

Chapter VI

Outreach and Enrollment Assistance

Word of mouth, program outreach, and available assistance to guide seniors through the complexities of the application process help shape seniors' initial perceptions of the Food Stamp Program and the likelihood that they will apply. This chapter discusses program information and client enrollment assistance for seniors. Section A illustrates that low-income seniors hear about the FSP through a number of channels and some receive assistance in navigating the food stamp application process from people they know and community organizations. Section B provides an overview of the food stamp outreach program in Washington State in Fiscal Year 2000 and a description of the specific programs funded to provide outreach to three distinct groups of seniors living in three communities in the State of Washington: 1) English-speaking seniors, 2) Spanish-speaking seniors, and 3) Korean-speaking seniors. The final section of the chapter presents what focus group discussants suggested as outreach methods, including effective communication channels and persuasive messages to reach, inform and motivate nonparticipating eligible seniors to apply for food stamps.

A. FSP Information and Enrollment Assistance Reported by Seniors

This section provides a summary of how seniors report first hearing about the Food Stamp Program and the assistance they have received to help guide them through the application process.

1. How Seniors Heard about the Food Stamp Program

Senior focus group discussants generally heard about the FSP through two primary channels: (1) friends and relatives, and (2) community-based organizations. However, there were differences across the focus groups in how they heard about the FSP and where they obtained information about the program. In particular, the non-English-speaking discussants had more

contact with food stamp outreach and client enrollment assistance provided by community-based organizations than the English-speaking seniors.

a. English-speaking Seniors

Among the English-speaking seniors, the most common method of learning about food stamps was through word of mouth. Family members, friends, and other people receiving food stamps often provide seniors both positive and negative information about the program.

“I was homeless and other women in the shelter told me about it, that I would be eligible for food stamps. So, I went out and I applied for them.”
(Seattle non-participant)

A few seniors learned about the program through flyers, community meetings, and other outreach methods employed by community-based organizations.

“Here recently, within the past year, I received a little slip of paper that says: If you make under \$900 of income a month you would qualify for food stamps... It was handed out to the line of people waiting at the food bank.” (Seattle non-participant)

Among the English-speaking seniors, some were unable to identify how they first heard about the program, but noted that they had known about its availability for quite some time and that they or their children’s families may have been on the program as younger adults.

“I’ve always just known it was there.” (Seattle participant)

A few English-speaking seniors learned about the FSP when they came in contact with other community-based services or agencies. Some received information about food stamps from social workers when they were discharged from a hospital.

“I think it was when I first came home from the hospital after having a double bypass and ... the hospital arranged for me to have a caseworker and she was telling me about all the different programs. And, I went on getting food stamps.” (Seattle participant)

Other English-speaking seniors said they had heard about the FSP while applying for benefits at the Social Security office.

b. Spanish-speaking Seniors

Many Spanish-speaking elderly identified social networks as their main source of information about the FSP.

“Friends tell you. They say go there, so they can help you.” (Pasco participant, translated from Spanish)

“There were many people who would tell me, go there, they give stamps. Even when you work, it is hard sometimes.” (Pasco participant, translated from Spanish)

“Nowadays we let each other know.” (Pasco participant, translated from Spanish)

Several Spanish-speaking seniors first learned about the program when they came to the country as immigrants or as migrant farm workers.

“When we came from Idaho...an asparagus contractor told me about food stamps. I thought they were stamps for mail.” (Yakima nonparticipant, translated from Spanish)

Other seniors in the Spanish-speaking groups said they first learned about the FSP when they inquired about applying for other government services.

“I had two children in school. I was divorced so I went to get welfare and they helped me with stamps and medical for the children.” (Pasco participant, translated from Spanish)

“I found out that stamps existed when I applied for my social security when I turned 65.” (Yakima non-participant, translated from Spanish)

“I went to unemployment and I didn’t qualify. They sent me to welfare.” (Yakima non-participant, translated from Spanish)

However, the Spanish-speaking discussants differed from the Korean-speaking seniors, in that most did not hear about the FSP from a bilingual community-based organization.

c. Korean-speaking Seniors

The majority of the Korean-speaking discussants first heard about the FSP through the Korean Women’s Association (KWA). Level of involvement with the KWA also seemed to influence the degree to which Korean-speaking seniors were familiar with the FSP. Korean-speaking non-participants were generally not very involved yet with the KWA, and had less knowledge about the program than other participant discussants in the groups

“I found out about the Korean Women’s Association in Tacoma. So, I visited the KWA in Tacoma and I told them about my situation and because my wife is sick and I’m also ill. I told them that I am not able to work, so they applied (for food stamps) for me.” (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

“I found out in ’97 through KWA. I also was feeling ill and I asked them and they told me that I should go buy food with this and from then on I’ve been using them (food stamps).” (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

“My experience has been that they usually find out through Korean Women’s Association. I have a lot of Korean elderly clients that work through KWA and that’s usually how they find out information and how I find out information on my clients.” (Tacoma food stamp worker)

A few Korean-speaking discussants also learned about food stamps when they were applying for benefits at the Social Security office.

“I went there for Medicare and then that’s when they gave me a card for the Food Stamp Program.” (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

“I came here last October and I received SSI, SSA and as I was getting all of that the Social Security office told me that they will give me the food stamps.” (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

A lot of people get it [food stamps] through the Social Security office also... It is a big referral for us. (Tacoma food stamp worker)

Many Korean seniors resisted contacting the food stamp office, as they were worried about their limited ability to speak English. One gentleman who had been to the office stated that it was difficult to get information and an application and the office staff were unable to help him. (Further discussion of language barriers at the food stamp office appears later in this report.)

A few Korean-speaking senior discussants explained that they first learned about the FSP at the grocery store where they saw people using food stamps.

“I live in a Senior Citizen’s apartment. Some people were going to the market because they were buying something there and I looked and I said, ‘Wow, it’s not even money. You get this?’ And they said, ‘How come you’re not getting them?’ (Tacoma non-participant, translated from Korean)

“The way I found out about the food stamp program was that I once visited this grocery market...And then there was, it was not the currency that people use, but it was something else that people were paying with at the grocery and I asked what it was and that person said it’s a food stamp. So I was wondering how these food stamps could be given out. And when I asked I was told that it’s only for the low-income people. But that’s all I heard.” (Tacoma non-participant, translated from Korean)

2. Assistance to Help Seniors Through the Application Process

During the focus group discussions, seniors participating in the Food Stamp Program talked about the assistance they received while accessing the Food Stamp Program. While there were several English-speaking seniors who did not receive outside assistance of any kind when they prepared their food stamp application, most of the seniors in the English-speaking and non-English-speaking groups said that they required assistance in the application process from a friend, relative, faith-based organization, or other community organization. Several pointed out that this help was critical to their completing the application process. Specifically, most sought help in filling out the application form. Many mentioned receiving transportation assistance to the office, while several needed help in interpreting the forms and correspondence they received from the food stamp office after they filed the application.

a. Assistance from Friends, Relatives, and Faith-based Organizations

Our discussants reported that the most common and reliable sources of help for seniors in the food stamp application process are people they know. They turn to people who help them with other activities in their daily lives, including friends, neighbors, family members, or a faith-based organization they belong to.

"I have eye problems, and because of medications I don't write very well... I called (the food stamp office) and asked for help and they wouldn't do it. So I had to get someone else to fill the application out." (Seattle non-participant)

"My daughter fills it out because I can't read or write very well nor can I see very well." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

"What I did was I brought my church pastor and he helped me out." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

"Before one guy who was the assistant manager in my building used to take me all the time. He died. Now I ask my friends." (Seattle participant)

"My son took care of everything. He told me where to go and when I have to go there for the interview. He dropped me off and then the office translator was waiting for me there." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

"(An elderly food stamp client who lives in elderly housing) helps many seniors get on the program... I think more elderly from that senior housing are on food stamps because he's helping them apply for benefits." (Seattle food stamp worker)

b. Assistance from Outreach and Enrollment Assistance Staff at Community

Many of the non-English-speaking food stamp participants in the focus groups in Tacoma and Central Washington said they initially filled out the application form with assistance from community-based organizations (CBOs). In Tacoma, staff from the Korean Women's Association (KWA) go to their homes to help them or the seniors go to the KWA neighborhood site that is very familiar to Korean seniors and where staff are bilingual. KWA staff fill out the application form for the seniors, often mail it in and help them gather the documentation they need to bring with them to the eligibility interview. In Central Washington, a food stamp outreach worker travels around this primarily rural area to food banks and health clinics to conduct food stamp outreach. As part of his work he also helps seniors fill out the food stamp application form. In Seattle, the representative from Hopelink noted that she does provide a limited amount of one-on-one client enrollment assistance in Seattle, but most of her work focuses on general outreach and education.

Staff in the food stamp offices in Seattle and Central Washington and in the community-based organization focus group in Seattle mentioned that the Aging and Long Term Care Agency offers home visits to help families secure access to needed home care and insurance coverage as needed. These outreach workers also assist homebound seniors or their spouses in completing the food stamp application form. However, their focus is primarily on assuring access to home-based care and they do not have the resources devoted to provide follow-up services that could assist throughout the food stamp application process, as do the food stamp outreach organizations mentioned in the focus groups.

The seniors who had received assistance from CBOs spoke positively about the help they received from these organizations. One Korean-speaking participant pointed out that he is more comfortable receiving the assistance from the Korean Women's Association than from his family because of the organization's expertise in food stamps.

B. Overview of Washington State Food Stamp Outreach Program

Since 1990, the State of Washington has contributed a significant amount of State funds to improve food stamp participation by funding non-profit organizations to conduct local food stamp outreach activities with specific target communities. In Federal FY 2000, Federal matching funds for food stamp outreach in Washington State totaled \$1,125,767, giving Washington State the largest food stamp outreach budget of any State in the nation.

Below is a brief description of the primary agencies that are conducting food stamp outreach for the elderly groups of concern in this focus group study.

- **English-speaking seniors in Seattle.** In the DSHS region four, the main food stamp outreach contractor is a community action agency named Hopelink. For services to inner-city seniors and other low-income individuals, Hopelink also subcontracts with the Fremont Public Association (FPA). FPA administers food banks, emergency shelters, housing assistance, and home care programs in the city of Seattle and conducts a fair amount of citizen advocacy, including organizing seniors to have a voice in their communities.

- **Korean-speaking seniors in Tacoma.** In the DSHS region five the main food stamp outreach contractor is Senior Outreach Services (SOS), which conducts outreach at senior meal sites, senior centers, food banks, and low-income housing units. For outreach to the Korean community, SOS subcontracts to the Korean Women's Association (KWA). KWA serves the limited-English and non-English-speaking Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants in this region (except Southeast Asian refugees who are served by the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center). KWA provides a wide-range of services for Koreans of all ages, including ESL classes, domestic violence services, and senior meals once a week. The bilingual staff provides food stamp outreach as an integral part of the services provided to Korean households through in-office contact, contacts in the community, home visits, group presentations, and public service announcements.
- **Spanish-speaking seniors in Central Washington.** In the DSHS region two, the food bank named Cascade Blue Mountain Food Share is the food stamp outreach contractor for the State. Food stamp educators visit food banks and health clinics to provide one-on-one outreach to Spanish-speaking seniors to assist with applications. Workers also visit radio stations to conduct weekly interviews. The community health center in Pasco (La Clinica) and the Yakima Homeless Coalition are two subcontractors who also work closely with the Spanish-speaking population in this area of the State.

The discussants in the CBO focus groups confirmed that these State-funded outreach contracts are the major source of food stamp outreach being conducted in their communities. When asked to describe the kinds of outreach activities they are engaged in with seniors, the representatives from the CBOs in these three regions reported using various complementary strategies, including: community presentations, direct mail, and distributing State-created materials. Many CBO discussants described their efforts to link potentially eligible seniors with information about the program. Outreach workers visit food banks, elderly housing units, and congregate meal sites to help people understand how to apply for benefits.

"We've done presentations at senior centers. We've come in contact with a lot of seniors at food banks that we've gone to throughout King County and we've also had meetings and participated in other food and nutrition outreach at the Seattle Housing Authority." (Seattle CBO)

Discussants in the Pasco food stamp office focus group explained that some informational outreach is being conducted by their own staff through radio stations.

"The radio station does do outreach programs on all of our programs so that we might pick a topic like food stamps or something and then...Some of our financial workers or any of our staff will go to this radio station and do a question and answer thing." (Pasco CBO)

Many of the CBO participants viewed food stamp outreach as one piece of a variety of services they provide. Often, providing information/reaching out to inform people about the FSP is incorporated into other activities and supports. These organizations often refer potentially eligible individuals to the FSP.

"I would say we have several programs that we run within our organization for seniors and disabled and our application covers whether or not they are getting food stamps and what their income is. So every application we take in for whatever program is screened for food stamps and whether they would qualify based on their income guidelines and household size. So then we send them out a card saying, 'It looks like you may qualify for food stamps. Contact us if you are interested.' " (Tacoma CBO)

"The Senior Information and Assistance Line is a clearinghouse for community resources so we can help seniors. We help educate and inform them about what's available and help link them up with different resources in the community including the Food Stamp Program." (Seattle CBO)

One CBO discussant from the regional office on aging explained that additional outreach is conducted through their Meals on Wheels workers. Although these workers don't directly answer questions, they are able to link seniors with information/materials to find the answers.

"On all applications for Meals on Wheels and for the Mobile Market, we have a question that asks, 'Do you receive food stamps? And if not, would you like more information?' And for people who do want more information, we link them with the information so that they can pursue it." (Seattle CBO)

In the Tacoma CBO group, discussants from Senior Outreach Services explained how their agency provides food stamp referrals and application assistance for elderly who have difficulty leaving their homes.

"We do a lot of food stamp outreach in some rural areas as well as within the city. And most of the outreach is done to elderly people whom, for whatever reason, have a difficult time getting out of their home and need someone to come in and fill out the forms and get everything they need to get them on [benefits]." (Tacoma CBO)

While the CBOs and food stamp offices discussed a variety of outreach activities targeted to seniors, very few seniors in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking focus groups reported coming in contact with the current food stamp outreach work of the DSHS contractors or subcontractors in their community. Some individuals in the English-speaking groups did note that they had attended food stamp informational presentations in the past, although the timing of these presentations is uncertain. When they did remember having attended such a presentation, many of these discussants enjoyed the interaction with other people and the social aspect of the presentations.

"They have come and had seminars in the local library...[It was a good presentation because] he was so cheerful. He was real cheerful. Serving coffee and donuts. They did taste good. There were very nice people." (Seattle non-participant)

On the other hand, most of the Korean-speaking seniors described outreach activities that had been conducted by the KWA, the sole food stamp outreach contractor for Koreans in their community.⁸

⁸ The finding that more of these focus group discussants were exposed to food stamp outreach activities may be related to the tight knit nature of the Korean community in Tacoma as well as the broad array of services that the KWA provides to them. Further, all focus group discussants in this target group were recruited by the KWA, whereas in the other two communities there were multiple community groups involved in the recruitment effort.

They discussed their exposure to variety of outreach methods, such as presentations in the community and public service announcements on Korean radio stations.

"At the KWA they advertise it on the radio and they are actually doing the promotion." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

C. Discussants' Suggested Outreach Strategies

Discussants offered a variety of ways to inform more eligible seniors about the FSP. Although many of these strategies are used in other outreach frameworks, the focus group discussants provided insights as to how these strategies might be tailored to fit the needs of seniors. Their suggestions can be divided into one-on-one outreach, group presentations, media, print materials, and outreach specific to non-English-speaking populations. These topics are addressed in this section.

1. One-on-one outreach

Many discussants expressed that seniors often respond best to personalized outreach efforts. As the food stamp application process and office are often perceived by seniors as intimidating, one-on-one education and application assistance was suggested by many discussants as an effective method of reaching eligible nonparticipating seniors. Providing information by word-of-mouth allows the seniors to hear the message from someone they trust. This, combined with the one-on-one context, allows seniors to be more comfortable asking questions to understand the process. One Seattle food stamp worker suggested an incentive-based method to encourage friends and neighbors to conduct food stamp outreach with their senior peers, with the motto "Refer a friend and receive \$10."

When asked to explain what they meant by one-on-one outreach the discussants provided an array of creative methods.

"Many seniors are willing to use the food banks....we could have someone there more frequently to answer questions one-on-one." (Seattle CBO)

"Find elders that will go door-to-door, or maybe if you're interested give a call and somebody can call back and we'll send somebody out... That's private, it's one-on-one." (Central Washington CBO)

"Go through an SSI list and see who's on food stamps and who's not on it. Maybe give them a call." (Seattle food stamp worker)

"Like a campaign when you have somebody running for office, you know, going door-to-door." (Central Washington CBO)

"Ask them (seniors) during the interview to think of others or to get the word out to others." (Seattle food stamp worker)

"Take them by the hand and walk them there (to the office)." (Seattle nonparticipant)

2. Group Presentations/Meetings

Personalized outreach in group settings was also suggested by many seniors as a way to reach and gain the trust of seniors. When seniors are in places where they already gather, such as senior homes or centers, they are more comfortable to listen, ask questions, and learn about the FSP. Other possible locations for presentations included libraries, cafeterias, and churches. One CBO discussant also suggested including participating seniors at these presentations so they could provide testimonials of their experiences. Many seniors suggested providing lunch or dinner as an incentive for individuals to attend.

"If food stamps would go to the senior centers, have a day where they could go in and apply for food stamps ... because it's not so embarrassing if you're going in there with a bunch of other seniors to do the same thing." (Seattle nonparticipant)

"Keep it to small groups. If you keep them down to a small group where they can ask questions and where you could answer them." (Seattle participant)

3. Media

Discussants in all groups recommended using various forms of electronic media, such as television and radio. Utilizing the Internet, especially to target “younger” seniors, was also suggested a couple of times.

"Get the radio involved, get the TV involved...You've got to get the information out there and remove the stigma." (Central Washington CBO)

"An awful lot of seniors have email and Internet on their computers. A lot of seniors spend time on their computers now...I would think a web page on food stamps directed more to seniors even, on the Internet would contact unfortunate people all over the U.S." (Seattle nonparticipant)

Using the radio or television, however, received mixed reviews. A few discussants expressed that radio or television might have limited value as outreach strategies when targeting seniors.

"Some people understand (the radio) well, but some people don't understand it quickly enough on the radio. So, I think it is better to have written material and get it promoted and dispersed." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

"Even if they see on TV that they qualify, the income guidelines, and this and that, they're still going to call and want somebody to tell them. It's not going to matter what they see on TV or what they hear on the radio. They still want to hear it out of somebody's mouth that is talking to them as a person and saying this is what it is. The personal one-to-one that you do doing the outreach work." (Tacoma CBO)

Using newspapers was also recommended as a method of getting the word out to seniors. Suggested newspapers included both large city-wide newspapers and ethnic newspapers that target specific communities and neighborhoods.

"The senior centers also have a newspaper that is sent out. They could put a little blurb in there." (Central Washington CBO)

Additionally, to identify other potential information sources for seniors, participants and nonparticipants were asked how they keep up with news events or hear about community events. Many individuals reported newspapers, television, and radio as their methods of obtaining current news. A couple of nonparticipant discussants expressed that they rely on the senior center for updates. Several individuals from the non-English-speaking groups expressed that they rely upon non-English television, radio and newspapers.

"If you go to the senior citizens association you get it all. All the daily things regarding seniors. If you go to KWA they tell you all." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

"I listen to Radio Korea...that's where I get a lot of information." (Tacoma nonparticipant, translated from Korean)

4. Print Materials

Participants offered many suggestions for using print materials to inform more seniors about the FSP. These strategies included the use of flyers, brochures, and posters being distributed and hung in grocery stores, laundromats, churches, health clinics, community centers, and food banks. A couple of CBO discussants also suggested including information about the FSP in mailings, such as utility bills.

"The food bank. If you can get them little slips like you get when you go down to the food bank. They'll give you a slip as to when they'll be giving commodities out the next time." (Seattle nonparticipant)

"A flyer, too, for people on the Meals on Wheels, the homebound, send them a flyer." (Central Washington CBO)

"Putting information into utility bills. Whenever we advertise things in utility bills we get calls all the time...When you put information in things that are going to their house, especially when it is as important as a bill, they'll make sure to go through it." (Seattle CBO)

"Have a sign up on the wall where they can read it. That would be the best. (Put a sign up where you) walk in the supermarket. Outside when you walk in the door. You can get the word out better that way than any other way." (Seattle nonparticipant)

"We could put it on our bulletin board... (and at) all the rest of the senior housings. There are six of them here with 100 apartments in each one." (Seattle nonparticipant)

"In that little booklet that you get when you start getting near the age for Social Security you receive a booklet about your benefits. Why not put it right in there. Say, 'Also, you might be [eligible] or will be if you draw this X amount.' And when they list your benefits put food stamps there and say, 'You also become eligible for food stamps.'" (Seattle nonparticipant)

5. Outreach for Non-English-Speaking Senior Populations

Culturally appropriate materials were also identified as critical components of the community outreach framework, due to large ethnic populations across Washington State. The Spanish-speaking and Korean-speaking groups recommended advertising in Spanish, Korean, or multi-languages in ethnic newspapers, radio ads, and posters.

"If you take them [seniors] someplace besides the Tacoma Community House, they don't feel comfortable...If they go to the Tacoma Community House, they see all the elderly and they see people that speak their own language, they're more comfortable, too." (Tacoma food stamp worker)

"If it is in Korean, yes I would read it. But, if it's in English then it's difficult. Maybe they can put it in multi-languages...that would be so much more convenient." (Tacoma nonparticipant, translated from Korean)

"I would post some posters and stuff at some of these little Hispanic grocery stores." (Pasco food stamp worker)

"When they send you Medicaid [information] all the instructions are in English, Korean, Chinese. So, likewise, if they make a [food stamp] pamphlet like this and send it to Americans or Hispanics or Chinese I think that everybody will be able to utilize it." (Tacoma nonparticipant, translated from Korean)

6. Organizations to Involve in Outreach Efforts

When discussants were asked about additional organizations that could be included in outreach efforts, many of the responses included places seniors already rely upon for information in the community. Many individuals mentioned churches, senior housing, and senior centers.

Additional sites mentioned included health centers and clinics. One individual also mentioned the Veterans Association, as many seniors are former members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"Churches. Seniors mostly go to Sunday morning if they are going to go...It would have to be after church on a Sunday morning." (Seattle participant)

"Every Wednesday we (senior citizens association) have a meeting. About 150 people gather together. So if you pass out some papers like this it will be very nice too." (Tacoma participant, translated from Korean)

D. Discussants' Suggested Outreach Messages and Spokespersons

Not surprisingly, the messages discussants believe the State of Washington should emphasize in its program outreach parallel many of the perceived barriers seniors encounter when applying for food stamps. Frequently suggested marketing messages included the following:

- Outreach materials need to address the difficulties experienced by many seniors in asking for assistance. Discussants suggested that materials should explain how seniors have worked all of their lives, have paid their taxes and supported

public programs, and are due to receive something back now that they are in need of a little support themselves. One Tacoma food stamp office discussant recommended writing “Take One for a Friend” on pamphlets and other packets of information to reduce the stigma that elderly often feel when requesting assistance for themselves. Examples of messages suggested by focus group discussants are:

“You have earned this, it is not a handout.” (Central Washington CBO)

“Are you missing out on one of your rights?” (Seattle nonparticipant)

- Educating seniors that EBT cards are now the way food stamp benefits are given out can counter the stigma seniors associate with using the food stamp coupons at the grocery store.

“These days it is like...a debit card so nobody would even know if you did anything.” (Tacoma CBO)

- Focus on health as a primary concern of seniors and stress the importance of caring for themselves. One Seattle CBO discussant suggested that the FSP could partner with other organizations promoting good health.
- Emphasize that food stamps are available to bridge the gap between rising food prices and stable incomes.

“Could you be eating better for less?” (Seattle nonparticipant)

“Prices on food have gone up. The money that you receive hasn’t. Food stamps are there to help bridge that gap.” (Central Washington CBO)

- Stressing the importance of even the \$10 in food assistance was suggested. Every little bit helps to buy something extra. Discussants suggested messages emphasizing that even if the benefits each month total only \$10, these totals free up money for other necessary expenses like medicine or utility bills.
- Clarify program information and program intent, especially for non-citizens. Some seniors are unfamiliar with the structure of government programs in the U.S. and fear that receiving food stamps will either affect their status with the

Immigration and Naturalization Service or that their children will one day have to pay back the government for the benefits received.

Members of the Central Washington CBO also recommended targeting the outreach to seniors' children, neighbors, and family members, as seniors often do not admit they need assistance. As noted in Chapter III, seniors are most successful with the application process when they have a family member or friend supporting them in the process.

"What is most successful is when you have a family member or somebody that walks you through it and supports you, encourages you. That's also the person that is probably going to bring it (food stamps) to your attention." (Central Washington CBO)

Focus group discussants were also asked who they believe seniors view as trusted sources of information in their communities. Many discussants expressed that seniors rely upon individuals that listen to them and make them feel comfortable. These trusted individuals often include fellow seniors who are respected in their peer groups as reliable individuals that others feel they can relate to.

"Another senior. Someone from our own building. Someone you know that you can talk to. Someone of your own class."
(Seattle, nonparticipant)

Health care providers, such as doctors or nurses, were also cited by discussants as individuals that seniors trust as reliable sources of information.

"I think if it's a physician that is still practicing in the community, and they [seniors] know that physician, and they know that physician isn't, you know, the perception of the typical money-hungry doctor. If they have a good rapport with the community, with their clients. If they have a lot of senior clients I think it could be very effective." (Central Washington CBO)

"Physicians from the clinics, it is obvious they are not there for the money, they are there for the people. They are there to help people and I think they would carry more credibility than a lot of other individuals in the community." (Central Washington CBO)

"We have a doctor. He's the chief doctor at Ballard Hospital and he came around...He said he really enjoys seniors and he thought people should do more for them. He's trying to get more seniors more active in the community. But they came and they made a dinner and they cleaned it all up and it was wonderful." (Seattle participant)

Several discussants also reported that priests/ministers/clergy are viewed by seniors as trusted sources of information, while a few suggested representatives from government agencies or CBOs. One nonparticipant group in Seattle expressed that seniors view the local public official as a trusted source of information. They explained how the mayor often stops by for visits at the senior housing units and, instead of having a set agenda of his own, he is willing to listen to any concerns the seniors bring to his attention.

Focus group participants suggested a variety of creative methods of getting the word out to seniors about the FSP. Using the information gathered during these focus groups, current methods of outreach utilized by the State of Washington could be tailored to better meet the needs of elderly populations. Many of the recommendations provide insights into the elderly population and are strategies that can be incorporated into existing outreach.

The next chapter presents focus group discussants' recommendations for improving the program. In addition to the outreach recommendations outlined in this chapter, discussants offered many specific suggestions for ways to improve FSP operations and program policies to improve access and participation for eligible seniors.