

Food Stamp Program Outreach Grants

There has been a new focus on outreach efforts, owing to the substantial decline in food stamp caseloads in recent years. FNS has been at the center of a number of innovative projects, several of which are represented here.

Panelists for the workshop included: Ellen Vollinger, Legal Director, Food Research Action Center, Margaret M. Turner, Director, MicroMax Project, Community Catalyst, Dennis Nakashian, Consultant, Bluemark, and Julie Bosland, Senior Program Associate, Institute for Youth, Education and Families, National League of Cities. The panelists presented a wealth of outreach information to the workshop participants.

Ellen Vollinger shared the important role that business leaders and schools can play in reaching potentially eligible families. Ellen used the progressive company TJX as an example of what employers can do to facilitate access to food stamp benefits within the constraints of the workplace. TJX is composed of the national clothing chains, T.J. MAX, and Marshall's stores. TJX believes in facilitating services such as Medicaid, food stamps, and Earned Income Tax Credits.

Margaret Turner and Dennis Nakashian discussed the development of the MicroMax Project and the use of RealBenefits™, a web-based pre-screening tool that can be used to pre-screen potential applicants for benefits. This state of the art software tool calculates a food stamp budget for a family, and produces a completed application form ready for signature. The tool will be available to human services staff in Chicago and Miami through two FNS outreach grantees- Illinois Hunger Coalition and the Miami-Dade Human Services Coalition.

Julie Bosland provided information about the outreach action kit developed by the League of Cities. She also discussed new ways to partner with mayors and city councilman in our local communities using proven outreach strategies in the action tool kit that they prepared for municipal leaders. These included outreaching to businesses and schools as well as media and help lines.