

A Sustainable Model of Outreach for Improved Immigrant Participation
In the Food Stamp Program:

A Case Study of Western Queens

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Introduction

The cornerstone of Federal food assistance programs, food stamps are a vital benefit for low-income households that cannot otherwise access sufficient nutrition. The monthly allowance is intended to subsidize food expenditures for households, many of which are composed of the working poor, and majority of which include children. However many families, especially immigrant households, are unable to access food stamps. It is estimated that in New York City there are 717, 457 eligible households not participating in the Food Stamp Program, 25% of which are immigrant households.

Low participation rates among eligible immigrants can be partially attributed to frequent changes to eligibility requirements. Prior to the Welfare Reform of 1996 most lawfully residing immigrants were able to apply for food stamps. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 prohibited a majority of immigrants from participating in the Food Stamp Program. The 2002 Farm Bill restored eligibility to immigrants of any age who could verify that they had been legally residing in the U.S. for five years, qualified immigrants under eighteen years of age, and recipients of certain disability based benefits. Although these changes have been in place for several years there are many eligible immigrant households that are unaware that they now qualify for food stamps. According to the USDA, lack of awareness of eligibility is the most prominent factor accounting for low participation rates.¹

New York City is home to some of the most vibrant immigrant communities. Given the shifting regulations on eligibility it is not surprising that the communities with some of the highest concentrations of immigrants are also the communities with the highest rates of food stamp non-participation among eligible immigrants. Data from the 2000 census shows that neighborhoods in Western Queens are among the neighborhoods in New York City exhibiting this trend. The other community with similarly high rates of food stamp non-participation among eligible immigrants is Coney Island. We chose to work with Western Queens in particular because it would give us multiple communities to work with, a majority of which are Spanish-speaking, and therefore optimal for targeted outreach. The communities we included in our effort had approximately 36,874² food stamp eligible non-participants. Western Queens also has the highest percentages of foreign born inhabitants.

Last year FoodChange produced a report, “Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program: An In-depth Analysis of New York City’s Immigrant Communities, Estimates of unmet Need and Barriers to Access.” To formulate recommendations for continued action in addressing the issue of under-enrollment among eligible immigrants FoodChange held a forum with leaders from New York City’s non-profit community, service providers, and elected officials. From this forum emerged the recommendation that FoodChange use its existing networks and relationships with service providers to promote the message of immigrant eligibility in communities exhibiting the highest rates of non-participation among eligible immigrants. For the last six months we have worked

¹ “Non-Citizen Requirements in the Food Stamp Program.” The United States Department of Agriculture. Jan. 2003 http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Legislation/pdfs/Non_Citizen_Guidance.pdf (15 Oct. 2006)

² These numbers are based on the 2000 census

hard to create a sustainable model for outreach targeting eligible immigrants not participating in the Food Stamp Program based on our own work in Western Queens.

Procedure:

Defining our objective:

Before we could even begin creating our model we needed to have a clearly defined objective for our outreach. The first step in this process was delineating our own role. For many years FoodChange has responded to the structural barriers that prevent New Yorker's from enrolling in the Food Stamp Program through media, outreach and food stamp pre-screening. The process of pre-screening involves a trained employee of FoodChange evaluating a client's eligibility for food stamps using the food stamp calculator³ that simulates the actual application process. We also provide a call center where potential applicants or individuals denied food stamps can inquire about personal situations and concerns as well as clarify confusion about eligibility. Considering these pre-existing services we determined that the most effective way for us to address under enrollment among eligible immigrants in the Food Stamp Program would be to focus on more of the social barriers to enrollment. We felt a response to social barriers would allow us to approach the issue more holistically. To ensure a complete approach we honed our objective so our outreach encouraged community organizations to hyphenate their message so that it was one part eligibility and another part endorsement of pre-screening services as an important first step towards applying for food stamps.

By focusing on social barriers we emphasized those obstacles that persist as a function of ingrained communal norms and practices; those beliefs and behaviors within a community that encumber the process of immigrants applying for food stamps. Examples of such barriers include: lack of awareness of eligibility, fear of public charge, distrust of government agencies, language barriers and the perpetuation of misinformation within the communities. These barriers had been identified by FoodChange in a recent report entitled "Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program: An In-depth Analysis of New York City's Immigrant Communities, Estimates of Unmet Need and Barriers to Access."

Lack of awareness is very much an umbrella issue, covering other barriers to enrollment. An effective outreach strategy would convey information on eligibility and simultaneously speak to the other barriers listed in the report. For example, as an immigrant learns about their potential eligibility, they would also be informed of their right to a translator at the application site.

Identifying Target Audience:

Once we had established our objective we had to select the audience for our outreach. Several factors were critical to this decision. We knew we wanted our audience to be connected in some way to the immigrant community. Other considerations included:

- Receptiveness to information

³ This tool is also available in paper format should there be any technical failure preventing the use of a computer

- Ability to commit to continuing the outreach with other members of their community,
- Potential effectiveness in expanding awareness of the Food Stamp Program.

We realized that by targeting community leaders who engage directly with immigrants we could make certain that our audiences were connected to immigrant populations. Community leaders, by virtue of their status, also have significant legitimacy within their communities and can serve as important connections between FoodChange and immigrant populations. Finally, we were careful to create a simple and replicable model hoping that leaders would continue the outreach after we retracted, and therefore ensure a level of sustainability. The only factor we could not account for during the planning phase was how receptive community leaders would be. It was not until we began contacting community leaders to participate in the outreach that we would realize the limitations of our target audience.

From the very beginning of the outreach design we had to take into consideration a number of variables. The diversity of the population, immigrant relationships with the community organizations and the food stamp office, accessibility of public transportation, and scheduling conflicts, were among the many factors accounted for in the final model. The model, as we understood it, would be both difficult to implement and reproduce should it fail to account for the myriad of obstacles to community participation.

Our outreach was intended specifically for community leaders, it was therefore their preliminary insights that we sought out from the very beginning of the outreach design process. An important preliminary step was to identify who in the community interacted with other members of the community in a leadership capacity. Leaders, as we conceived of them, would be individuals who exhibit the following qualities:

- Provide services such as health care, counseling, and daycare, that establish them as authorities in particular areas
- They are recognized by those who receive their services as authorities on certain issues
- Those individuals who have earned the trust of fellow community members, either through service, or visibility, or connections to certain groups.
- People actively involved in community affairs who have demonstrated a willingness to take on responsibility
- Individuals with experience in community organizing and effective at convening community members around specific issues.

In order to be even more specific we looked for leaders who worked in sectors where they would be most likely to interact with eligible immigrant populations and could directly link a message on food stamp enrollment to their pre-existing services. For example, a doctor would be able to promote food stamp enrollment while encouraging clients to consume more nutritious food. In this same scenario the clients would be open to the doctor's advice because it is consistent with the scope of their services. Another factor influencing our contact choices was the time frame for the outreach. It was not an option to contact every single service provider in Western Queens, we could however seek out those most qualified to disseminate the information and hope that the knowledge would trickle down through community networks.

Involving the Local Government and Administrators:

In addition to inviting members of the community it is imperative that the local government and representatives from the appropriate government agencies are present. Ultimately outreach should be about framing broad issues so that they become locally relevant, however you should never lose sight of the big picture. Government officials have the capacity to influence policy decisions; they will also bring media coverage and increased visibility to your cause. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) processes applications for food stamps in New York City, it was therefore essential that they be aware of our outreach initiative and invited to the meetings. Your focus on particular issues gives you a greater wealth and depth of knowledge than government agencies that cover a range of issues. You will find yourself in a position to inform officials and agencies of guidelines for immigrant eligibility. Inviting officials and agencies will also inspire community participants who might be unaware of the political dimensions of their activism.

Our contacts were ultimately selected from several databases with extensive listings. To find this information for your own community contact local food banks for the listings of pantries they deliver to, organizations that have authored reports on these issues will likely have a long list of contacts, and other organizations  we have collaborated in past are also good starting points. Our final list included over 150 service providers, and political officials and administrators from Western Queens. Our contacts represented the following services:

- Food pantries
- Daycare and pre-school providers
- Immigration rights advocates
- WIC centers
- Religious leaders
- Farmers Market coordinators
- Public libraries
- Local museums
- Community Board members
- District Managers
- HRA supervisors
- City Council members and representatives

As evidenced by the varied backgrounds of the participating service providers, our criterion was flexible enough to produce a range of leaders. Food pantries and WIC centers were obvious choices because their clients are likely to meet the economic guidelines for food stamp eligibility. Organizations such as Greenmarket, which organizes farmer's markets across New York City, and the Queens Museum of Art, had both demonstrated a commitment to promoting healthy food through community programming. Diversifying some of our audience while still maintaining the basic standard of regular interactions with immigrant populations enabled us to reach non-participating immigrants through a variety of avenues.

Gaining Community Support

Once we had assembled a preliminary list of contacts we randomly selected service providers, and appropriate officials and administrators from all of the communities and made plans for individual meetings. We kept this process random because it was intended to merely give a glimpse of the overall outreach experience. The purpose of these meetings was to assess the community's receptivity to our targeted outreach and what issues they felt were most pressing. We also wanted to determine what factors should be taken into consideration when planning the outreach. Most importantly, we wanted to see if members from the communities considered the under-enrollment of eligible immigrants in the Food Stamp Program to be a pressing issue. From the very beginning we intended our outreach to be a community initiative; therefore it was essential that the community feel connected to what we were identifying as a community priority. Some of our initial contacts were surprised to learn that immigrants are eligible for food stamps, other organizations turned us away apologetically explaining that they simply did not have the time to take interest in yet another issue, however a majority of the organizations were extremely supportive and encouraged us to hold a series of meetings for service providers where we could review the regulations dictating immigrant eligibility.

Based on our preliminary conversations we began coordinating our outreach. We wanted to create an agenda for our meeting that would most effectively meet our objective. We knew that we had to limit the span of the meetings to under two hours to avoid scheduling conflicts. Covering basic eligibility for immigrants applying for food stamps was our primary objective. We also wanted to include a strategizing session where meeting participants could develop personalized plans of action for putting the information to task. This two-pronged approach created the opportunity to follow up on the personalized outreach plans as well as compelled participants to conceive of themselves as important actors in addressing the issue of immigrant under-enrollment. Delegating responsibility, or suggesting that your participants think of their own small obligations in tackling an issue, creates a sense of ownership that is crucial to the success of outreach.

The final component to the content of our meeting was connecting our outreach to FoodChange's food stamp pre-screening services. Conscious of not overwhelming our clients with excess information we chose to focus the outreach on the most important immigrant provisions. Complimenting this approach was FoodChange's pre-existing relationship with the Western Queens based Sunnyside Community Services. FoodChange works with Sunnyside to facilitate pre-screening in the Western Queens area. Meeting attendees were encouraged to use their newly acquired information to inspire their clients to contact Sunnyside and receive food stamp pre-screenings. Our outreach was a necessary first step towards food stamp enrollment since clients are unlikely to even be pre-screen for food stamps if they think they have no chance of being found eligible. The materials used in the meetings can be found in the appendix.

Mobilizing the Community

Once the content of the meeting had been settled our next step was to begin mobilizing the community. We had established our contacts and some initial links to the

community. Our next step was to secure a space for our meetings and develop a contact strategy. Given the dearth of free and accessible spaces in New York City we divided the seven communities into three outreach groups. Proximity to public transportation was a key consideration. We assumed that most people would not own a car and would be unwilling to commute long distances to attend our meetings. In the contact phase of our outreach this consideration was recognized and applauded by community members who had been forced to travel to Manhattan for many of their other meetings. Once the space for the meetings had been confirmed we began contacting members of the corresponding communities.

The following recommendations will enhance your contact's responsiveness to an outreach proposal:

- Our contacts were the most responsive in the afternoon. This is a time of the day when service providers had already addressed immediate concerns and could be found at their desk with time to spare.
- Try to make immediate connections between yourself and your contact. Referencing leaders I had already met with in the community contributed to our legitimacy among the contacts
- Have a clear mission statement for both your outreach and the organization you are representing
- Be prepared to defend your position and to encounter individuals who are skeptical of your initiative
- Remember that you never stop networking while conducting outreach. Inviting community members to a meeting is a great opportunity to ask your contact if they know anyone else from the community who might be interested in your event.
- Ask your contacts to provide or confirm their e-mail address. Although many service providers do not have access to email, for those who do it is the easiest way to correspond beyond the initial phone call.

It is crucial to remember that everyone who accepts your invitation will not necessarily attend your event, you should therefore strive to contact as many people as possible. It is also critical that you confirm your expected attendees before the meeting. Service providers have very busy schedules that are subject to frequent changes, increasing the likelihood that they are overbooked or have forgotten about your event. Confirming the attendees also creates the opportunity for clarifying issues that might not have been immediately apparent.

OUTREACH IMPLEMENTATION

The most time consuming component of outreach is always going to be the preparation. Once contacts, space, and content have been established the major concern

shifts to whether or not those participating in the outreach are going to be receptive and committed to the message. To easily and accurately convey the message of immigrant eligibility for food stamps we relied upon several simple flyers and summarizations of basic requirements for eligibility complimented by a very interactive community strategizing session.

FoodChange was able to hold a total of four meetings. The first meeting included the communities of Astoria, Long Island City, and Sunnyside. The second meeting included the communities of Jackson Heights and Woodside, and the third meeting included the communities of Corona and Elmhurst. The final meeting was hosted at the Queens Museum of Art and included leaders from all seven of the communities. All four meetings were hosted in one of the communities from which leaders were invited and were in close proximity to public transportation. A total of sixty two⁴ community leaders attended

The format of the meeting was as follows:

MEETING AGENDA	
I.	Greetings introductions: <i>10 minutes</i>
II.	Introduction: How do food stamps make communities stronger?: <i>10 minutes</i>
III.	Discussion: Immigrant eligibility and the food stamp program: <i>20 minutes</i>
IV.	Community Strategizing: What can be done? <i>30 minutes</i>
	a. Break out into focus groups for discussion: <i>10 minutes</i>
	b. Share ideas about possible outreach efforts: <i>10 minutes</i>
	c. Come up with plan for implementation: <i>10 minutes</i>
V.	Develop plan for follow-up: <i>15 minutes</i>
VI.	Closing: <i>5 minutes</i>
TOTAL TIME: 1.5 HOURS	

The discussion of immigrant eligibility provided both information, and most importantly, an opportunity for community leaders to ask questions related to their particular experiences. The strategizing sessions were even more fruitful. As community members registered that many of their clients were eligible but not participating in the Food Stamp Program and could benefit dramatically from enrollment, they began to recognize their responsibility as leaders in encouraging and facilitating enrollment. The key findings gleaned from both of these processes highlight the importance and effectiveness of this format for outreach.

IMPORTANT FINDINGS

During discussions of immigrant eligibility for food stamps community leaders were unaware of the following eligibility requirements:

⁴ This number represents community leaders who attended each of the meetings. Leaders who attended multiple meetings are counted for each of the meetings they attended. Leaders who failed to sign-into the meeting are unaccounted for.

- Undocumented parents who are ineligible for food stamps but have children who are legal permanent residents (LPR) may apply for food stamps on behalf of their children without fear of penalty or inquiry into their own residency status.
- Immigrant spouses who are victims of domestic violence, children of battered immigrant spouses, and immigrant parents of battered children may be eligible to receive food stamps even if they do not meet some of the basic eligibility requirements
- Food stamps will not count as a Public Charge
- Children of immigrant parents will not have to pay back the food stamp allotment when they are older.
- Immigrant applicants who are unable to furnish appropriate proof of immigration status will not be penalized by HRA administrators

Community Leader Profile

Sister Mary runs a weekly food pantry in Astoria. Her clients are mostly Spanish speaking and return weekly to the pantry to help subsidize their groceries. At our initial visit she claimed that most of her clients are illegal and therefore ineligible for food stamps. At a community outreach meeting Sister Mary learned that documented children under 18 are eligible for food stamps, and she realized that many of her clients may have children on whose behalf they can apply for food stamps. She developed her own outreach strategy that will involve sending out a mailing of letters to her parishioners and pantry clients informing them of immigrant eligibility

After these points were explored we asked leaders to develop personalized plans of actions. We specified that these plans should be simple and easily implemented within the immediate future.

Below are some of the plans of actions devised by community leaders:

- Reproduce handouts from the meetings and make them available with other public handouts regularly distributed by organization
- Translate meeting materials into Bengali and distribute them at local Hindu temples.
- Post fliers and invite food stamp pre-screeners to assist clients during food pantry operation hours
- Cover immigrant eligibility rules in organization newsletters
- Create mailings to parishioners that review immigrant eligibility and encourage parishioners to visit a pre-screening site
- Incorporate a message on food stamp eligibility during monthly parent meetings
- Host pre-screeners at NYC Greenmarkets
- Incorporate information on immigrant eligibility and pre-screenings at upcoming

community fairs.

- Discuss immigrant eligibility with fellow staff at HRA
- Take advantage of community board funding resources and USDA matching funds to finance and expand food stamp outreach initiatives.
- Use Spanish language newspapers and radio programs to get the message out about immigrant eligibility
- MHRA WIC centers will try to make information on food stamps available at their sites

- Groups are going to contact the USDA if they cannot find food stamp outreach materials translated into a particular language used within their communities.

BENEFITS OF CHOSEN STRATEGY

Our strategy integrated components that we believe were effective in addressing the issues of under enrollment among eligible immigrant populations as well as other community concerns vocalized during the outreach. We felt that by hosting the meetings at community specific locations successful at keeping the dialog as locally focused as possible. The decision to combine communities and hold four separate meetings guaranteed that the meetings were accessible, that individuals unable to attend one of the meetings could attend a meeting at a later date. This process also allowed us to learn from previous mistakes and improve the meetings format for each subsequent gathering. By being so specific about whom we contacted to attend the meetings we ensure that the meeting size would be small enough for focused dialog on the issue. Furthermore, the information presented was general enough that community members felt comfortable relaying the message to their clients. Had we chosen to be overly technical we may have confused our participants therefore discouraging them from sharing the information with their clients.

We selected the Western Queens areas recognizing that the immigrant population was largely made up of Spanish speaking immigrants. Their language was really the only common denominator other than location. We did not want to pigeon whole all immigrants together as their concerns, openness to the program etc. would vary even more significantly than it already does. We were therefore able to effectively target a specific group through a customized strategy that was cognizant of language barriers.

Working with community has also, as we had hoped, rendered the model more sustainable. Community leaders made connections with Sunnyside pre-screener at the meetings; they also received comprehensive contact information from FoodChange. Community leaders are now more aware of immigrant eligibility guidelines and the resources available to help them to become more actively engaged and to support their activism. Follow-up with community leaders has shown that many of them have been proactive with the implementation of their personalized outreach strategies.

LIMITATIONS OF CHOSEN STRATEGY

Our chosen approach to outreach had several significant limitations. Our first obstacle was the audience we chose for our meetings. Community leaders, by nature of their position and the services they provide, are extremely busy and do not always have the flexibility in their schedules and their agendas to be actively involved in issues beyond the mission of their organization. Working with leaders from different fields also diminishes the likelihood of finding a meeting time that is compatible with everyone's schedules. Furthermore, many community leaders, especially those working in very small and under-funded operations, do not have access to email. Phone calls require extensive and time-consuming follow up, and with the leader's busy schedules, are oftentimes unsuccessful.

As previously mentioned, outreach also focused primarily on improving enrollment for Latino immigrants. We were able to bring in representatives from the Indian, Eastern European, and Korean community, but they were among the minority. There are multiple immigrant communities within Western Queens that are not Spanish speaking and in desperate need of access to food stamps. Community groups that work with non-Spanish speaking immigrant groups are encouraged to customize this model so that it is relevant to their communities.

The most significant limitation was our time frame. To establish oneself in a community and among its members requires a sustained effort that was simply unfeasible. More time could translate into greater opportunities for follow-up and continued networking among new activists that would further develop their personalized plans of action.

MEASURING IMPACT OF OUTREACH

Signs of successful outreach

- Number of community leaders who have attended your meetings
- Positive testimony from recent food stamp applicants
- Increased circulation of informational materials
- Community leader implementation of self-designed outreach
- Local press coverage of outreach efforts
- Increase in phone calls to pre-screening centers

FoodChange's outreach included sixty two community leaders from Western Queens. Our leaders represented the seven communities we had focused on in the initiative. All sixty two individuals who attended our meeting gave positive feedback with many saying that the information was new and would be helpful in future efforts to promote the Food Stamp Program. Everyone who attended the meetings was given the materials attached in the appendix and expressed their intentions to make the information available to clients and fellow community members. Every leader at the meetings developed their own personal outreach plans and committed to its implementation. We were also able to bring heightened visibility to issue through extensive press coverage of our event at the Queens Museum of Art. A total of thirteen news agencies, both print and television covered the event and highlighted the role of FoodChange in improving enrollment among eligible immigrants. The time frame of the initiative does not allow us to fully measure its impact on immigrant utilization of pre-screening services.

This model of outreach is designed to facilitate awareness and to generate referrals to experts in the field. The model operates on the assumptions that community leaders play a key role in the community systems that influence individual decisions to contact pre-screeners. With greater information on immigrant requirements for the Food Stamp Program community leaders will be both increasingly aware of whom among their clients and peers are eligible, and able to give informed referrals to food stamp experts. Community leaders are also in the position to incorporate a message on food stamps into

their existing services. A successful meeting will provide information that is new to the community and will inspire leaders to take pro-active steps in their services to increase immigrant enrollment in the Food Stamp Program. Individuals who use this model should be prepared to be available for questions after the meetings, help produce additional materials, and connect leaders pre-screening services. There should also be a plan for following up on community leader's progress with the self-designed outreach plans. With all of these steps accounted for, any group that choose this model should look for signs of shifting awareness in their prospective communities and measure their impact accordingly.

Appendix I: Outreach Model

Project Title:

A Sustainable Model of Outreach for Improved Immigrant Participation in the Food Stamp Program: A Case Study of Western Queens.

Goal:

Increase enrollment in the Food Stamp program among eligible immigrants living in Western Queens

Objective:

Create and implement outreach designed around the needs of a community so that community leaders can effectively overcome social barriers to food stamp enrollment and through promoting participation in the Food Stamp Program among community members. Community leaders should be trained on basic eligibility, and develop personal plans of actions to effectively refer their clients to pre-screening services.

Procedure:

- Identify audience that will be:
 - Receptive to the information
 - Closely connected to and representative of immigrant groups
 - Able to effectively communicate message of food stamp eligibility for immigrants
 - Some recommendations for service providers:
 - Food pantries
 - Daycare and pre-school providers
 - Immigration rights advocates
 - WIC centers
 - Religious leaders
 - Farmers Market coordinators
 - Public libraries
 - Local museums
 - Community Board members
 - District Managers
 - HRA supervisors
 - City Council members and representatives
- Local government officials and representative from the Food Stamp Offices should be invited to your outreach.
 - Government officials will make your work more visible and will attract local press
 - People from the Food Stamp Office must be involved. They can reassure community leaders of their commitment to making improvements that will increase enrollment of eligible immigrants and provide input on immigrant reception at food stamp centers.
- Hold preliminary conversations with members of the community

- These meetings are an important first step towards building support for the outreach
- Ask community leaders about what they perceive as the barriers to participation in the Federal Food Stamp Program and how they feel they should be addressed.
- Get community feedback on best outreach practices such as:
 - Times service providers are generally available
 - Optimal time for scheduling the meeting
 - Factors that should be considered when selecting a meeting site
 - What commitments can be expected from the leadership
 - Recommendations for meeting content
- Organize content of outreach around social barriers to participation highlighted in “Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program: An In-depth analysis of New York City’s Immigrant Communities, Estimates of Unmet needs and Barriers to Access.
 - Lack of awareness and outreach about the federal Food Stamp program
 - Language barriers
 - Fear of deportation
 - Fear of Food Stamps qualifying as a public charge
 - Discrimination and fear of government agencies
- Create materials that summarize important requirements for eligibility. Your materials should review the following information
 - Who is potentially eligible for food stamps
 - Individuals who have been legal permanent residents (LPR) for five years
 - Children under the age of 18 who have LPR status
 - Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking⁵
 - Individuals who have LPR status and have completed 40 work quarters
 - People receiving disability related assistance or benefits
 - Any information specific to your community or to the particular ethnic group with which you are working.
- Secure locations for community meetings
 - Meeting locations should be selected as far in advance as possible
 - Look for locations that can accommodate the optimal number of participants
 - Meeting sites should be in close proximity to train stations so that they are accessible to all of your participants
 - Meeting spaces should be large enough to allow for free movement and interaction with the material

⁵ The regulations dictating eligibility for this group are very specific. Community leaders should be aware that clients who fall into these categories may be eligible for food stamps and should be encouraged to speak with organizations who specialize in these situations.

- The person or organization providing the space should be contacted several days prior to the meeting to confirm the availability.
- Contact community leaders
 - Community leader should be notified of your event as far ahead of time as possible.
 - Contacts tend to be most responsive in the afternoon. This is a time of the day when service providers had already addressed immediate concerns and could be found at their desk with time to spare.
 - Try to make immediate connections between yourself and your contact. Referencing leaders I had already met with in the community contributed to our legitimacy among the contacts
 - Have a clear mission statement for both your outreach and the organization you are representing
 - Be prepared to defend you position and to encounter individuals who are skeptical of initiative.
 - Never stop networking while conducting outreach. When inviting community members to a meeting ask your contact if they know anyone else from the community who might be interested in your event.
 - Ask your contacts to provide or confirm their e-mail address. Although many service providers do not have access to email, for those who do it is the easiest way to correspond beyond the initial phone call.
 - Plan to confirm attendance several days before the event.

Community Outreach Meetings

- Introductions
 - Every person present in the room should introduce themselves and the organization/group they are representing
 - Be prepared to review general information on the federal Food Stamp Program.
 - Frame the purpose of the meeting so that everyone in the room recognizes their responsibility in promoting food stamps among their clients/ fellow community members
 - Attendees should be informed of existing services, such as pre-screening, that connect their clients/ fellow community members to experts on food stamps
- Review of Immigrant Eligibility
 - Go over content reviewed in your meeting materials
 - Throughout the review of immigrant eligibility ask your audience if they need any clarification
 - Emphasize to your audience that they are not expected to become experts of immigrant eligibility but should be prepared to offer general

information and should be able to guide their clients to experts in the field.

- Strategizing Session
 - Attendees should be asked to develop personal plans of action to include a message on food stamp eligibility in the other services they provide
 - Emphasize the importance of setting short-term goals that can be implemented within a two-week time frame. Outreach providers more likely to meet these short-term goals.
 - Go around the room and have everyone share their outreach concept.
 - If members of the group have difficulty developing a strategy be prepared to give them some ideas as well as encourage the group to assist in this process.
 - Invite the group to contact you if they need any assistance in implementing their outreach plan.
- Wrapping-Up
 - Encourage groups to share contact information and to network as they work on their outreach strategies
 - Underline the supporting role that you play and your willingness to help with local outreach strategies
 - Set a short-term goal for yourself for re-contacting groups and checking-in with them on the progress of their outreach

Evaluating Your Outreach

Signs of successful outreach

- Number of community leaders who have attended your meetings
- Positive testimony from recent food stamp applicants
- Increased circulation of informational materials
- Community leader implementation of self-designed outreach
- Local press coverage of outreach efforts
- Increase in phone calls to pre-screening centers

This model of outreach is designed to facilitate awareness and to generate referrals to experts in the field. The model operates on the assumptions that community leaders play a key role in the community systems that influence individual decisions to contact pre-screeners. With greater information on immigrant requirements for the Food Stamp Program community leaders will be both increasingly aware of whom among their clients and peers are eligible, and able to give informed referrals to food stamp experts. Community leaders are also in the position to incorporate a message on food stamps into their existing services. A successful meeting will provide information that is new to the community and will inspire leaders to take pro-active steps in their services to increase immigrant enrollment in the Food Stamp Program. Individuals who use this model

should be prepared to be available for questions after the meetings, help produce additional materials, and connect leaders pre-screening services. There should also be a plan for following up on community leader's progress with the self-designed outreach plans. With all of these steps accounted for, any group that choose this model should look for signs of shifting awareness in their prospective communities and measure their impact accordingly.

Appendix 2

Food Stamp Outreach Resources

“Food Stamp Outreach” The USDA Food and Nutrition Services.
< <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/>>.

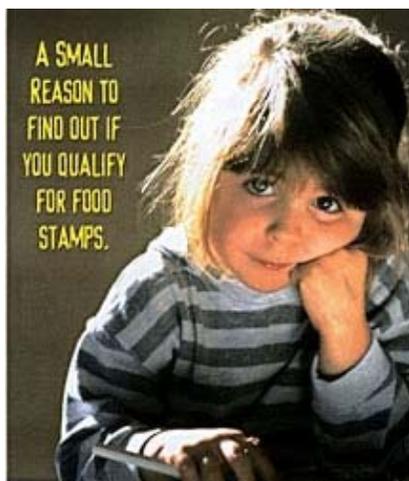
The USDA’s online food stamp toolkit has links to resources for local agencies, faith based organizers, and retailers who want to help eligible members in their communities enroll in the Food Stamp Program. This site provides templates and ideas for potential initiatives

“Food Stamp Informational Materials in Other Languages” The USDA Food and Nutrition Services. < <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/translations.htm>>

Thirty seven languages are represented in the translated materials available from the USDA. These materials can be printed and reproduced for distribution among clients.

“Measuring Community Impact: Where to Start, Where to Go” The United Way.
18 May 2006 < <http://national.unitedway.org/clc/files/measuringCI.ppt>>

This power point presentation provided concrete examples of different approaches to evaluating the success of your outreach. This presentation is also a valuable reference tool for understanding what considerations will help ensure an effective project.



You May Qualify for Food Stamps!

If you can answer yes to ANY of the questions below and you are documented then you may be eligible for Food Stamps.

- Are you a documented immigrant who has been in the U.S. for five years?
- Do you have documented children under 18 years of age?
- Have you completed 40 work quarters? (There are 4 quarters in a year)
- Are you receiving disability related assistance or benefits?

What you should know before applying:

- You will NOT be penalized if you apply but are found ineligible
- Food Stamps will NOT be counted as a public charge
- The Food Stamp Office will NOT report undocumented immigrants to USCIS
- Undocumented parents who apply on behalf of their children will NOT be penalized.

For More Information Contact FoodChange
212-894-8060
www.foodchange.org

UNA PEQUEÑA
RAZÓN PARA
AVERIGUAR SI
PUEDE
OBTENER
CUPONES
PARA
ALIMENTOS



Usted Puede Ser Eligible Para Recibir Cupones para Alimentos!

Si usted puede contestar 'si' a unas de las preguntas siguientes usted puede ser elegible para cupones de alimentos

- ¿Es usted un inmigrante documentado que ha estado en E.E.U.U. por cinco años?
- ¿Tiene usted niños documentados bajo 18 años?
- ¿Ha usted terminado 40 cuartos del trabajo? (hay 4 cuartos en un año)
- ¿Está usted recibiendo alguna pensión por invalidéz o algun beneficio?

Qué usted debe saber antes de aplicar:

- NO le penalizarán si usted se aplica pero se encuentra ineligible
- Los Cupones Para Alimentos NO serán contados como carga pública
- La oficina de los Cupones Para Alimentos NO divulgarán a inmigrantes indocumentados al USCIS
- NO penalizarán a los padres indocumentados que aplican para sus niños.

Para más información llamar a FoodChange

212-894-8060

www.foodchange.org

Appendix 5

Office of the District Director

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 North Los Angeles Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

March 3, 2004

Attention: Low-Income Immigrants
Subject: Food Stamps Will Not Affect Potential applicants for U.S. CIS Benefits

Dear Customers:

The U.S. Government wants to ensure that you receive food assistance if you are eligible under the Food Stamp Program. This nutrition program of the United States Department of Agriculture is meant to assure the health and well-being of you and your family.

Many immigrants have fears or misunderstanding about how services like Food Stamps may affect their immigration status.

As a District Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S. CIS- formerly known as INS), I want to assure you that applying for and receiving food stamps will have no impact on your application to become, or your status as, a permanent resident.

When you are applying to become a permanent resident, you are not considered a "public charge" if you are using food programs (such as Food Stamps, WIC and school meals), health care benefits or other programs *that do not give cash*.

U.S. CIS officers will not be asking you if you receive non-cash benefits like these. The only time U.S. CIS officers can ask about an immigrant's use of food stamps is when the interviewing officer suspects benefits were used illegally or acquired in a fraudulent manner.

We want to encourage you to access Food Stamps and assistance programs for which you may be eligible without fear of their affect on your immigration status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane E. Arellano".

Jane E. Arellano
District Director
USCIS

www.uscis.gov

Office of the District Director
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 North Los Angeles Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

March 2, 2004

Atención: Inmigrantes de Bajos Ingresos
Tema: Las Estampillas de Comida No Afectarán Su Estado Migratorio

Estimado Apicante:

El Gobierno De los Estados Unidos quiere asegurarse que UD. reciba la asistencia de comida si UD. es elegible bajo del programa de Estampillas de Comida. Este programa de nutrición del Departamento de Agricultura del Estados Unidos es para asegurar la salud y el bienestar de UD. y su familia.

Muchos inmigrantes tienen miedo de aplicar para el programa porque no saben que servicios como las Estampillas de Comida no afectan su estado de inmigración.

Como Directora del Distrito de Servicios de Ciudadanía y Inmigración de los Estados Unidos (el USCIS-anteriormente conocido como el INS) quiero asegurarle que si usted aplica para o recibe Estampillas de Comida esto no va afectar su:

- ❖ aplicación para hacerse residente permanente de los Estados Unidos
- ❖ o aplicación para hacerse ciudadano.

Agentes del USCIS no le preguntaran si usted recibe beneficios de programas como Estampillas de Comida, WIC, Comidas Escolares, Beneficios de Salud y otros programas en los cuales usted no recibe asistencia monetaria. (La unica vez que el USCIS puede preguntar a un inmigrante sobre si obtiene estampillas para alimentos es cuando el oficial sospecha que los beneficios han sido utilizados o adquiridos ilegalmente).

Cuando usted esta aplicando para hacerse residente permanente, usted no es considerado un "cargo publico" para el estado si usted usa estos programas que no ofrecen dinero.

Queremos animarlos a que tome ventaja de las Estampillas de Comida y otros programas de asistencia para los cuales usted pudiera ser elegible sin miedo que esto le vaya afectar su estado migratorio.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane E. Arellano".

Jane E. Arellano
Directora del Distrito
USCIS