

SNAP/Food Stamp Benefits

If you're eligible for SNAP benefits, you could receive almost \$200 a month for groceries! Please consider applying. SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP may not cover your food expenses for an entire month. Take advantage of other resources in your area such as food pantries, especially while you are waiting for your SNAP application to be approved.

You CAN live with a partner/roommate/parents and STILL receive SNAP benefits, even if their incomes are higher. You will do this by applying as an individual. Anyone living with you will just need to sign a form stating that they do not purchase and prepare meals with you.

If you are not a U.S. Citizen, your sponsor's income will be considered, so you may not qualify for SNAP benefits. If you are married, your spouse's income will be considered so you may not qualify for SNAP benefits. If you have money saved up in your bank account in the amount of around \$#000 or more, you may not be eligible for SNAP benefits.

SNAP Application Process

When filling out the application and providing supporting documents, you will treat your AmeriCorps VISTA stipend as you would any normal income. You are considered a full-time employee, and you must provide proof of employment as a VISTA member.

1. Request a letter of Employment Verification from Michele (Michele@compactnypa.org). You will need proof of your fulltime employment through AmeriCorps VISTA. It is possible to wait and submit paystubs for this, but you will get your letter more quickly instead of waiting for paystubs to come at the end of pay periods.
2. Fill out the application online or in person at your local Community Assistance Office. Your income through CCNYPA is calculated at a daily rate, not hourly. Your yearly stipend amount will be listed in your Employment Verification Letter. You can divide this by twelve to list your monthly income in your application. You will also list that you get paid twice a month.

New York state SNAP application website:

<https://mybenefits.ny.gov/mybenefits/begin>

Pennsylvania SNAP application website:

<https://www.compass.state.pa.us/compass.web/Public/CMPHome>

****Some of you may live in a city or area where a local nonprofit organization can serve as an advocate for you during the SNAP application process. Refer to the regional resource guide to see if an organization is listed for your area. It may be worth it to have an organization advocate for you throughout your application process.****

3. Submit your Employment Verification Letter and any other required documentation ASAP, but especially within 30 days of your application. In addition to your Employment Verification, this could include other documents such as proof of residency, proof of any assets (like a bank account), proof of any utility bills, etc. If you have a certain amount of money saved in a bank account (likely upwards of a few thousand dollars), you may not be eligible for SNAP.

If you are living with a partner, roommate, or family members other than dependents (such as parents), you will need them to type up a letter stating that although they live with you, they do not purchase groceries with you or for you and that they do not prepare and share meals with you.

4. Attend your SNAP interview (in person or on the phone). They will let you know when it is scheduled. Your caseworker will ask you questions from your application including: if you're registered to vote, number of people in your household, student status, disability status, employer (CCNYPA), how often you are paid (twice a month), if your pay is hourly or salary (it's actually a daily stipend), how many hours you work a week (40), whether you have children, if you have any other income, what your assets are and what value they are (such as bank accounts and amounts), whether you filed taxes, whether you have healthcare coverage, whether you have unpaid medical expenses, rent amount, if your name is on the lease, utility bills, phone bills, among other possible questions.

This is also when you can kindly remind your case worker that they are not required to count your AmeriCorps VISTA stipend toward your monthly net income when calculating eligibility. Ultimately, it is your caseworker's decision. For applicants who do not have a part-time job outside of VISTA service, this likely will not affect you either way. For applicants who do have a part-time job outside of VISTA service, your caseworker's decision to not count your VISTA stipend could give you more leeway in eligibility.

Does it Matter if Stipend is Counted as Income?

If the only income you are receiving is your VISTA stipend, it likely will not make a difference if your stipend is counted as income at the end of the day or not. Your stipend will still be at a modest enough level, very close to the federal poverty level, that even if your caseworker counts your stipend as income, you will most likely still be eligible for SNAP benefits.

It matters more if you are working, or later decide to work, a second job in addition to your VISTA position. If your caseworker doesn't count your stipend as income, it gives you more "wiggle room" with any extra income you bring in before you reach the income threshold that would make you no longer eligible for SNAP benefits.

How Will I Know if my Stipend was Counted as Income?

After a decision has been made on your case, you will receive a Summary of Benefits. There should be a section titled "Your Household Income" as well as "How We Counted Your Income." Your AmeriCorps stipend will always be listed under your household income. If your caseworker decided not to ultimately count your stipend as income, it will not be listed under "How We Counted Your Income."

Difficulty?

Did you not receive a call for your scheduled phone interview time? Did you miss a call from your county assistance office and you are not able to reach them in return? Do you need to contact your county assistance office to ask questions or explain a situation, but they are not responding? This is a good time to seek outside help.

If you are having difficulty with the application process for SNAP Benefits in Pennsylvania and want to make a complaint, call the PA Change Center at 877-395-8930. This is basically a customer service line for the whole state. They will send in a ticket to your local county assistance office and your office is required to respond within a timely manner. If you enter your zip code and no one answers, call back and stay on the line without entering your zip code.

If you are having difficulty with the application process for SNAP Benefits in New York and want to make a complaint, call the "Agency Conference" number at 315-789-1767.

Let your VISTA Leader know if you are experiencing difficulty during the process, and they may be able to assist you.

Notification of SNAP Benefits

You will receive notification of whether or not you were determined to be eligible. If you were determined to not be eligible, but you believe that you should be eligible, you can appeal your case. Follow the appeal instructions included in the notification.

If you were determined to be eligible for SNAP benefits, you should be able to start using your SNAP benefits shortly. Your EBT card may be mailed to you, or held at your COA to pick up in person.

Using your EBT Card & SNAP Benefits

1. Your benefits will be automatically loaded each month onto an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card.
2. Once you start receiving SNAP benefits, download the Fresh EBT app. It lets you know your SNAP balance, your previous and upcoming deposits to your account, your past spending history, stores near you that accept EBT/SNAP, and gives you coupons to use!
3. Individuals receiving SNAP benefits can now purchase an Amazon Prime account for a reduced fee. See this link for details:
https://www.amazon.com/l/16256994011?tag=googhydr-20&hvadid=255820406141&hvpos=1t1&hvexid=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=13980743308042257586&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=b&hvdev=c&ref=pd_sl_235sbogyrt_b&hvtargid=kwd-317100788636
4. Check to see if your local organizations offer discounts to SNAP users such as reduced fees or free events at pools and parks, museums, or community events.

Online Purchasing Pilot in New York

As of April 2019, a new program has been launched in the state of New York to use your SNAP benefits online with these three retailers: Amazon, Shoprite, and Walmart. Read more here:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot>