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SNAP E&T Toolkit



NATIONAL
GOVERNORS
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Executive Summary

SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs have the potential to be one of the most effective tools states and territories have for connecting individuals to economic opportunities. When SNAP E&T works well, participants gain skills that help them obtain employment and the broader workforce system becomes more aligned and effective. The challenge in making SNAP E&T work well is that it requires state and territory agencies that were not designed to work together to do exactly that: navigate across separate systems, separate priorities, and separate accountability structures, all while managing limited resources and changing federal program requirements.

The experiences documented in this toolkit demonstrate that meaningful progress on these challenges is possible and does not require the perfect starting point. Between 2024 and 2026, six states participated in the Policy Academy to Strengthen SNAP E&T Delivery, a structured, technical assistance initiative led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices in partnership with Third Sector and support from Seattle Jobs Initiative. Each state came in with different barriers, agency configurations, and various levels of experience with cross-agency collaboration, but shared a commitment to doing things differently. State teams clarified roles that had been ambiguous for years, documented processes that previously only lived with individuals or specific teams, and built internal structures that allowed their programs to scale without sacrificing quality or consistency.

This document is organized to serve two purposes: Part 1 is a full documentation of the Policy Academy's two cohorts, the barriers each state faced, the approaches they took, and the outcomes they achieved. Part 2 is a practical toolkit for state SNAP E&T administrators and Governors' office staff, organized around the challenges states are most commonly facing, with tools, state examples, and step-by-step guidance that any state or territory can apply. It includes [a readiness assessment](#) to help states identify the conditions required before launching improvement work, and a directory of state experiences organized by challenge type

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How To Use This Toolkit

This document does not need to be read from start to finish. Use the guide below to find the path most relevant to you and your role.

	Governors' Office Staff	Senior Agency Leadership	SNAP E&T Administrators	Program Staff and Practitioners
Audience	Policy advisors, chiefs of staff, interagency liaisons	Agency commissioners, deputies, and budget officers	State or territory agency program leads and directors	Case managers, coordinators, frontline administrators
Your Goal	Identify relevant state examples and understand what conditions to create before work begins	Understand what executive leadership can do to accelerate progress and create the conditions agencies need	Find the tool and state example most relevant to your challenge and get step-by-step guidance	Get practical, step-by-step guidance and access the templates needed to begin
Suggested Starting Point	State Experience Directory	Call to Action for Governors	State Experience Directory	Tools and How to Use Them

Document Structure at a Glance

Part 1: The Policy Academy Report	Part 2: The Toolkit
Section 1: About the Policy Academy	Section 7: Understanding the Operating Environment
Section 2: Barriers States Faced	Section 8: Finding Your Starting Point — State Experience Directory
Section 3: How States Approached the Work	Section 9: Process Mapping Tool
Section 4: What States Achieved	Section 10: Creating the Conditions for Success
Section 5: Case Studies — Idaho and Maryland	Appendices A–C
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About the Policy Academy

In 2024, the Policy Academy was launched by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), with technical assistance from Third Sector and Seattle Jobs Initiative. It was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's SNAP Employment and Training National Partnership Grant. The purpose of the Policy Academy was to help states identify and address specific barriers preventing them from expanding and improving their SNAP E&T programs.

The Policy Academy operated in two cohorts. Each cohort brought together a small group of states, each represented by a cross-agency team that included staff from human services and workforce agencies, as well as a representative from the Governor's Office. Over the course of the cohort, each team worked to diagnose their most pressing barriers, apply targeted tools and interventions, and build internal and interagency capacity to sustain progress.

Policy Academy Cohort	Participating States
Cohort 1 (July 2024–February 2025)	Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina
Cohort 2 (July 2025–February 2026)	Idaho, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina

PART 1: THE POLICY ACADEMY TO STRENGTHEN SNAP E&T DELIVERY - REPORT

Cohort Experiences and State Accomplishments

Section 1: About the Policy Academy

In 2024, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), in partnership with Third Sector (TS), and support from Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI), funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's SNAP Employment and Training National Partnership Grant, launched the Policy Academy to Strengthen SNAP E&T Delivery. The Policy Academy was designed to help states identify and overcome barriers to expanding their SNAP E&T Programs and improving participants' well-being.

The Policy Academy included two cohorts of state teams that received technical assistance:

Policy Academy Cohort	Participating States
Cohort 1 (July 2024–February 2025)	Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina
Cohort 2 (July 2025–February 2026)	Idaho, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina

SNAP E&T Policy Academy Team Structure

By securing a broad range of leaders and staff in human services, workforce, and nonprofit areas, state teams expanded their capacity and ability to translate policy academy decisions into key actions, enabling them to work together within, across, and outside of their departments to inform and shape the state's progress toward its Policy Academy goals.

- A representative from the Governor's office (required for acceptance)
- Human Services agency leadership & staff
- Workforce Development agency leadership & staff
- Workforce Development Board leadership & staff
- Community-based organizations and nonprofit partners
- Local/regional community leaders
- Other stakeholders key to carrying out the state's proposed scope of work

Section 2: Barriers States Faced

States entering Cohort 1 were largely building cross-agency partnerships from the ground up for the first time. Human services and workforce agencies had often operated independently for years, with little formal coordination and limited shared understanding of each other's programs, priorities, or constraints. For most states, the priority was establishing the relational and structural foundation, shared roles, communication practices, and basic mutual understanding that effective coordination depends on.

Persistent Structural Barriers

- ★ **Strategic alignment:** State and territory human services and workforce agencies often serve overlapping populations without formal coordination mechanisms, leading to unclear expectations across partners, limited trust, and competing or overlapping priorities.
- ★ **The Resource Gap:** Federal funding was already considered insufficient for intensive case management. States relied on a patchwork of federal waivers to manage under-resourced systems, creating fragile administrative structures dependent on continued flexibility.
- ★ **Fragmented Data Systems:** The absence of robust data-sharing processes, agreements, and structures makes it difficult to coordinate across agencies and track participant outcomes. For many states and territories, updating or establishing new data infrastructure is too expensive or requires capacity they do not have.

States entering Cohort 2 were navigating updated federal program requirements while continuing to build and sustain cross-agency partnerships. H.R. 1, enacted in 2025, updated federal SNAP E&T program parameters in ways that affected both the population states are responsible for serving and how administrative responsibilities are structured.

The New Federal Context

- ★ **Administrative Processes:** States and territories are working to modernize internal SNAP E&T workflows, including provider invoicing and participant referrals, to ensure processes are efficient, accurate, and equipped to support an expanded program.
- ★ **Expanded SNAP Work Requirements:** H.R. 1 expanded the population subject to the ABAWD work requirement/time limit, including extending the applicable age range through age 64 and modifying applicable exceptions. States and territories must ensure their orientation, case management, and tracking systems are scaled accordingly.
- ★ **Updated Waiver Criteria:** H.R. 1 limited the criteria under which states and territories may waive ABAWD work requirements, meaning that communities previously exempted from this process must now either create new or connect with existing SNAP E&T systems.

Section 3: How States Approached the Work

States and territories do not enter the work of SNAP E&T improvement from the same starting point. Each state brings a different administrative structure, a different mix of agency partners, and a different set of priorities shaped by its leadership, its workforce landscape, and its existing program infrastructure. What the Policy Academy states shared was a common recognition: that serving SNAP E&T participants well requires systems, shared processes, clear roles, and sustained relationships that allow multiple agencies to work together reliably over time.

The two cohorts of the Policy Academy reflected two distinct moments in that work. Cohort 1 states were largely building the relational and structural foundation for cross-agency coordination, establishing the shared understanding, defined roles, and communication practices that make sustained collaboration possible. Cohort 2 states were working to ensure their administrative systems could support a program operating under updated federal requirements and serving a broader population.

Cohort 1 (July 2024 – February 2025): Building the Foundation for Coordination

The overarching goal for Cohort 1 states was to reduce barriers to SNAP E&T access by strengthening the cross-agency infrastructure on which effective service delivery depends. Human services and workforce agencies were often serving overlapping populations without formal mechanisms for communication, referral, or shared accountability. Three themes cut across all four Cohort 1 states, regardless of their specific intervention:

Cohort 1 Goals: Partnering for Expansion

- ★ **Building a shared vision across agencies:** Agencies across workforce, health and human services, and labor needed to align on a shared understanding of what coordinated, high-quality SNAP E&T delivery would look like in their state, including clarifying roles, developing common referral approaches, and establishing the communication practices that make coordination sustainable over time.
- ★ **Turning separate programs into a unified service system:** With evolving SNAP student eligibility legislation, greater collaboration among human services, labor, and higher education was needed to move from a collection of isolated programs and funding streams toward a more unified system, one in which participants could access the full range of services available to them without navigating disconnected agency processes.
- ★ **Creating cross-agency visibility for co-enrollment:** Co-enrollment, connecting participants to multiple programs simultaneously, unlocks more support for individuals and makes better use of existing funding. Achieving it requires data sharing between agencies, which in turn requires navigating legal requirements, building strong interagency relationships, and committing staff capacity to make it work.

Cohort 1 State Goals and Interventions

State	Primary Barrier	Goal	Intervention
Idaho	Limited formal coordination between human services and workforce agencies; unclear roles and expectations for the partnership	Identify opportunities for program coordination between SNAP E&T and One-Stop workforce programs	Co-creating a shared vision statement and defining clear roles and expectations between the Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Labor
Indiana	Siloed operations and fragmented data systems limiting cross-agency communication and visibility into participant outcomes	Build a sustainable, accountable, and effective system for SNAP E&T coordination across partners	Communication mapping to establish regular, structured communication practices among internal and external partners
Minnesota	Siloed operations and state legislative provisions creating discrepancies between program design and federal requirements	Identify opportunities for alignment and collaboration to connect participants to best-fit workforce services	Process mapping, resource mapping, and program mapping to identify coordination opportunities and assess funding alignment across human services, labor, and higher education
North Carolina	Limited capacity for cross-agency communication; low provider and participant awareness of available services	Increase awareness and enrollment in SNAP E&T among eligible participants and providers	Customer journey mapping to identify participant pain points and opportunities to strengthen outreach and provider engagement

A few observations cut across all four Cohort 1 states and are worth noting before moving to the full state detail in Section 1.

- **Coordination requires more than willingness.** In each state, there was genuine interest in working across agencies. What was missing were the structures that allow that interest to translate into reliable practice. The interventions focused on building those structures deliberately rather than assuming they would emerge on their own.
- **Starting with shared understanding accelerates everything else.** Several states found that a significant portion of early work involved partners simply learning about each other's programs, constraints, and priorities. Time invested in that mutual orientation paid dividends later by reducing miscommunication and building the trust needed for harder conversations about process change and resource alignment.
- **The Governor's office connection mattered from the start.** Each participating state was required to include a Governor's office representative on its team. States that engaged that representative actively, not just as a signatory, but as a working team member, reported stronger alignment between their Policy Academy goals and broader state priorities, and found it easier to secure the decisions and resources needed to move forward.

Cohort 2 (July 2025 – February 2026): Strengthening Administrative Infrastructure

States entering Cohort 2 were navigating a changed program environment while continuing to build and sustain cross-agency partnerships. For most, the priority was ensuring that their administrative infrastructure, the processes, documentation, and workflows that support day-to-day program delivery, was reliable, accurate, and equipped to support a larger participant population than it had been designed for.

For many Cohort 2 states, this meant confronting a foundational challenge: administrative processes that had been adequate for a smaller program were not designed to handle increased volume, and in some cases had never been formally documented at all.

Three themes shaped the goals and interventions across all four Cohort 2 states:

Cohort 2 Goals: Building a Solid Foundation for Expansion

- ★ **Formalizing referral pathways:** States needed to build documented, standardized referral processes capable of handling increased participant volume reliably, with defined roles, handoffs, and feedback loops that ensure participants are consistently connected to services regardless of which agency they first encounter.
- ★ **Modernizing administrative workflows:** Invoicing, contract execution, and eligibility verification processes that had developed organically over time often contained inefficiencies, redundancies, and gaps that became more consequential as program demands increased. Documenting and standardizing these workflows reduced administrative burden on staff, improved relationships with providers, and created a more consistent and auditable administrative record.
- ★ **Building capacity to serve more participants effectively:** With an expanded participant population, states needed to examine how staff time was being used, particularly in case management and orientation functions, and identify where administrative burden could be reduced to expand capacity for direct participant support.

Cohort 2 State Goals and Interventions

State	Primary Barrier	Goal	Intervention
Idaho	Lack of alignment on co-enrollment processes between human services and workforce agencies; risk of referral gaps; unclear participant tracking across agencies	Create and implement a standardized referral process	Process mapping of direct and reverse referral pathways between the Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Labor

State	Primary Barrier	Goal	Intervention
Maryland	Delays in contract execution and invoice processing creating administrative burden for staff and straining provider relationships; policies and training materials not updated to reflect current federal requirements or agency capacity	Improve administrative functions and processes to ensure they are efficient and accurate	Process mapping of end-to-end invoicing workflows to identify bottlenecks, eliminate redundancies, and standardize processes across teams
North Carolina	Undocumented and inconsistent referral pathways; unclear roles and responsibilities between agency staff and third-party providers for eligibility assessments, contributing to sanctions	Build and sustain a network of SNAP E&T providers	Process mapping of the referral process to clarify roles, standardize eligibility assessment procedures, and update training materials for staff and provider partners
South Carolina	Delays in invoicing processes affecting provider retention; unclear invoicing procedures creating barriers to provider expansion; administrative burden limiting case manager efficiency in orientation functions	Maximize administrative resources	Process mapping of case manager responsibilities in the orientation process to identify inefficiencies and design an improved future-state workflow

Several themes emerged across Cohort 2 states that are worth noting for any state navigating a similar administrative modernization effort.

- **Administrative processes are program infrastructure.** Invoicing workflows, referral pathways, and case manager responsibilities are not back-office concerns separate from service delivery. They are the systems through which participants access services, providers receive payment, and states demonstrate sound stewardship of program funds. Central to this infrastructure is proactive transparency including upfront communication that reimbursement often takes three to six months is a vital tool for managing expectations and building trusted provider relationships. Treating these processes as a strategic priority rather than a clerical one is a shift that each Cohort 2 state had to make deliberately.
- **Documentation is the foundation of scalability.** A process that exists only in the knowledge of experienced staff cannot be easily replicated, audited, or handed off when personnel change. Each Cohort 2 state found that documenting existing processes surfaced gaps and inconsistencies that had previously gone unexamined and created a foundation for training, onboarding, and continuous improvement.
- **Operational readiness enables expansion.** For states facing an expanded participant population, the instinct may be to focus immediately on outreach and enrollment. Cohort 2 states found that investing first in the administrative systems that support participants, including referral processes, eligibility verification, provider invoicing, made subsequent expansion more sustainable and reduced the risk of errors that carry compliance and fiscal consequences.

Section 4: What States Achieved

Through tailored technical assistance, states made meaningful strides toward alleviating or removing the structural, operational, and administrative barriers that have historically constrained SNAP E&T access and program growth.

Before and After: What Policy Academy Participation Made Possible

Before	After
→ Single entry point for participants seeking services	→ Multiple, documented pathways so participants can access services regardless of which agency they first encounter
→ Siloed agency efforts with duplicative or misaligned activities	→ Coordinated service delivery with clear roles and shared accountability
→ Unclear or undocumented referral pathways for staff and providers	→ Standardized referral processes with defined handoffs and feedback loops
→ Delays and inconsistencies in administrative processes	→ Streamlined workflows with reduced processing time and greater transparency
→ Elevated risk of errors and associated compliance consequences	→ Documented processes and monitoring practices that support administrative accuracy and program integrity

Cohort 1: July 2024–February 2025

When states entered Cohort 1, many were building cross-agency partnerships (workforce agency staff, providers, and human services staff) from the ground up for the first time. As a result, many states' efforts focused on formalizing partnerships and establishing a shared understanding of funding, data, programs, and roles required for effective SNAP E&T expansion.

Idaho	
Goal	Identify opportunities for program coordination between SNAP E&T and One-Stop workforce programs.
Barriers	Siloed Operations: • Limited previous efforts to align human services with workforce programs • Lack of clarity on the desired outcomes of the partnership • Lack of clarity on the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the partnership • Lack of knowledge and awareness of the partner's capacity, initiatives, and priorities
Intervention	Co-creating a shared vision to inform interagency collaboration and coordination between the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) and the Department of Labor (DOL) to increase SNAP E&T service access and wraparound supports.
Outcome(s)	• A shared vision statement reflecting both agencies' priorities and commitments • Alignment on partnership goals including establishing a standardized referral process • Clearly defined roles and expectations to reduce barriers to access, such as referral gaps or knowledge about available services • More efficient coordination between human services and workforce partners through recurring meetings and check-ins • More partner resilience despite disruptions in funding or staffing
Impact	• Reduced duplicative efforts and administrative burden • More leveraging of shared resources and operating with greater consistency • Clearer referral pathways from the Department of Labor (DOL) to the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) • Created a foundation to expand SNAP E&T access for individuals interacting with IDOL and WIOA programs • Identified opportunities to increase access to wraparound supports through improved coordination between workforce and human services partners

Indiana	
Goal	Build a sustainable, accountable, and effective system for SNAP E&T coordination across partners
Barriers	Siloed Operations: • Risk of misalignment or duplication of priorities and budgets • Limited coordination and communication Fragmented Data Systems: • Limited access to and understanding of outcomes data across programs
Intervention	Communication mapping to establish regular, structured communication practices among key members internal and external to the SNAP E&T administering agency
Outcomes	• Dedicated time and capacity towards cross-agency collaboration • Open, scheduled, and maintained lines of communication • Increased trust and strengthened cross-agency relationships • Greater understanding of the landscape of workforce partners for streamlined coordination and stronger partnerships
Impact	• Aligned resources to avoid duplicative efforts • Greater ability to track participant outcomes across programs • Increased and regular communication and strategy planning amongst partners

Minnesota	
Goal	Identify opportunities for alignment and collaboration among partners to ensure participants are connected to “best fit” workforce services via streamlined processes
Barriers	Siloed operations: • Risk of misalignment or duplication of priorities and budgets • Limited coordination and communication State legislative challenges: • Discrepancies between state legislation and federal mandate
Intervention	• Process Mapping: Mapping the flow of existing processes • Resource Mapping: Mapping available resources and opportunities to braid and blend funding • Program Mapping: Mapping various program offerings, services, eligibility to maximize co-enrollment

Outcome	Identified where partners plug into the wider SNAP E&T ecosystem, unlocking additional resources and capacity to coordinate and deliver SNAP E&T services effectively.
Impact	• SNAP E&T program expansion via enrollment of eligible college students • Interagency coordination through alignment of co-enrollment plans • Launched efforts to assess and streamline direct referral and reverse-referral processes.

North Carolina	
Goal	Increase awareness and enrollment in the SNAP E&T program among eligible participants and providers
Barriers	Siloed Operations & Administrative Frictions: • Limited capacity to support ongoing communication and coordination • Lack of clarity on when and how to align priorities and budgets across agencies • Lack of clarity on what coordination between partners should look like • Risk of misalignment of priorities and budgets, preventing awareness of SNAP E&T and enrollment in the program
Intervention	Customer journey mapping to understand the participant experience of accessing SNAP E&T services to identify areas of strength and areas of improvement for program outreach and marketing strategies to increase access and awareness of services
Outcome(s)	• A greater understanding of the customer experience within the SNAP E&T ecosystem and the ability to communicate this process with new or interested providers and participants • An understanding of pain points SNAP E&T participants may experience from outreach to completion of services • Alignment between all partners on their respective roles and responsibilities to coordinate SNAP E&T services • An opportunity to discuss aligning budgets based on the SNAP E&T mapping
Impact	• Better positioned to increase awareness and enrollment among providers • Increased and enhanced coordination to provide wraparound supports to participants, reducing referral gaps • Ability to direct funding toward reducing SNAP E&T participants' barriers to services, increasing their ability to complete services effectively

Cohort 2: July 2025–February 2026

Cohort 2 welcomed back several of the same states alongside new participants. While the relational and structural groundwork for effective partnerships was not entirely behind them, states were navigating a changed program environment that required immediate attention to administrative infrastructure. For most, the priority was ensuring that the processes, documentation, and workflows that support day-to-day program delivery were reliable, accurate, and equipped to support a larger participant population than they had been designed for. The following tables document what each Cohort 2 state set out to do, what they accomplished, and what changed as a result.

Idaho	
Goal	Create and implement a standardized referral process
Barriers	Administrative Friction & Fragmented Data Systems: • Lack of alignment on what a shared co-enrollment process looks like • Risk of referral gaps • Unclear co-enrollment practices and methods for monitoring and tracking participant outcomes across agencies
Intervention	Process mapping of direct and reverse referral pathways between the Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Labor to ensure participants are connected to services in a timely manner
Outcome	• Established clarity and alignment on SNAP E&T contract requirements for mandatory SNAP E&T participants • Established buy-in across partners • Clarity on roles and expectations of all partners • Identified strategies for tracking participant outcomes across both partners • Established regular communication between partners • Identified reliable co-enrollment policies with clear handoffs and defined feedback loops • Kicked off process to onboard ID Department of Labor as Third Party Provider
Impact	• Designed and documented enhanced direct and reverse referral pathways with clearer roles, handoffs, and accountability • Established a foundation intended to reduce the risk of participants falling through gaps between agencies • Developed feedback-loop and monitoring approaches intended to reduce administrative burden and improve service coordination • Clearer onboarding pathways for third-party providers • Established foundation for program expansion infrastructure

Maryland	
Goal	Improve administrative functions and processes to ensure they are efficient and accurate
Barriers	Administrative Friction: • Delays in contract executions and invoice processing, straining provider-agency relationships and increasing staff administrative burdens. • Policies and training not updated to reflect current federal policies or agency capacity
Intervention	Process mapping of end-to-end invoicing workflows to identify bottlenecks, eliminate redundancies, and standardize processes across teams
Outcome	• Streamlined and standardized administrative workflows • Reduced processing time for invoices • Fewer errors and rework due to clearer guidance and training • Increased transparency and tracking of administrative processes • Transitioned from 1-year to 3-year provider contracts; rolling out a dedicated procurement software system to streamline operations.
Impact	• Stronger administrative processes enable the agency to efficiently handle an increased volume of invoices and contracts with fewer delays • improved provider satisfaction and retention • Updated policies and training materials support more consistent implementation across staff

North Carolina	
Goal	Build and sustain a network of FNS E&T providers
Barriers	Administrative Friction: • Undocumented and inconsistent referral pathways • Unclear roles and responsibilities between staff and third-party providers for eligibility assessments, leading to sanctions
Intervention	Process mapping of the referral process to increase awareness of and access to SNAP E&T services among third-party providers such as community colleges.
Outcome(s)	• Now serves North Carolinians across 85 counties with the goal of expanding to 100 counties by end-Summer 2026 • Identified and documented gaps, inconsistencies, and breakdowns in the referral process (e.g., communication and handoffs)

	• Clarified roles and responsibilities across staff and third-party providers • Established a standardized eligibility assessment process, including clear ownership and timing • Developed and documented clear, consistent referral pathways • Updated and aligned training materials for SNAP E&T staff and provider partners
Impact	• Improved staff and provider understanding of referral and eligibility processes, leading to more consistent implementation • Increased efficiency in referral processing and reduced delays in participant enrollment • Reduction in inappropriate referrals and sanctions due to clearer eligibility and handoff processes • Improved participant access to SNAP E&T services through more consistent and navigable referral pathways • Reduced administrative burden for staff and providers • Strengthened foundation for scaling the provider network, including more effective onboarding of new partners

South Carolina	
Goal	Maximize administrative resources
Barriers	Administrative Friction: • Delays in invoicing processes affecting provider retention • Unclear invoicing processes leading to increased administrative barriers to provider expansion • Administrative burden limiting case manager efficiency in key functions such as preparing for and facilitating SNAP E&T orientations
Intervention	Process mapping of case manager responsibilities related to the orientation process to identify administratively burdensome or duplicative activities and remove barriers to increased efficiency
Outcome	• Detailed understanding of areas of the orientation process that could be optimized • A documented “future state” orientation process that better reflects current agency capacity without sacrificing participant needs and experiences
Impact	• The “future state” orientation process will serve as the team’s pilot with a subset of case managers in 2026. • Case managers will benefit from additional capacity to provide stronger support services, proactive employer and provider coordination, improved participant engagement and retention, and enhanced progress monitoring.

Section 5: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Idaho

Overview: The following case study provides insight into a process-mapping session facilitated by Third Sector and completed by the Idaho team during Cohort 2 of the SNAP E&T Policy Academy. It examines the purpose and scope of process mapping, as well as the outcomes the state team achieved from the activity.

The Challenge: There were two challenges the state was seeking to address through completing the process mapping exercise:

1. How might the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare align with its partner agency, the Idaho Department of Labor, to create a “no wrong door” approach for participants through clear, direct, and reverse referral?
2. How might the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the Idaho Department of Labor work together to streamline processes and improve communication, so our shared customers experience fewer barriers and receive coordinated, non-duplicative services while maximizing funding sources

The Intervention: To address both challenges, the state completed two process mapping exercises:

- The first mapping focused on the direct referral pathway for SNAP recipients who are exempt from the SNAP E&T work requirement, but are still interested in receiving SNAP E&T services.
- To complement the first mapping, the second focused on mapping a reverse referral pathway for a department of labor program participant who may be eligible for SNAP benefits.

Process Mapping Impact & Findings

Finding solutions to both of these challenges was especially timely. To effectively co-enroll SNAP E&T participants, Idaho's human services and workforce agencies had to co-create clear referral pathways outlining their collaborative service delivery blueprint. Process mapping to accomplish this was one of the state's first key steps to simultaneously ensure a “no wrong door” approach. . As a result of this work, Idaho has initiated the process of pursuing the Idaho Department of Labor as a SNAP E&T third-party provider.

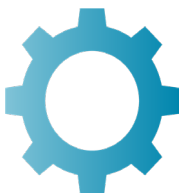
For Idaho, integrating feedback loops and structured communication channels through process mapping strengthened the state's referral infrastructure,

ensuring that as program volume grows, participants are consistently connected to services and partners are aligned in their respective roles.

Through process mapping, Idaho was not only able to answer the two challenge questions above, but they were also able to enact change in three major areas:



Internal Culture: By mapping processes, agencies can spark positive internal culture change. Clarifying roles and defining expectations for team members both within and across various entities minimizes administrative friction and sets up vital feedback loops. This helps ensure teams consistently communicate and collaborate.



Services: Process mapping is also a foundational tool for continuous improvement by documenting processes. This enables agencies to review service pathways, identify service gaps, and ensure consistent participant experiences. The resulting clarity informs the necessary updates to operating procedures and training materials for partners and providers. This ultimately leads to higher-quality, consistent service experiences for participants and administrative staff.



External Relationships: By documenting existing processes, and outlining future “ideal” states of processes, the roles and expectations of partners remain clear, including protocols for handoffs and communication. When providers know what to expect, greater trust is built amongst providers, an essential component prior to program expansion.

Case Study 2: Maryland

Overview: The following case study provides insight into a process mapping effort facilitated by Third Sector and completed by the Maryland team during Cohort 2 of the SNAP E&T Policy Academy. It examines the administrative challenges Maryland's Family Investment Administration faced in processing provider invoices, the process-mapping work the team undertook to diagnose and address those challenges, and the outcomes the state achieved through that work.

The Challenge

There were two challenges the state was seeking to address through completing the process mapping exercise:

1. How might the Maryland Family Investment Administration streamline its invoice review and documentation process to reduce administrative burden on staff and ensure providers are reimbursed accurately and within 45 days of correct submission?
2. How might the Maryland Family Investment Administration move from a uniform 100 percent documentation review requirement to a risk-based approach that maintains program integrity and audit readiness while allocating staff review capacity more strategically across its provider network?

The Intervention: To address both challenges, the state conducted a multi-phase process-mapping effort across several sessions from September 2025 to February 2026.

- Using a process mapping template (Appendix A), the team documented every step from provider submission through final payment, mapping the under-\$50,000 and over-\$50,000 pathways separately, since each moved through different systems and approval chains.
- Subsequent sessions focused on identifying where the process was breaking down and why. The team used a structured voting exercise to surface the steps that were creating the most burden, then moved into root cause analysis for the highest-priority areas.

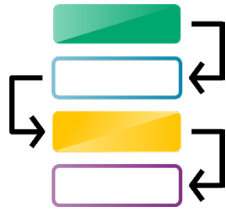
Process Mapping Impact and Findings

Improving Maryland's invoicing process was an important and timely investment. Maryland's Family Investment Administration oversees a growing network of up to 48 providers, each submitting monthly invoices that require careful review to ensure accuracy, compliance, and timely reimbursement. With a dedicated team managing this work on behalf of the entire state, finding ways to make the process more efficient, consistent, and sustainable was both a practical necessity and a strategic priority.

By building a shared, visual picture of the invoicing process from start to finish, the team was able to see the full workflow in a way that had not previously been possible, and to identify, together, where targeted improvements would have the greatest impact. The work also opened an important conversation about the distinction between what audit requirements actually mandate and what the team had built up

over time out of caution, creating an opportunity to design a smarter, risk-based review model that strengthens accountability without adding unnecessary burden.

Through process mapping, Maryland was able to enact change in three major areas:



Administrative Efficiency: Documenting how the process worked enabled the team to identify inconsistencies, redundancies, and gaps that were creating burden. The development of a standardized review approach and a risk-based documentation framework provided staff with a consistent, defensible process, replacing a system in which different team members followed different versions of the same process.



Provider Relationships and Accountability: A standardized process provides consistent communication, and enforcement across a system's provider network. The risk assessment framework, once implemented, will move Maryland away from a uniform, high-burden review approach applied to all providers equally, toward a differentiated model that recognizes and rewards providers with strong track records while directing more attention and support to those who need it. Maryland is also deepening provider engagement by partnering with the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) to map the current SNAP E&T landscape and identify new community-level partnership opportunities.



Fiscal Stewardship: When providers experience reimbursement delays, they hold off on spending, reduce referrals, and, in some cases, decline to begin services until payments are flowing. Improving the reliability and efficiency of the invoicing process directly supports Maryland's ability to more fully utilize available funding, maintain an active and engaged provider network, and ultimately serve more participants.

Section 6: Governor's Call to Action

Governors can leverage SNAP E&T as a powerful tool to advance workforce and economic mobility priorities while better connecting residents to education, training, and employment opportunities. SNAP E&T is an underutilized lever states and territories can use to connect low-income individuals with meaningful employment opportunities. When designed thoughtfully and implemented with sustained commitment, it can serve as a bridge for individuals who have previously struggled to meaningfully engage with the workforce system. It can support individuals not only seeking a job but looking to establish a career.

The states that participated in this Policy Academy have demonstrated that with time, patience, and dedication, transforming the SNAP E&T system is possible and has meaningful implications for the state. Through cross-agency collaboration, creative partnerships, and a willingness to grapple with existing structures, they have begun

building SNAP E&T programs that are more responsive and more effective at meeting customers where they are. The lessons captured in this toolkit reflect the progress that they have made.

Governors are uniquely positioned to support and build their state's SNAP E&T program to ensure it reaches its full potential. Governors can do this by convening the appropriate stakeholders, signaling to partners that this is a priority, and aligning workforce priorities from the top-down. The following actions represent meaningful steps governors can take to effectively leverage SNAP E&T to meet their state and territory's larger workforce goals and align with their overall workforce strategy.

- **Champion SNAP E&T as a Workforce Priority:** In several instances, employers and community organizations may be unaware of SNAP E&T and that the state can serve as a resource for them. Governors can change this by publicly positioning SNAP E&T as a core component of their workforce agenda. Consistently sending this message shapes how agencies prioritize resources, how partners engage, and how participants perceive the opportunity in front of them.
- **Coordinate Across Agencies and Connect to Broader Workforce Systems:** SNAP E&T sits at the intersection of several systems including human services, workforce development, higher education, and economic development. Without deliberate coordination, these systems can move in different directions, creating confusion for participants and inefficiency for the state. Governors can establish clear roles and responsibilities across agencies, designating accountability metrics, and ensuring that SNAP E&T is integrated into the state's broader workforce strategy.
- **Build systems for the long-term:** The federal landscape governing SNAP E&T is evolving rapidly. Governors may consider directing their teams to build programs that are financially diverse, administratively resilient, and designed to grow. This might look like investing in data infrastructure to track outcomes, identifying opportunities to expand access to underserved populations, and ensuring that the program is equipped to adapt to changes without losing momentum.

Governors looking to lead on workforce development and economic mobility can look at SNAP E&T as not simply a compliance exercise but a strategic asset. The tools, resources, and partnerships explored in this toolkit offer a roadmap for governors to build programs that are responsive to participants' needs, durable during uncertain moments, and connected to the broader economic opportunities every state and territory is working to expand.

PART 2: THE TOOLKIT

A Practical Guide for State SNAP E&T Administrators and Governors' Offices

Section 7: Understanding the Operating Environment

Barriers to expanding SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs are longstanding and widely observed across states and territories, including those participating in the Policy Academy. These challenges are not new, nor are they unique to any single state or territory; rather, they reflect structural and operational complexities that have persisted for decades and that no single agency, administrator, or legislative change created, or can resolve alone.

Common Barriers to SNAP E&T Delivery

Barrier	What It Means in Practice
Siloed operations	Human services and workforce agencies serve overlapping populations without formal coordination mechanisms, leading to referral gaps, unclear roles, and duplicative effort.
The resource gap	Federal funding is often insufficient for intensive case management, limiting program capacity and making cross-agency coordination harder to sustain
Fragmented data systems	The absence of cross-agency data sharing makes it difficult to track participants across programs, monitor co-enrollment, and demonstrate that coordination investments are working
Administrative process gaps	Invoicing workflows, referral processes, and case management procedures that were never fully documented or standardized create bottlenecks that become more consequential as programs grow
Leadership and staffing turnover	Partnerships built on personal relationships rather than documented processes are vulnerable to disruption when key staff leave or new leadership arrives

The Current Federal Context

While states have historically navigated constraints related to federal funding and coordination between labor and human services agencies, recent statutory changes under H.R. 1 (The One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025) introduced additional fiscal and

administrative considerations. The legislation expanded the populations subject to SNAP work requirements and also increased associated administrative costs. The legislation also created new cost-share models between states and the federal government which have caused most states and territories to undertake substantial reforms to their SNAP quality control process. States and territories may need to manage these changes within existing funding structures or restructure them to absorb new state or territory obligations, requiring careful alignment of resources, staffing, and program capacity. States participating in Cohort 2 were actively working to ensure their administrative infrastructure was positioned to support program delivery within this updated framework, and the tools documented in this toolkit reflect that environment.

For a full description of these barriers and the federal context, see Part 2, Section 8.

Finding Your Starting Point:

Use the State Experience Directory in Section 2 to identify which challenge category most closely aligns with your state or territory's citation, and which state examples and tools are most relevant to your work.

Section 8: Finding Your Starting Point- State Experience Directory

The directory below is intended to assist you in identifying which state experience and tools are most relevant to the challenges your state is currently experiencing. Each row connects a common challenge to a recommended tool and the state example that best illustrates it in practice.

Challenge	Relevant Tool	Relevant Example
Unclear partner roles and expectations	Shared vision and roles mapping	Idaho Cohort 1
Duplicative or inconsistent communication across agencies	Communication mapping	Indiana Cohort 1
Low participant or provider awareness of SNAP E&T	Customer journey mapping	North Carolina Cohort 1
Limited understanding of available services, programs, or funding	Resource and program mapping	Minnesota Cohort 1
Unclear referral pathways between agencies	Referral process mapping	Idaho Cohort 2
Unclear referral pathways	Referral process mapping	North Carolina Cohort 2

Challenge	Relevant Tool	Relevant Example
involving third-party providers		
Delayed invoices or provider reimbursement	Administrative and workflow mapping	Maryland Cohort 2
Case manager capacity constraints	Administrative and workflow mapping	South Carolina Cohort 2
Co-enrollment gaps between programs	Referral and program mapping	Idaho or Minnesota Cohort 2
Administrative process modernization	Administrative and workflow mapping	Maryland or Idaho Cohort 2
Interagency partnership with higher education	Resource and program mapping	Minnesota Cohort 1 or North Carolina Cohort 2
Difficulty sustaining cross-agency work over time	Governance and meeting cadence planning	Cross-state best practices, Section 5

A Checklist to Identify Starting Conditions

During the launch of an improvement initiative, it could be helpful to take stock of your state or territory's current conditions. The Policy Academy experience showed that states can make meaningful progress even when barriers are present; what often helped sustain momentum was having - or intentionally building - key enabling conditions along the way. The attached Starting Conditions Checklists are intended as guides, rather than an audit or prerequisite for action. They help states and territories identify existing strengths, consider areas that may benefit from additional attention, and anticipate opportunities to strengthen implementation. Note that you don't *need* to have all of these in place before you begin an initiative, but strengthening these components can increase odds of success.

Defining the “Minimum Viable Product”—You Do Not Have to Do It All

The Policy Academy was a structured, multi-month process and not every state or territory is positioned to replicate the process exactly, but that is not a reason to wait. The tools and practices in this toolkit are designed to be modular, usable in pieces at whatever scale your state or territory can sustain right now.

If your state has...	Minimum viable next step	How to do it
Senior leadership support but limited staff time	A single alignment meeting	Convene human services and workforce agency leads for 90 minutes. Agree on one specific barrier to address, name who from each agency will own the follow-through, and set a date for a second meeting to report back on progress.
Staff capacity but limited leadership engagement	A process documentation sprint	Choose one administrative process, a referral pathway, an invoicing workflow, or an orientation sequence, and document how it currently works. Map each step, note who is responsible, and identify where delays or gaps occur. Use the completed map as evidence to make the case for leadership investment.
Neither staff capacity nor strong leadership engagement yet	A peer learning conversation	Contact the NGA to be connected with a state mentioned in this toolkit and request a one-hour conversation with their project lead. Ask what they wish they had known before starting, what conditions made the biggest difference, and what they would do differently.

A Note on Sequencing

If...	Start With...
Your agencies have not worked together before	Relationship and alignment work first. Attempting to map or redesign a shared process before basic trust and communication norms are established will produce surface-level results. (See Idaho and Indiana Cohort 1 in Part 2, Section 10)
Your agencies have an existing working relationship	Process-focused work. The relationship foundation is already there. What is missing is the documented structure that makes coordination reliable and scalable. (See Cohort 2 states in Part 2, Section 10)

Section 9: Process Mapping to Identify Program Improvements

Process mapping is a tool that agencies can use to identify and prioritize system improvements needed for SNAP E&T program expansion. It was the primary tool used by Policy Academy states to diagnose and improve SNAP E&T administrative and coordination challenges, such as invoicing and referral processes.

The sections below describe the process mapping tool used by Policy Academy states, followed by general guidance on what you will need, how to conduct a process mapping session, and what to watch out for. The process mapping tool (i.e. the template and facilitation guide) is linked in Appendix A.

What Is Process Mapping?

About

The process mapping tool depicts the flow of operations for a single task from start to finish. It's more than simply outlining steps in a process; it also notes the key stakeholders involved and the time required for each step.

When could you use process mapping?

Goal	What it Accomplishes	When to Use It
Align vision and roles	Builds a documented, agreed-upon foundation for a partnership, capturing what the partnership is trying to achieve and what each agency is responsible for	When two or more agencies are beginning to coordinate formally for the first time, or when an existing partnership lacks clarity about roles, expectations on how to collaborate, or shared goals
Set communication plan	Identifies who needs to communicate with whom, about what, and how often and formalizes those patterns into reliable, recurring structures	When cross-agency coordination is happening informally and inconsistently, or when staff feel out of the loop on each other's priorities and decisions
Understand the participant journey	Documents the participant experience of accessing SNAP E&T services from first contact through completion. It identifies where participants receive strong support and where they encounter confusion, delays, or gaps	When participant enrollment is lower than expected, when provider awareness is limited, or when agencies want to ground outreach and intake redesign in the actual participant experience
Inventory resources and programs	Builds a comprehensive picture of the programs, services, and funding streams that make up a state's SNAP E&T ecosystem	When agencies lack a clear picture of what resources and programs exist across the system, or when the state is exploring co-enrollment opportunities or braided funding strategies

Goal	What it Accomplishes	When to Use It
Define referral processes	Maps the SNAP E&T referral system from the agency's operational perspective, documenting how a participant moves from one agency or program to another, capturing every step, handoff, responsible party, and point at which the operational process can break down.	When referral pathways between agencies are unclear or inconsistent, when co-enrollment practices need to be formalized, or when third-party providers are being onboarded into the SNAP E&T system
Develop standard operating procedures for program administration and workflow	Maps internal administrative processes and staff workflows, including invoicing, contract execution, eligibility verification, and case manager responsibilities, to identify bottlenecks, redundancies, and inconsistencies that create burden on staff, delay provider reimbursement, or limit capacity for direct participant support	When invoice processing is slow or error-prone, when providers are experiencing reimbursement delays, when case managers are spending significant time on administrative tasks, when the orientation process is inconsistent across staff, or when program expansion is anticipated and current administrative capacity cannot absorb increased volume

What You Will Need to Do Process Mapping

- The process mapping template (Appendix A)
- The facilitation guide (Appendix B) to prepare prompting questions, manage the session, and guide the follow-up analysis
- Representatives from all agencies and roles involved in the process being mapped
- At least one person with direct knowledge of how the process actually works in practice, not just how it is designed to work
- A collaborative workspace, physical or virtual, for building the map together such as a whiteboard, poster paper, or interactive platform like Miro

Instructions for Hosting a Process Mapping Series

BEFORE

STEP 1. Identify the process you would like to map**STEP 2. Identify the stakeholders that should be involved in the activity****STEP 3. Align on the boundaries of the process mapping activity with stakeholders**

Starting meetings with intention and boundary-setting. For example: what is the goal of the meeting/activity, what *will* you discuss, what *won't* you discuss, and how does this activity connect to broader agency priorities? Without clear boundaries, conversations drift, scope can expand uncontrollably, and the group may end up mapping something different from what was intended, making it difficult to translate the mapping session into tangible outcomes that the team can act on.

State Example: During Idaho's Policy Academy work, process mapping was a core activity for Cohort 2. To create a container of what was being mapped, the team began sessions by reminding participants that the mapping focused on the referral process for work-exempt participants who voluntarily participate in SNAP E&T.

STEP 4. Schedule the necessary meetings. This includes:

- A 90-minute meeting to complete the mapping activity that includes the necessary stakeholders.
- A 90-minute follow-up 1-2 weeks *after* the mapping activity to conduct analysis, including all the meeting participants from the mapping activity meeting

STEP 5. Create a template (Appendix A) to input steps and stakeholders responsible for completing them during the meeting. You may begin populating your template to create a starting point for the activity. This is not necessary, and if you plan to identify the steps during the meeting, proceed to Step 6.

Tips for Success

- The “team lead” should facilitate steps 1-3 to ensure accountability and responsiveness to the activity
- Assign roles for the mapping activity. Roles include:
 - A “facilitator” to keep the conversation and activity moving forward
 - One to two “note-takers” that can update the mapping template during the activity
 - “Contributors” who are well-versed in the process and can help explain steps, nuances, and provide context
- Allocate enough time to complete the mapping. Discuss the reality of how much time process mapping requires (i.e., multiple meetings lasting longer than an hour). It may be tempting to reduce the meeting to 60 minutes; however, this is a process that takes time, and it is best to end the meeting early rather than lose momentum from cut-short meetings, risking further collaboration and trust.
- When planning meetings longer than 60 minutes, ensure there are short breaks to allow individuals time to process and reset their attention

DURING

STEP 6. Complete the mapping template. This requires careful review of each step, ensuring all stakeholders are aligned on who is responsible for the action, the timeline for completing each action, and any challenges or barriers in the process.

Use a facilitation guide (Appendix B) to create prompting questions before the mapping activity begins to keep the conversation going during the activity. Conversations about processes and how to improve or change them can be difficult, especially alongside day-to-day responsibilities and priorities. Proactively drafting probing questions to ask the group during the activity helps to create a productive conversation by avoiding tangents, silence, or surface-level responses.

Tips for Success

- Record the process mapping meeting. There is a lot of information to capture live, and recording will ensure any missing details can be found again.
- Create a separate space, a “parking lot” to revisit ideas that may come up during the mapping activity, but don’t quite fit in the scope of the meeting. This will ensure the meeting stays focused and reduces unnecessary tangents.

AFTER

STEP 7. Clean up the completed mapping activity to ensure it is easy to read and comprehend. Share the completed map with all activity participants and request feedback on the accuracy and clarity of the process map.

STEP 8. Analyze the completed mapping during the follow-up meeting. Use icons or colors to clearly indicate which steps of the process are strong or need improvement.

- Strong steps of a process reinforce standards and requirements of a process while ensuring participant and provider needs are met
- Areas of a process that need improvement cause inconsistencies, delays, and further burden on participants, staff, and/or third-party providers

STEP 9. As a group, discuss which improvement areas will be prioritized through partnership. Then, identify strategies for improvement (Appendix D).

Tips for Success

During Step 9, open the meeting with an honest conversation with partners. Before analysis begins, ask partners questions about capacity and feasibility:

- What are the upcoming priorities/initiatives that may shift their ability to contribute to change meaningfully?
- How can the group share the effort to ensure the work can be carried forward despite capacity constraints?
- What feasible strategies are available to improve the step(s)?

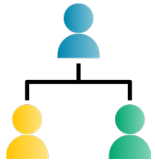
Section 10: Strategies for Creating the Conditions for Success

The interventions and best practices described above did not occur in a vacuum. Across states, the ability to successfully engage in and benefit from technical assistance depended not only on the quality of the intervention but also on the conditions the team had fostered throughout the Policy Academy. These strategies laid the foundation for meaningful progress and, in many cases, determined whether a state could translate a work session into tangible outcomes that would lead to operational changes. Despite variations in what constituted success across states, a common thread emerged:

States that made the most progress had cultivated environments that enabled partners to show up ready to work, communicate openly, and sustain momentum between sessions.

The practices below helped states foster the right conditions and environments to establish internal and interagency teams needed to build the infrastructure for expanding SNAP E&T.

Strategy 1: Assemble a Balanced Team



Before starting work to advance goals, especially in collaboration with partners, carefully consider *who* will be part of the team to make progress. Interventions only work if the right people can leverage them and support the tool's use. Engage these stakeholders early and often. It is key to ensure balanced representation, which may look like:

- A representative from the Governor's office
- Human Services agency leadership & staff
- Workforce Development agency leadership & staff
- Workforce Development Board leadership & staff
- Higher education leadership & staff
- Community-based organizations and nonprofit partners
- Local/regional community leaders

Agency representatives should reflect your state or territory's network of agency partners that administer SNAP E&T or who are seeking to administer SNAP E&T (i.e., third-party partners). The mix of leadership and staff is key to ensuring the work can move forward with the proper capacity and decision-makers at the table.

From the Field:

Each Policy Academy state was required to include a Governor's office representative as an active team member. States that engaged that representative actively, not just as a signatory, reported stronger alignment between their Policy Academy goals and broader state or territories priorities, and found it easier to secure the decisions and resources needed to move forward.

Strategy 2: Align on Roles & Expectations



All initiatives operate most efficiently when staff have a clear understanding of roles and expectations. This may look like outlining the following roles and responsibilities:

- **Team/project lead**
 - Helps to define the team's goals
 - Assigns roles and responsibilities within team
 - Leads meetings/work sessions, and ensures team members are engaged
 - Serves as primary point of contact for coordinating within and across agencies
 - Attends all meetings, unless otherwise specified
- **Team member**
 - Attends and contributes to discussions during meetings
 - Completes assignments as designated by team lead
- **Governor's Office Representative**
 - Ensures the team's work aligns with the Governor's policy priorities
 - Serves as a bridge between the team and the Governor's office
 - Provides context and insights on current state initiatives or legislation
 - Connects the team with other relevant agencies, departments, or stakeholders, as needed
 - Attends meetings, unless otherwise specified

Strategy 3: Invite Open and Honest Conversation



This work is only possible when partners can foster trust by inviting open and honest conversation. To effectively accomplish this, discuss the following items with partners to ensure you are aligned and begin to foster trust:

- **Capacity**
 - What initiatives, grants, or upcoming work is each member balancing?
 - How will that impact a partner's ability to attend meetings or contribute to the work?
 - What solutions can be implemented to mitigate surges in work for specific members?
 - *For example, assigning a secondary point of contact may help, or specifying that certain members will be consulted for decisions during surging times.*
- **Program Knowledge**
 - What are the areas in which program knowledge can be built among the team?
 - What misconceptions exist amongst partners of each other's programs?
 - What prior collaboration pain points have been experienced, and how will the team commit to doing things differently this time?

Strategy 4: Conduct Research Before Work Towards Goals Begins

Regardless of the type of meeting, and especially if you have not worked with partners formally before, conducting research can help ensure you are prepared for future meetings aimed at advancing agency goals. This can be accomplished in various ways:

- Schedule a meeting with partners to understand each other's programs, initiatives, and processes.
- Conduct independent research to learn how other states are approaching similar goals/initiatives and prepare to share these examples with your team.



Strategy 5: When Appropriate, Use Opportunity Framing

Dismantling complex barriers impacting effective or seamless SNAP E&T delivery is time-consuming and often takes more than one attempt. Despite this truth, it does not make it easier for staff who may already be working under capacity constraints and multiple agency priorities in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities. As a result, staff may naturally respond with:

- ✗ “I don’t have the capacity...”
- ✗ “This won’t work because...”
- ✗ “We don’t have the time/funding...”



While these are valid responses, opportunity framing can move partners away from them and toward thinking creatively and doing things differently in their work and across agencies. Instead, try the “How Might We” approach to encourage opportunity framing.

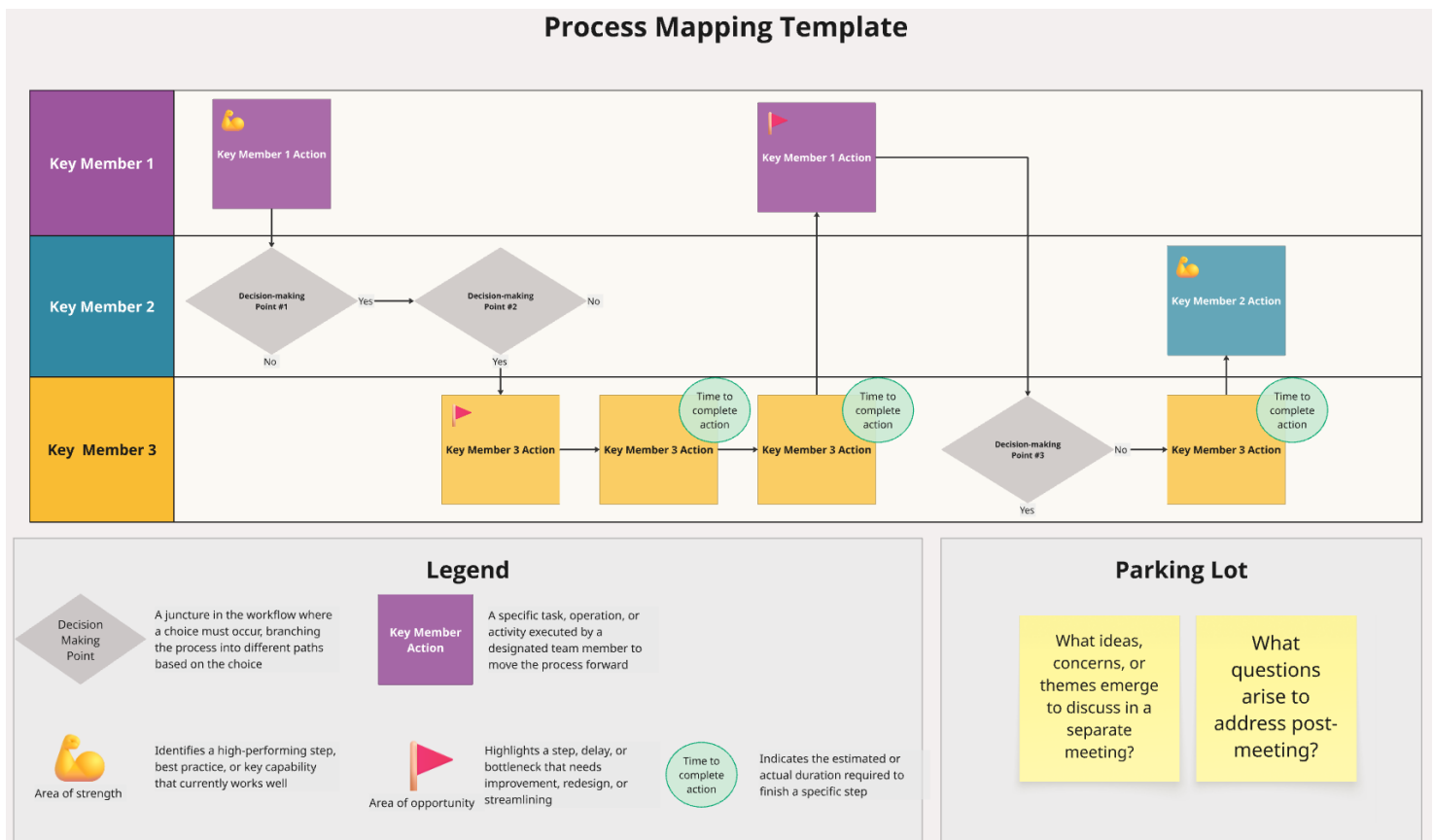
Strategy Available

See Appendix C for facilitation guidance on applying the How Might We approach in team settings.

Appendices

Appendix A: Process Mapping Template

The process mapping template outlines the key members, their specific responsibilities, and the critical decision making junctures. To gain a holistic perspective on workflow complexities, document the duration of each action whenever feasible. Utilize the “parking lot” technique to maintain facilitation focus. This strategy allows the group to capture vital insights, potential risks, or inquiries for future deliberation without derailing the immediate mapping session.



Appendix B: Meeting Facilitation Guide

This meeting facilitation guide is a resource for leading a productive, focused process mapping session. It provides structured guidance and prompting questions to maintain momentum, manage potential conflicts, and ensure a smooth transition to identifying improvements. Reference Section 9: Process Mapping to Identify Program Improvements for more information about process mapping and steps to take to prepare in order to facilitate a meeting.

Keys to Success: Set the Stage

At the start of a process mapping session, it is critical to align session members first on:

- **What is being mapped and what is not being mapped?** The process being mapped should have a clear “start” and “end”. A strict focus will ensure participants know what to expect and help avoid unrelated discussions. Clearly define:
 - How long the process mapping session will take (including time for review, analysis, and solutioning)
 - Key teams, roles, or systems included in the process
 - What triggers initiate the process in question
 - Which related processes or topics will be intentionally excluded from the session

Sample facilitation prompts:

- Ensure all team members are aligned at the start. Confirm this alignment by asking:
 - *“To summarize our goal for today, we’re only focusing on mapping one process, [insert process name], which includes X Y Z stakeholders. Does anyone have any questions or concerns about today’s focus?”*
- When team members stray from the mapping scope at hand, try responding with:
 - *“Let’s put that item in the parking lot discussion! It’s important to consider, but let’s make sure we are remaining focused on what we are mapping today.”*

- **Doing things differently.** Meeting participants should not be surprised by the session's goal or topic. However, this does not mean you may not experience resistance from members to the need to map existing processes or the capacity to analyze and identify solutions for process improvements. Prepare to invite a mindset shift by leveraging language that validates member's expertise while encouraging openness to improvement opportunities.

Common Hesitations to Watch Out For	Phrases to Invite Change
<i>This is great, but we don't need to document every single process. We've been doing just fine without documenting.</i>	<i>"I know process mapping takes time and can feel repetitive, especially for those who already know our operations inside and out. But this effort isn't documentation for its own sake. Documenting institutional knowledge builds consistency, reduces dependency on single individuals, highlights pain points, and protects our program's long-term sustainability. Ultimately, it validates what works, eliminates team confusion, and gives us the baseline we need to innovate for our staff, SNAP E&T customers, and provider partners."</i>
<i>I appreciate the effort, but we just don't have the time or capacity right now. X is due in Y weeks/months, and we don't have the capacity.</i>	<i>"Taking time to map the process now can help reduce rework, clarify responsibilities, and identify opportunities that could save staff time in the future. Is there anyone on your team who can speak to their role in the process that has the capacity to join three one-hour process mapping sessions over the next two months?"</i>
<i>We've always done X processes this way. Why do we need to change the process now?</i>	<i>"The goal is not to criticize existing work, but to understand the current state and explore where improvements could strengthen outcomes or reduce barriers for SNAP E&T customers. "</i>

Anticipate moments during the process mapping sessions where discussion may become overly detailed, move outside the agreed-upon scope, or shift prematurely into solutioning. The facilitator's role is to keep everyone grounded in documenting the current-state process while ensuring all participants have an opportunity to contribute. Strategies for maintaining productive mapping include:

- Summarizing and reflecting key points back to the group. Be sure to pause after summarizing to allow for questions, comments, or concerns.
- Redirecting side conversations or operational issues outside of the process mapping scope for the meeting
- Capturing unresolved topics in a “parking lot” for future deliberation
- Checking for alignment before moving to the next process step
- Encouraging quieter participants to share perspectives

Scenario

A cross-agency SNAP E&T process mapping session convened to map out the participant referral and intake process

Key Roles Present in the Meeting

- Tre, the State SNAP E&T Program Lead: Represents the state’s policy vision and can articulate what an ideal participant referral and intake process could look like. Tre’s role is to ensure the mapped workflow aligns with broader state priorities and policies.
- Xue, a Case Manager: Represents the direct operational perspective as the day-to-day team member working most closely with SNAP E&T participants. Xue knows how the process works in practice, including informal workarounds, manual handoffs, and operational bottlenecks.
- Zee, the Partner Agency Coordinator: Represents the receiving or external partner agency. Zee provides insight into handoffs, reverse referrals, receipt confirmation, and cross-agency communication and standard operating procedures.

Sequencing Discussion

The process mapping discussion is most effective when meeting participants build off one another’s perspective. This is where an interactive platform, such as Miro, is effective. Rather than having Tre, Xue, and Zee independently map out and present their individual perspectives on the process one-by-one which will lead to misaligned terminology and duplicated efforts that bog down momentum, all three participants should simultaneously place sticky notes across a shared timeline for their specific swimlanes. The facilitator then guides the group through the Process Mapping template step-by-step from beginning to end. Each person speaks to their specific

actions as the timeline progresses, surfacing handoff gaps and operational discrepancies.

Meeting Facilitation Guide

Step 1: Framing: State what is being mapped and what is not being mapped. The process being mapped should have a clear “start” and “end”. A strict focus will ensure participants know what to expect and help avoid unrelated discussions

“To summarize our goal for today, we’re only focusing on mapping one process, the participant referral and intake process. Tre is here to help us hold the vision for the ideal process, while Xue and Zee will help us capture current frontline realities and cross-agency handoffs. Does anyone have any questions or concerns about today’s focus?”

Step 2: Parking Lot: When team members stray from the mapping scope at hand, respond with:

“We’ll put that item in the parking lot discussion! It’s important to consider, but let’s make sure we are remaining focused on what we are mapping today.”

Step 3: Fill Out the Template: Introduce the process mapping template and the exercise for filling out the template together using an interactive whiteboard

“Before we talk through the entire workflow out loud, we are going to build our shared baseline timeline concurrently on the board.”

“For the next 10 to 15 minutes, I’d like all three of you to write down key steps and place them on the timeline at the same time. Don’t worry about perfect alignment or overlapping stickies yet. We expect it to be a bit messy at first.”

“Tre, focus your notes on the overarching milestones and what the ideal sequence should look like. Xue, write down every step you take on the frontline day-to-day to initiate and process a referral. Zee, focus on when and how your agency receives the referral, confirms it, and logs participant entry. Let’s begin!”

Step 4: Deep Dive: Guide meeting participants through the process, step-by-step, inviting moments of pause and discussion.

“Now that we have everyone’s steps on the board, we are going to walk through the timeline step-by-step from left to right, going handoff by handoff. As we reach each

action, I'm going to pause and ask the person who placed it to explain the action. We'll compare Xue's frontline steps directly with Zee's intake steps to ensure handoffs align, while referencing Tre's ideal state to spot gaps."

"Xue, walk us through the very first action you placed when a participant expresses interest."

Step 5: Prompt: Ask prompting questions about the macro-level and mechanics of the process

Macro-level questions include:

- *Roles and scope: "Who are all the parties involved in this process across both agencies?"*
- *Triggers: "How is the referral process triggered? What exact form or system action starts it?"*
- *Sequencing: "What happens before X step?" What comes immediately after X step?"*
- *Timing: "How long does each step take?"*

Mechanical questions include:

- *Responsibility:*
 - *"Who is responsible for executing this specific step?"*
 - *"What decisions do staff have to make at their discretion or through a standardized procedure?"*
- *Protocol and Delivery:*
 - *"What is the exact protocol for doing this step? How do staff send the screening and referral form?"*
 - *"What determines which path of the process is taken by a SNAP E&T customer?"*
 - *"How does the receiver confirm receipt of the form or handoff?"*
 - *"How do you know this step has been completed?"*
- *Exceptions and Barriers:*
 - *"What parts of the process are the most time-consuming, confusing, or delayed?"*
 - *"Are there workarounds staff use to expedite the process?"*
 - *"What happens if this step is not followed or gets delayed?"*

End of the Session: Wrapping Up

Concluding a process mapping session requires facilitators to guide members through reviewing the completed map to identify strengths, pain points, bottlenecks, redundancies, and areas for improvement.

⚠ Keep in mind, multiple meetings may be needed to “wrap up” a process mapping session. It is best to schedule separate sessions and avoid sprinting through a process mapping activity to avoid burnout and maintain buy-in.

Step 6: Pinpoint Insights: Reviewing the map should focus on observations from the current-state process rather than jumping to implementation planning. Use visual indicators to mark the map up as the group identifies:

- High-friction steps
- Areas with significant staff or SNAP E&T customer burden
- Delays or bottlenecks
- Opportunities for standardization
- Positive practices/steps already working well

“We’ve walked the full timeline from the initial trigger all the way to participant enrollment. Before we wrap up today’s mapping exercise, let’s take a step back and look at the visual picture we built together.”

“Place a red dot on the steps that feel high-friction, delayed, or confusing in your day-to-day work. Place a green dot on the steps or hand-offs that are currently working really well.”

“Xue, focus your red dots on where administrative burden or form handoffs slow you down. Zee, mark where incoming referrals are missing information or where receipt confirmation gets lost. Tre, place yours where policy compliance or reporting visibility breaks down.”

Step 7: Next Steps: Outline how the inputs from the process mapping discussion will be used. This includes leveraging Appendix C to prioritize areas for improvement and inform the design of a future-state process. Clear communication regarding next steps will help staff understand the value of their input and reinforce trust. Potential next steps may include:

- Synthesizing findings and themes from the session
- Validating the documented process with agency staff and with participants, separately
- Prioritizing opportunities for improvement
- Scheduling follow-ups to complete review of the current-state mapping or solutioning discussions

"I will send the finalized visual map to Tre, Xue, and Zee by [Insert Date] for a quick accuracy check."

"We have our 90-minute follow-up meeting scheduled for [Insert Date, 1–2 weeks out]. In that session, we won't be mapping. We will be analyzing these red-flagged areas and prioritizing which bottlenecks to solve first using framing tools like 'How Might We' exercises."

Appendix C: Strategy Guide: Fostering Solutions-Oriented Thinking

Tool #1: The “How Might We” Exercise. A “how might we” activity is an opportunity framing tool that can help build alignment about strategies to solve a problem, especially when faced with existing tension, hesitancy, or disagreement. It takes a root cause and reframes it as an opportunity for solution design rather than a problem to be solved. By transforming root causes into “How Might We” statements, barriers can be turned into questions that invite creative, actionable responses. For example, “SNAP E&T participants are dropping out of training programs before completion” becomes “How might we better support SNAP E&T participants in staying engaged through their full training?”

When should you use the “How Might We” exercise? Once an outcome or data trend has been identified and after a potential root cause is better understood, the How Might We Exercise will help users reframe that cause as an opportunity and identify feasible, actionable solutions.

How do you do a “How Might We” exercise?

- **STEP 1:** Begin by reframing a root cause into a “how might we” statement to turn the problem into a question that the group can design solutions to address. With a diverse group of stakeholders, draft a “how might we” question based on your root cause of interest.

For example: *How might we [reduce transportation barriers for SNAP E&T participants in rural areas] so that [eligible individuals can consistently attend and complete their work and training activities]?*

- **STEP 2:** Once the group has drafted the “how might we” question, it is time to start thinking of solutions. Brainstorming, brainwriting, and reverse brainstorming are all great ways to engage a group in coming up with solutions.
- **STEP 3:** Group solutions into themes for further discussion to build on each other’s ideas
- **STEP 4:** Select potential solutions to test out

Tool #2: Reverse Brainstorming Tool. Reverse brainstorming is a problem-solving exercise that identifies ways to cause or worsen a problem, then flips those into

tangible practices. This can be a helpful technique to help force you and your teams to think in ways you haven't before while encouraging innovative, collaborative solutioning.

Instructions to Complete Reverse Brainstorming

Step 1: Start with the challenge you seek to solve

Establishing a clear anchor ensures the group focuses on a single, well-defined operational barrier rather than attempting to tackle systemic issues all at once. Framing the challenge as a "How Might We" question converts a static problem into an open invitation for collaborative design while opening up possible solutions.

"To kick off our session, we need to pick one specific challenge from our process map. Based on the friction points we identified in our mapping session, we are focusing on this 'How Might We' question: 'How might we increase the speed and accuracy of participant referrals between agencies?' This question will serve as our North Star for the exercise."

Step 2: Flip the "How Might We" question so that it achieves the opposite effect

Flipping the question disrupts conventional thinking and immediately lowers anxiety. By asking participants to solve for failure rather than success, you remove the pressure to come up with perfect ideas and invite a lighter, more engaging mindset.

"Now, we are going to do something counterintuitive: we are going to flip this goal completely on its head. Instead of solving the problem, our new question is: 'How might we make the referral process as slow, confusing, and error-prone as humanly possible?' We are intentionally trying to design the worst possible outcome."

Step 3: List the ways you can achieve the reverse challenge, as though to make the problem worse

This step allows participants to safely surface existing, unstated pain points, frustrating workarounds, and systemic flaws without feeling like they are criticizing their colleagues or agency policies. It gives the team permission to be humorous and candid while surfacing real operational vulnerabilities.

"Write down as many ways as possible to make this referral process fail. Think absurd, think frustrating, but also think about actual things that quietly break workflows, like never confirming form receipt, using handwritten illegible notes, or ignoring emails for three weeks. Don't filter yourselves; let's get as many bad ideas on the board as we can!"

Step 4: Flip your thinking: turn the ideas that would make the problem worse around to create solutions to the original challenge

Reversing the negative ideas bridges the gap between diagnosing a problem and creating a actionable fix. It leverages the "bad" ideas as direct blueprints for positive standard operating procedures, ensuring the resulting solutions directly counteract real-world risks.

"Now comes the fun pivot. We are going to look at our list of terrible ideas and flip every single one back around into a positive solution. For example, if our bad idea was 'never confirm when a referral form is received,' its opposite is 'establish an automated email confirmation protocol within 24 hours of submission.' Let's go line-by-line and convert these bad practices into actionable fixes."

Step 5: Discuss and build on proposed solutions once you have a broad list of ways to achieve the reverse and solutions to the original problem.

Generating raw solution concepts is only half the work; this final step transforms individual ideas into cohesive, structured strategies. Grouping ideas by theme builds consensus across agency leads and frontline staff, establishing clear ownership and feasibility before moving into implementation.

"We now have a strong list of positive solutions derived directly from our operational realities. Let's spend our remaining time clustering these ideas into common themes: automation, staff training, or form standardization. Once grouped, we will vote on which two or three high-impact, feasible solutions we want to pilot first."

💡 The table below provides an example of a completed reverse brainstorming exercise.

1. The Challenge: *What is the How Might We Question we wish to solve?*

How Might We...increase attendance at in-person SNAP E&T orientations?

2. The Reverse Challenge: How Might We achieve the opposite effect?

How Might We...decrease attendance at in-person SNAP E&T orientations?

3. Achieving the Reverse Challenge:

Ideas that would achieve #2

4. Flipping the Reverse Challenge:

Flipped Ideas from #3 to create solutions to #1

Host sessions at times when participants are available

Limit hours of orientations

Host sessions at easily-accessible locations

Make it difficult to access the location (i.e., no public transportation routes)

Send automatic reminders of the orientation location, time, and expectations

Do not communicate with participants in advance regarding orientation time, location, or expectations

5. Discuss and Build on Proposed Solutions

- To increase attendance at in-person orientations, session times, and expectations will be communicated with participants in advance. Sessions will be held in easily accessible locations at times when participants are available.