence of activities: 1) establishing active public/private collaboration; 2) developing systematic needs assessment and/or client-identification methods; 3) providing public information and education services; 4) offering individualized client application-assistance services; and 5) providing client follow-up and advocacy services.
- **A full range of individualized client application-assistance services were the most critical element in the more effective demonstration projects.** Important services included a detailed explanation of the application process (especially in conjunction with pre-

ja

2000-003301

1

screening), help in completing the application and preparing documentation, transportation assistance, accompaniment to interview, translation services, and authorized representation for elderly, disabled, and traumatized individuals.

- **Strong public-private collaboration was also consistently important in the demonstrations.** Because local food stamp offices resources are generally inadequate to conduct the necessary assistance, successful programs developed collaboration and partnership between the local offices and private-sector grantees to reach clients effectively.