The **Smith County Food Security Council** in partnership with the **East Texas Food Bank**, **Children’s Defense Fund**, and **Texas Community Partners Program** is pleased to host a

Benefits Assistance Training for non-profits and community organizations.

This training will equip volunteers and staff at community-based and non-profit organizations in East Texas to assist their clients in enrolling for important nutrition, health, and financial assistance including SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, Healthy Texas Women, and TANF. Individuals and organizations who participate in the training will be eligible to become a Texas Health and Human Services Community Partner.

***Who should participate in this training?***

Staff and volunteers with local non-profit and community-based organizations who serve families living at or near poverty or struggling with under or unemployment. Examples include but are not limited to food pantries, clinics or healthcare organizations, churches, social support organizations, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and employment and educational services.

***Why should our organization offer Benefits Assistance?***

We know that families who are struggling financially are helped when they receive support from organizations such as food pantries, clothes closets, or prescription assistance, but many families have ongoing needs that cannot be fully addressed by non-profits. Linking families to programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, or TANF can reduce a family’s stress and improve financial stability. We also know that providing assistance in one area (SNAP/food stamps for example) can allow a family to address another need (electricity or rent for example) more easily, so it is beneficial to apply for assistance in one area even if that isn’t a family’s immediate need.

***How is this training different from other Benefit Assistance trainings?***

Previous trainings in our area often focused on enrolling clients in one particular program but this training will equip participants to assist with enrollment in any of the programs offered through Your Texas Benefits. It will also encourage those providing Benefits Assistance to consider applications for any members of a household. Just as receiving SNAP can relieve financial strain allowing a person to pay other bills, one member of a family receiving services (for example providing healthcare through Medicaid for children) can improve the stability of an entire family.

***Do people really need help applying for benefits? Is it that hard?***

Many people are able to complete the Your Texas Benefits application themselves, but others encounter cultural, literacy, and technological barriers that can be easily resolved with a well-trained benefits assistance navigator. Many families are more comfortable receiving this assistance from organizations where they already have a relationship with and receive help. Community partner organizations help reduce barriers, increase utilization of services, and provide help with respect and dignity.

***How much time will becoming a Community Partner take?***

The training itself is ½ day. There is a web-based learning module that is recommended prior to the live training that takes approximately 2 hours to complete. Your organization can then determine how much time you want to devote to benefits assistance. Some organizations have a designated hours each week they provide assistance, others set appointments for clients on an as needed basis.

***How do we become a Community Partner?***

Once you register for the training, you will be provided a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the benefits and responsibilities of becoming a Community Partner site. If your organization is already a community partner, any new staff or volunteers trained will complete a background check and then be added to your site. If your organization is not already a Community partner you can be added as a site of the East Texas Food Bank. Texas Health and Human services will screen all new organizations and staff/volunteers. There is no cost for the background checks.

***If we participate in the training do we have to provide Benefits Assistance?***

No, completing the training does not obligate you or your organization to provide Benefits Assistance if you determine it does not fit into your organizational model. We hope that the training will help you understand the importance of many of these programs for the families you serve. You can also choose to offer Benefits Assistance to the general public or only to those whom you are providing other services.

***What can we do if we aren’t able to provide Benefits Assistance?***

We can share a list of community organizations providing benefit assistance with you so that you can refer clients in need of assistance to other organizations in East Texas for help.

**Training Details:**

**Thursday, November 14, 2019**

**Noon-4 pm**

**East Texas Food Bank Nutrition Education Center**

**3201 Robertson Road**

**Tyler, TX 75701**

**Lunch provided**

[**Register here**](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/508044aa9af22a2f85-benefits)