SNAP Community Engagement

YOUR SNAP GUIDE

Navigate & Nourish

We'll help you find your way to the table

Whether you're applying for the first time or returning to SNAP, this guide walks with you—from application to keeping your benefits.

3
WAYS TO APPLY

30
DAYS STANDARD

7
DAYS EXPEDITED*

*For households that qualify for expedited service.

Navigate & Nourish

Virginia SNAP Resource Guide | Initiative Overview

PURPOSE	AUDIENCE	EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Navigate & Nourish is a public resource guide designed to help Virginians navigate, understand, access and maintain their SNAP benefits. The guide navigates neighbors through every stage of the SNAP Process. It starts with "Learn" and ends with " Maintain", covering Prepare, Apply, Interview, Decision and Benefits in between. It also serves as a living communications vehicle for policy updates and changes, including the SNAP Healthy beverage update effective November 1, 2026, and the EBT Chip card transition.	**Primary:** ❑ Current and prospective SNAP participants ❑ Virginians who are unaware of or unenrolled in SNAP ❑ Households navigating policy changes **Secondary:** ❑ Local Departments of Social Services staff ❑ Community partners, food pantries and outreach organizations	❑ Increased SNAP application submission rates by reducing confusion about the process ❑ Improved participant understanding of eligibility, verification requirements and certification timelines ❑ Reduces case closures resulting from missed Interim Reports or recertification due dates ❑ Smoother EBT Chip Card transition through clear how-to guidance ❑ Timely participant awareness of November 1, 2026, beverage purchasing changes ❑ Stronger community partner capacity to assist participants using VDSS resource ❑ Reduced call volume to LDSS offices through self-service information access.

START HERE

Your path through SNAP

You do not have to figure out the process all at once. Use this guide one step at a time.

1. **Learn** — Understand SNAP
2. **Prepare** — Gather what you can
3. **Apply** — Choose one of 3 ways
4. **Interview** — Confirm your details
5. **Decision** — Read your notice
6. **Benefits** — Use and protect EBT
7. **Maintain** — Report and renew

KEEP THIS GUIDE

Return to the step you need. Each page gives you a direct action and an active link to official help.

LEARN

SNAP helps stretch your food budget

SNAP provides monthly food benefits to eligible individuals and families. Benefits are deposited into a SNAP account and used with an EBT card.

01

MONTHLY SUPPORT

Benefits are added automatically to your SNAP account after approval.

02

SHOP WITH EBT

Use your EBT card at approved grocery stores, farmers' markets and participating restaurants.

03

ELIGIBILITY VARIES

Household size, income, expenses and other rules determine whether you qualify.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many working households qualify for SNAP. Applying is the only way to receive an official eligibility decision.

LEARN

Apply even if you are not sure

SNAP serves many kinds of households. Do not rule yourself out based on work, age, disability or living arrangements.

1. **Families and caregivers**
   Household size and income are considered.
2. **Working households**
   Wages and allowable expenses both matter.
3. **Older adults and people with disabilities**
   Special deductions may affect eligibility and benefit amount.
4. **People sharing housing**
   Who buys and prepares food together helps define the SNAP household.

HOUSEHOLD RULE

Some people who live together must be included together, including spouses and most children under 22 living with a parent. Your local office can help you sort this out.

YOUR RIGHT TO APPLY

You can apply even when you are unsure you qualify or do not have every document ready.

PREPARE

Gather what you can before you apply

Use this page as a checklist. Your benefit programs specialist may ask for different items based on your household.

- [ ] Full names and birth dates for household members
- [ ] Social Security numbers for people applying
- [ ] Identity document, if available
- [ ] Current address and contact information
- [ ] Gross Income: pay stubs, award letters or self-employment records
- [ ] Housing costs: rent, mortgage or landlord statement
- [ ] Utility costs: electric, gas, water or phone
- [ ] Dependent-care expenses
- [ ] Medical expenses for household members age 60+ or those with a disability
- [ ] Immigration documents only for noncitizens applying

SNAP SUCCESS TIP **Keep originals. Submit copies or clear photos when your local department of social services allows.**

Choose the application method that works for you

There is no wrong choice. Your application date matters, so submit the application as soon as you are ready.

01

ONLINE

Apply securely through CommonHelp from a phone, tablet or computer.

Apply through CommonHelp

02

BY PHONE

Call the SNAP assistance line and speak with a representative.

Call 833-522-5582

03

IN PERSON

Submit a paper application or ask for help at your local department.

Find Your Local Department

DID YOU KNOW?

You do not have to gather every document before submitting your application. Provide what you can, then follow the next steps from your local office.

APPLY

Avoid the most common delays

A few quick checks can keep your application moving.

1	**Missing or outdated phone number**	Use a number where you can receive calls or messages.
2	**Wrong mailing address**	Update the address where you can reliably receive notices.
3	**Unsigned application**	Review the signature section before submitting.
4	**Missing requested verification**	Send requested items by the deadline or ask about alternatives.
5	**Missed interview**	Call quickly to reschedule if you cannot attend.

SNAP SUCCESS TIP Save confirmation numbers, screenshots and copies of everything you submit.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

After you apply, expect six steps

Processing can take up to 30 days. Households that qualify for expedited service may receive benefits within 7 days.

1. **Application submitted**
   Keep your confirmation.
2. **Agency review**
   Your local office checks the application.
3. **Interview**
   Scheduled by local office, appointment letter mailed. Attend by phone or in person.
4. **Documents**
   Send anything requested.
5. **Decision**
   Read your official notice.
6. **Benefits**
   If approved, benefits are loaded to your EBT card. You can pick it up or have it mailed.

STAY REACHABLE

Watch your mail and voicemail. Contact your local office if your address or phone number changes while your application is pending.

Prepare for a smoother interview

Your interview is usually required and may happen by phone or in person. The appointment letter gives the date and time.

01

Find a quiet place

Choose a setting where you can speak privately.

02

Keep documents nearby

Have gross income, housing, utility and expense information within reach.

03

Write down questions

Bring anything you want clarified.

04

Plan for access needs

Tell your office if you need an interpreter or disability accommodation.

Open SNAP Interview Resources

Your interview is a private conversation

A benefit programs specialist will confirm your household details and explain what is still needed to complete your application.

- Who lives with you and who buys and prepares food together?
- What income does your household receive?
- What do you pay for housing, utilities, dependent care or medical costs?
- Do any work requirements or exemptions apply to you?

SNAP SUCCESS TIPS

Answer honestly. Ask questions when something is unclear. Tell the specialist what you do not know. Before ending the call, repeat back any documents and deadlines.

NEED TO RESCHEDULE?

Contact your local office as soon as possible. A missed interview can delay or stop the application.

Missing a document? Keep the process moving

Do not skip your interview or abandon your application because one item is missing.

1	**Tell your specialist**	Explain what is missing and why.
2	**Ask what else may work**	Some facts can be verified in more than one way.
3	**Confirm the deadline**	Write down exactly what must be provided and when.
4	**Submit clearly**	Use readable copies or photos and keep proof of submission.

[Use CommonHelp] or [Find Your Local Department]

DID YOU KNOW?

You can attend the interview even if you do not have every document. Your benefit programs specialist will explain the next step.

DECISION

Your notice of action will provide the next step

Read every page of the notice and keep it with your records.

IF APPROVED

Check the benefit amount, certification period and effective date.

- Watch for your EBT card or pickup instructions.
- Save the dates for interim reports and recertification.

IF DENIED OR YOU DISAGREE

Review the complete notice, the decision and the appeal deadline.

- Contact the local office if information is missing or changed.
- Most SNAP decisions may be appealed within 90 days.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

An independent hearing officer reviews whether the local agency followed the rules and made the correct decision.

How to Appeal

Use and protect your EBT card

Treat your EBT card like a bank card. Your benefits are valuable and can be targeted by scammers.

01 **KEEP YOUR PIN PRIVATE**

Never share it with store staff, agency staff or anyone who contacts you unexpectedly.

02 **LOCK THE CARD**

Use ConnectEBT to lock the card when it is not in use and check transactions.

03 **REPORT LOSS QUICKLY**

Call EBT Customer Service at 866-281-2448 for a lost, stolen or damaged card.

NEW CHIP CARDS • FALL 2026

Virginia is mailing new chip-enabled cards from September through December 2026. Set a new PIN and tap or insert the card. The old card stops working when the new card is activated or 60 days after mailing.

Protect Your EBT Card

Most everyday grocery foods are eligible

Look for retailers that accept SNAP EBT. At checkout, eligible and noneligible items are separated automatically.

YOU CAN BUY

- Fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry and fish
- Dairy products, breads and cereals
- Snack foods and nonalcoholic beverages
- Seeds and plants that produce food

YOU CANNOT BUY

- Alcohol or tobacco
- Vitamins, medicines or supplements
- Cleaning supplies, toiletries or pet food
- Hot prepared foods, unless eligible to participate in Virginia Restaurant Meals Program

VIRGINIA CHANGE • NOVEMBER 1, 2026

SNAP benefits can no longer buy carbonated sweetened beverages in Virginia, including soda, diet or zero soda and carbonated energy drinks. Milk, juice, non-carbonated sports drinks, iced tea and lemonade remain eligible.

See SNAP Healthy details

Stay enrolled by tracking your dates

Approval is the beginning. Your notice tells you what to report and when forms are due.

1

REPORT CHANGES

Tell your benefit programs specialist about changes your notice requires during the certification period. A change report form will be mailed with your Notice of Action. Save it for future use

2

COMPLETE AN INTERIM REPORT

If your household receives one, return it by the due date to avoid case closure. Virginia Department of Social Services will generate and mail it the 5th or 11th month of your certification period

3

RECERTIFY ON TIME

Submit the recertification before the certification period ends to prevent a break in benefits.

SNAP SUCCESS TIP

Add every due date to your phone calendar when the notice arrives. Keep your mailing address current.

[Manage benefits in CommonHelp]

Interim Reporting

Your Interim Report will be mailed to you. The Interim Report provides a snapshot of household circumstances that were presented at the time of application. We will ask for proof of income changes and changes in legal obligations to pay child support. If households fail to return the completed Interim Report by the fifth of the 6th or 12th month, SNAP benefits may be suspended or closed the 7th or 13th month. A few of the questions they will ask are:

- Is there a change in your household members? Who moved in? Who moved out? What date did they move?
- Has there been a change in jobs (started or stopped), earned income or unearned income? Has the income source changed by more than $100 per month for anyone?
- Did you move? What is your new address? What do you pay for housing, utilities, childcare or medical costs?
- What is the amount of your resources?
- Do you need to tell them anything?

SNAP SUCCESS TIPS

Report any changes. Check boxes "no change", "yes" or "no" and do not leave any questions blank. Remember to sign your interim report. Provide proof for changes reported for child support obligation and income. Update current phone numbers and mailing address.

Subject to time-limited benefits?

Tell them about any allowable activities you participate in to meet SNAP work requirements.

Recertification

SNAP recertification, is a scheduled review of your household's eligibility for SNAP benefits. It is **not a new application** but a check to confirm your current income, household size, and expenses to ensure you still qualify and that your benefit amount is accurate.

- Who lives with you and who buys and prepares food together?
- What income does your household receive?
- What do you pay for housing, utilities, childcare or medical costs?
- Do any work requirements or exemptions apply to you?

SNAP SUCCESS TIPS

Answer honestly. Ask questions when something is unclear. Tell the specialist what you do not know. Before ending the call, repeat back any documents and deadlines.

NEED TO RESCHEDULE?

Contact your local department of social services office as soon as possible. A missed interview can delay or stop the process.

What happens if...?

I miss my interview?

Contact your local department of social services to quickly reschedule.

I move?

Update your address so notices and cards reach you.

My income changes?

Follow the reporting rules on your notice or ask your benefit programs specialist.

My EBT card is lost?

Call 866-281-2448 immediately.

I need help understanding a notice?

Contact your local department of social services listed on your notice and ask questions.

I disagree with the decision?

Review the appeal instructions and deadline.

Find help and official contacts

Work rules may apply—ask about exemptions

Many adults ages 18–64 must work or take part in an approved activity for at least 80 hours per month unless an exemption applies. You may combine multiple activities to meet the work requirement.

YOU MAY BE EXEMPT IF YOU ARE...

- Age 17 or younger, or 65 or older
- Pregnant or unable to work for medical reasons
- Living with a child under age 14
- Caring for someone who is sick or disabled
- Working 20 hours or more each week
- Receiving/applying for unemployment or in certain work programs

WAYS TO MEET THE RULE

Work, volunteer or participate in a qualifying employment, education or training activity. Your local department of social services determines which activities count for your case.

PROTECT YOUR BENEFITS

If you think you meet an exemption, report it and provide any requested proof. Do not assume the agency already knows.

Review SNAP Work Requirement FAQs

ELIGIBILITY CHANGES

SNAP WORK REQUIREMENT ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES

This chart provides a overview of allowable work, education, volunteer, and training activities that meet SNAP work requirements. It outlines definitions, participation criteria, and verification guidance to help ensure consistent application of program rules.

EMPLOYMENT	COMMUNITY SERVICE	EDUCATION
Work for cash wages in any amount or for in-kind goods and services for 20 hours or more per week, averaged monthly. **Paid employment includes:** full-time or part-time employment, self employment, seasonal work and temporary/contract work. **In-kind work:** work performed in exchange for non-monetary compensation such as meals, clothing, housing, or produce from a garden. **Examples:** Perform maintenance or repairs in exchange for housing or reduced rent. Working on a farm in exchange for produce. Providing childcare in exchange for meals. Helping with landscaping in exchange for clothing or other goods.	**Serve in an unpaid volunteer capacity for a public or private agency for at least the number of hours equal to the household's monthly SNAP allotment divided by the federal minimum wage**. Tracking of participation and the number of hours completed is required to verify compliance. **Location Examples (not all inclusive):** • Food banks and food pantries • Homeless shelters and housing assistance organizations • Public agencies - local government offices, public libraries, park and recreation departments, community centers • Nonprofit charitable organizations • Senior service organizations • Schools or educational organizations • Community improvement programs	**A work registration and eligible student status evaluation is required.** A student is someone enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education, including: • Business, technical, trade or vocational schools that usually require a high school diploma or equivalency certificate • Colleges or universities that offer degree programs, regardless of whether a high school diploma is required

ELIGIBILITY CHANGES

SNAP WORK REQUIREMENT ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES

WORK PROGRAM	WORK PROGRAM CONTINUED	WHEN TO VERIFY HOURS
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title 1: Programs and activities that support job training and related services to unemployed and underemployed individuals. Programs include, but are not limited to, WIOA Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker programs. **When provided through WIOA, job search and job search training are not limited to less than half time to qualify towards the ABAWD time limit.** **Programs Under Section 236 of the Trade Act of 1974:** Training programs for workers who lose their jobs or whose hours of work and wages are reduced because of increased imports. Workers may be eligible for training, job search and relocation allowances, income support, and other reemployment services. **Veteran Programs:** Any employment and training program serving veterans that is offered by the Department of Labor or Veterans Affairs	**Veteran Programs:** Any employment and training program serving veterans that is offered by the Department of Labor or Veterans Affairs, **SNAP Employment and Training (E&T):** Components include supervised job search, job search training, E&T workfare, work experience, and education. Job search activities must be less than half of required hours to qualify towards the ABAWD time limit. **E&T Workfare:** Unpaid work assignment at a public or private non-profit organization in exchange for monthly SNAP allotment. Total monthly participation hours are calculated by dividing a household's SNAP allotment by Virginia's minimum wage. **Completing assigned workfare hours is an accepted way to fulfill the 80-hour per month ABAWD work requirement, even if the assigned hours are less than 80 hours**	If a time-limited participant is meeting the work requirement, verification must be obtained at application, recertification or when reported changes affect compliance, and to regain eligibility. **Monthly verification it not needed (except for those participating in SNAP E&T).**

SNAP E&T can help build your next step

SNAP Employment & Training provides free support to help SNAP participants build skills, train and move toward employment.

01

JOB SEARCH

Job openings, resumes and interview preparation

02

TRAINING

Career certificates, adult education and work experience

03

WORK SUPPORT

Possible help with clothing, transportation, fees or minor car repairs

04

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Available in 32 local agencies; funding and services vary

Explore SNAP Employment & Training

Need more than SNAP? Start here

Food security is connected to health, housing, childcare, energy and employment. These resources can help you find the next door.

COMMONHELP	Apply for TANF, medical assistance, childcare and energy assistance. Video on how to navigate CommonHelp after approval	CommonHelp After Applying for Benefits
FOOD SUPPORT	Find farmers' markets, Virginia Fresh Match, food banks and meal resources.	Find Food Assistance
VIRGINIA RESTAURANT MEALS	Eligible for adults 60 or older, people permanently disabled or experiencing homelessness can purchase prepared meals using their EBT card at participating restaurants.	Restaurant Meals Program
2-1-1 VIRGINIA	Free, confidential help 24/7. Dial 2-1-1 or text CONNECT to 247211.	Find Help and Contacts

COMMUNITY MATTERS Asking for help is a practical step toward stability—not a failure.

Need more than SNAP? Start here

Food security is connected to health, housing, childcare, energy and employment. These resources can help you find the next door.

VIRGINIA WORKFORCE CONNECTION	Register for free help finding work and training opportunities.	vawc.virginia.gov
VIRGINIA COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP	A statewide network of Community Action Agencies offering emergency assistance, housing support, and childcare assistance.	https://vacap.org/agencies/
SERVE VIRGINIA VOLUNTEER HUB	Find volunteer opportunities, sign up to serve, and record verified hours.	servevirginia.org
VIRGINIA LEGAL AID	Legal services for low-income residents, immigrants, and refugees. .	https://www.virginialawhelp.org/ .

COMMUNITY MATTERS Asking for help is a practical step toward stability—not a failure.

KEEP THIS PAGE

Your SNAP success plan

Six habits can reduce confusion and protect your case.

1 **SUBMIT**

Apply as soon as you are ready.

2 **SAVE**

Keep confirmations and copies.

3 **ANSWER**

Watch mail, calls and messages.

4 **ASK**

Request clarity and accommodations.

5 **CALENDAR**

Track every due date.

6 **PROTECT**

Lock your EBT card and PIN.

Explore Virginia's SNAP Learning Modules

Ready when you are.

Take the next step that works for you.

APPLY ONLINE

Apply through CommonHelp

CALL

833-522-5582

GET LOCAL HELP

Find Your Local Department

Navigate & Nourish

A clear and dignified path to food assistance.

This guide provides general information. Your local department social services will make the official eligibility decision for your household.

You've found your way to the table. Thank you for helping neighbors find theirs, too.

Your feedback keeps this guide accurate for the neighbors you serve.

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