Real Collaboration for Real Results—Taking SNAP to the Next Level

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Good morning! As a relatively new member of the FNS Team, I am honored to join you today in this session that focuses on taking SNAP to the next level. I was truly impressed with the stories of collaboration shared by States at yesterday's SNAP sessions.

I want to start by acknowledging that real collaboration is hard and there are many barriers that are often outside your control--funding streams, accountability issues, staffing shortages, and competing or conflicting priorities--just to mention a few. However, these same barriers make it all the more necessary for us to work together. Our combined expertise and funding can support common goals and achieve more comprehensive and far-reaching results. That is the underlying principle that supports the SNAP process, which recognizes that no one program has the resources to support the type of ongoing and comprehensive interventions required to make behavior change happen.

We know that collaboration is the most intense form of partnership between two or more individuals or organizations. Perhaps the technical definition that is most precise is from Arthur Himmelman: "Collaboration is defined as exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources"--and this is the critical one--"enhancing the capacity of one another for mutual benefit and to achieve common purpose."

Some people think of collaboration as a "buzzword" for something that needs to happen when money is scarce. According to Suzanne Morse, President of The Pew Partnership for Civic Change, this is neither all wrong nor all bad since collaboration can save resources—financial, personal, and otherwise. Collaboration has less to do with saving money than with building different relationships, shaping different program areas, and drawing different conclusions from the same circumstances. Collaboration is about thinking and acting differently.

In an article on "Making Things Happen" in the June 2005 Policy and Practice journal, Phil Basso, a consultant with the American Public Health Services Association, identifies five components of a successful group collaboration that you may want to consider in your discussions this morning. These components are:

- **Purpose**—clearly define a shared purpose for the work, with input from all stakeholders.
- **Identification of stakeholders**—identify all groups that will benefit from or in some way be involved in the project to determine how each group will be represented.
- **Criteria for stakeholder representation**—the core group needs to feel strongly about the defined purpose and desired outcome.

- **Climate**—the group's internal climate is set by the relationships formed within the group and the openness of the group to all individual members, including those who join in mid-stream.
- **Outcome**—mutual interest in a desired outcome is a crucial component because it is the issue to fall back on when conflicts arise.

There are many common links between our programs beginning with the FNS overarching mission "To increase food security and reduce hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence." Note the emphasis on "in partnership with cooperating organizations" and the common target audience of "children and low-income people."

FNS is committed to collaboration at all levels. As stated in Under Secretary Bost's April 14 letter to Commissioners, and I quote, "I am writing to invite you to work in partnership with me to improve the eating and physical activity behaviors of people in your State as a preventive approach to reducing diet-related health problems in America."

We also have a common overarching nutrition goal--improved nutrition for children and low-income people. The goal of improving the eating and physical activity behaviors of Americans is not limited to FNS Programs. Rather, it is a priority of many other programs. FNS programs are in the unique position of having a very similar target group--children and low-income people--a group that in general has greater needs.

Working together on one common goal across all FNS programs in a State is the foundation of SNAP--many of you started on that journey at the first National Nutrition Education Conference in 2003. Since that time, many of you have identified objectives and tactics to meet your goal and some of you have made considerable progress toward achieving your goal.

This morning, each State group will be working together to take SNAP to the next level, strategizing how to move forward from where you are now in the SNAP process. The facilitator at your table will guide you through these activities. Take advantage of this dedicated and uninterrupted time to reconnect with your SNAP team, ask questions of FNS staff, and make plans for the future. At this conference in 2003, States planted the first seeds of collaboration through SNAP. Today, we are here to cultivate and nurture this seedling, to help it grow and flourish. Working together, we will succeed. Thank you.

SNAP State Nutrition Action Plans

During the second FNS National Nutrition Education Conference, over 600 people gathered around State-specific tables for this Networking Breakfast. The breakfast provided an opportunity for State teams to meet and discuss accomplishments and consider strategies for the future. Clarence H. Carter, Deputy Administrator, Food Stamp Program, FNS, welcomed and provided the charge to the group. During this event, State teams re-examined their State SNAP goal(s) and reviewed an updated list of potential SNAP goals provided by FNS. States had the option of continuing to work toward their current goal, modifying their existing goal, or choosing a new goal. Overall, evaluations indicate that many attendees found the opportunities to discuss SNAP and network with colleagues very valuable.
What did the States and Territories decide at this Breakfast event? Here are the results:

- 39 States agreed to promote healthy eating and physical activity per the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*,
- 14 States will promote fruit and vegetable consumption,
- Two States will focus on promoting healthy community/school nutrition environments, and
- The States of Massachusetts, Illinois, and Utah chose more than one goal.

The SNAPs focus on a common goal and promote collaboration and joint planning to establish objectives and tactics for achieving the selected goal. State teams, consisting of key staff representing USDA nutrition assistance programs, will continue working to take SNAP to the next level for their State. FNS is facilitating and supporting this process by providing technical assistance and support to States.

To facilitate continued advancement of SNAP goals, the FNS Regional Offices will sponsor regional cross-program meetings involving State and local agency staff during the next 3 years. These meetings will:

- emphasize the importance of putting collaboration into action by connecting nutrition education efforts across FNS nutrition assistance programs in each region;
- communicate and reemphasize the FNS vision for SNAP and FNS' continued commitment to advancing real collaboration;
- highlight successful SNAP initiatives of States within each Region so all can benefit from lessons learned; and
- enable State and local program staff to dialogue and share ideas with FNS and each other on how to strengthen their cross-program nutrition education efforts.