

CalFresh Application Experience Project



In collaboration with San Francisco State University nursing students

The SF-Marine Food Bank worked with the San Francisco State School of Nursing to learn about the experience of applying for CalFresh benefits in San Francisco.

The Food Bank sought to learn what parts of the process were easy or hard for applicants, how applicants were treated, and what the bottlenecks were in the process – all by having a nursing student document the experience of a pre-screened person applying to CalFresh without the special assistance of a CalFresh outreach worker.

September, 2015

15 pre-screened people participated in our project, but only 5 people got CalFresh

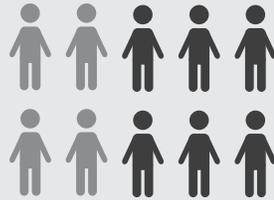


Had competing priorities and did not have time to apply

Feared that CalFresh would negatively affect their taxes


Application

Online Paper



Overwhelmed by application and could not get help they needed (3 participants)


Interview

Phone In Person



County never processed application

Missed scheduled interview


Documents

Submitted Some Doc's Submitted All Doc's



Did not submit required documents


Determination



Withdrew application

5
Got CalFresh



10
Didn't Get CalFresh

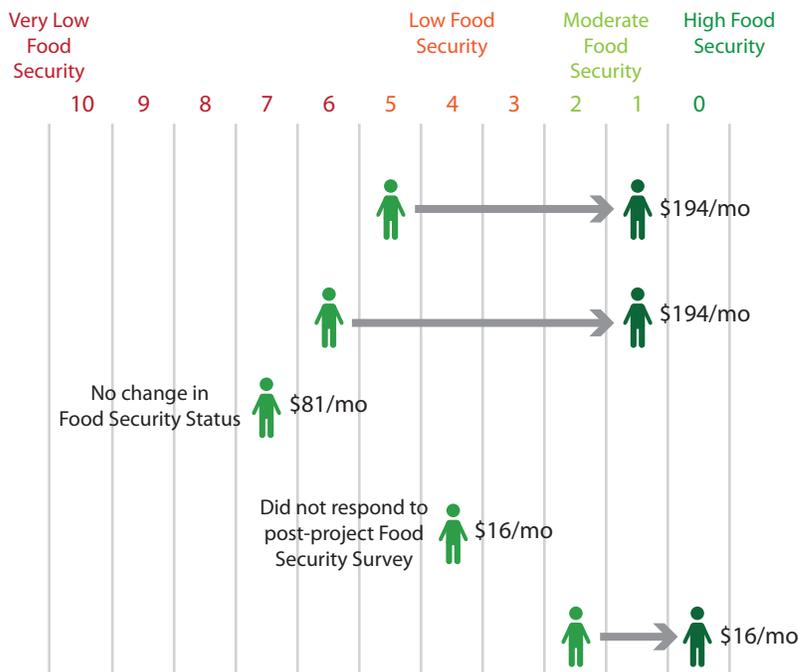


Denied due to income ineligibility

Impact:

We used the USDA's 'U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module' to measure the self-reported food security status for participants before and after they received their eligibility determination.

We found that food security status improved for most of the five participants who qualified for CalFresh benefits.



What We Learned:

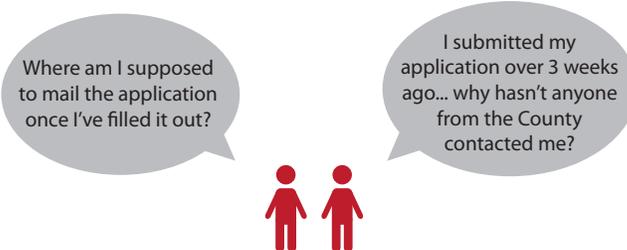
- 1 Finding applicants was not difficult.** Among potential applicants, awareness and interest were not obstacles to participation. Contrary to prevailing wisdom, people did not need to be "talked into" applying for CalFresh, and they were typically very interested in participating in the project once they knew that their incomes made them likely eligible.
- 2 Three quarters of the project participants were already receiving Medi-Cal but not CalFresh.** Even though the same agency oversees both programs, poorly integrated enrollment processes means that most people have to apply separately for CalFresh. Eleven participants (73%) were already receiving Medi-Cal at the time of enrollment in the project. These participants, and likely many other San Francisco residents, engaged with SF-HSA to apply for public benefits but weren't offered CalFresh.
- 3 Almost every single participant encountered one or more discouraging obstacle,** ranging from difficulty getting any (or sometimes inaccurate) information to being turned away at the office because the CalFresh staff person was on vacation. Paper and online applications themselves were lengthy, confusing, and discouraging for many participants. With nowhere to turn for guidance or assistance, at a minimum these obstacles caused frustration and often delays but in some cases thwarted the process entirely.

Recommendations:

Connect CalFresh to Medi-Cal Every Time

Maximize dual enrollment between programs. This research study highlighted the large number of people in San Francisco who are enrolled in Medi-Cal, yet remain unenrolled in CalFresh. The single biggest opportunity for enrolling more eligible people in San Francisco is through enrolling existing Medi-Cal recipients in CalFresh.

Ask, Improve, Repeat



This project revealed numerous areas for process improvement at the local and state level, but there is no existing system at either level for soliciting and analyzing feedback on the CalFresh application process from individual applicants and application assistors.

Developing a data-driven system for capturing this type of feedback and reviewing it in a transparent way on a regular basis would demonstrate the county and state's commitment to improving the CalFresh experience and would allow for prioritization and implementation of those improvements.

