



For College, Community, and Justice

HOPE4COLLEGE.COM

## BEYOND THE FOOD PANTRY: Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions to Implement Federal Guidance on SNAP Expansion for College Students During COVID-19

Jennifer King, Paula Umaña, Edward Conroy, and Carrie R. Welton

February 1, 2021

While enrollment, retention, and persistence numbers are plummeting across the nation, the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic creates an imminent threat for [college students' ability to secure food, housing, and other basic needs](#). We have an opportunity to help them connect with food benefits and must act now.

Formerly known as food stamps, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federally funded monthly benefit available to individuals and households meeting predetermined asset and income criteria. The [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#), expanded previous limitations to SNAP eligibility access, opening possibilities for college students enrolled in higher education at least half-time, under the **new following two criteria**:

- Students with an **Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0 based on their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)**.
- Students eligible to participate in the **federal or state work-study program during the current academic year** (this applies even if a work-study assignment has not started or is not available).

Higher education institutions must reach eligible students immediately. Beyond the Act's requirement to do so, this will help them secure resources to buy groceries, remain enrolled, and graduate. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice makes the following recommendations to inform, serve, and care for students, especially those who can potentially be eligible for SNAP under the new temporary changes:

1. **Identify \$0 EFC and work-study eligible students.** Communicate their newly SNAP potential eligibility by phone, text, email, financial aid award, work-study program determination, and bursar's communication.

For example: "Congratulations on your award! If you are concerned or have difficulty affording groceries or accessing enough food to eat every day, we have good news: you may be eligible for new opportunities to get additional supports including [SNAP](#). To explore your options and apply, call [add name and contact information of your institution's student support center, regional SNAP hotline (search [here](#)), and/or community partner (if applicable)]."

2. **Provide easy access to help students obtain documents required for SNAP consideration.** Incorporate and highlight links to students' work-study authorization, Student Aid Report (SAR), enrollment profile summary, and other college related documents along with information about the new SNAP eligibility opportunity to the financial aid page, student portal, online orientation platform, scholarships, and emergency aid application (among other channels) to direct students to this information.
3. **Train key staff** (e.g., financial aid officers, counselors, student affairs staff, and student leaders/workers) to amplify the new changes and connect students with support, [using language](#) that empowers them to take action by removing the stigmas related to public benefits.
4. **Engage faculty and student-led organizations to disseminate information about SNAP** during non-academic activities, at the beginning and end of class, via [emails](#), and with a [syllabus statement](#). This will also strengthen students' safety net and increase their sense of belonging.
5. **Establish partnerships with SNAP advocates** (e.g., local social services agencies and/or community-based organizations) to identify referral system ensuring that students get the support they need to navigate, troubleshoot the application process, and obtain SNAP. This will also increase the institution's capacity to connect students with additional financial services like unemployment, utilities, childcare, and cash assistance.

Given the extensive research showing that college improves a vast array of social and economic outcomes, [connecting eligible students to SNAP](#) so they can better learn, should be a priority for higher education institutions.

The empathy and guidance that students receive from trusted sources within their institution will set them up for success, decrease their levels of anxiety, and enable them to access additional financial supports that are fundamental for their learning.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Supporting Students with Access to SNAP](#)
- [Surviving COVID-19: A #RealCollege Guide for Students](#)
- [Supporting #RealCollege Students with Caring Enrollment Management and Financial Aid Practices During COVID-19](#)
- [Getting Started Addressing Basic Needs Insecurity on Campus](#)
- [Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits \(United States Government Accountability Office, 2018\)](#)
- [Hungry to Learn Documentary \(Soledad O'Brien Productions, 2019\)](#)



This brief carries a Creative Commons Attributions 4.0 International License, which permits re-use of Hope Center materials providing that re-use abides by the conditions below.

You are free to:

**Share.** Copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Under the following terms:

**Attribution.** You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**NonCommercial.** You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

**NoDerivatives.** If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

For the full legal code of this Creative Commons license, please visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



For **College, Community, and Justice**

**HOPE4COLLEGE.COM**