

FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) Member Research

IMAC Presentation

February 20, 2025

| Project Background

- DHS was awarded Pledge Funding
- Aim for the research? Inform how DHS might **improve the FSET program statewide, facilitate a better member experience, and enhance FSET communications and publications**

Research Team



Steph Mabrey



Ellie Chessen



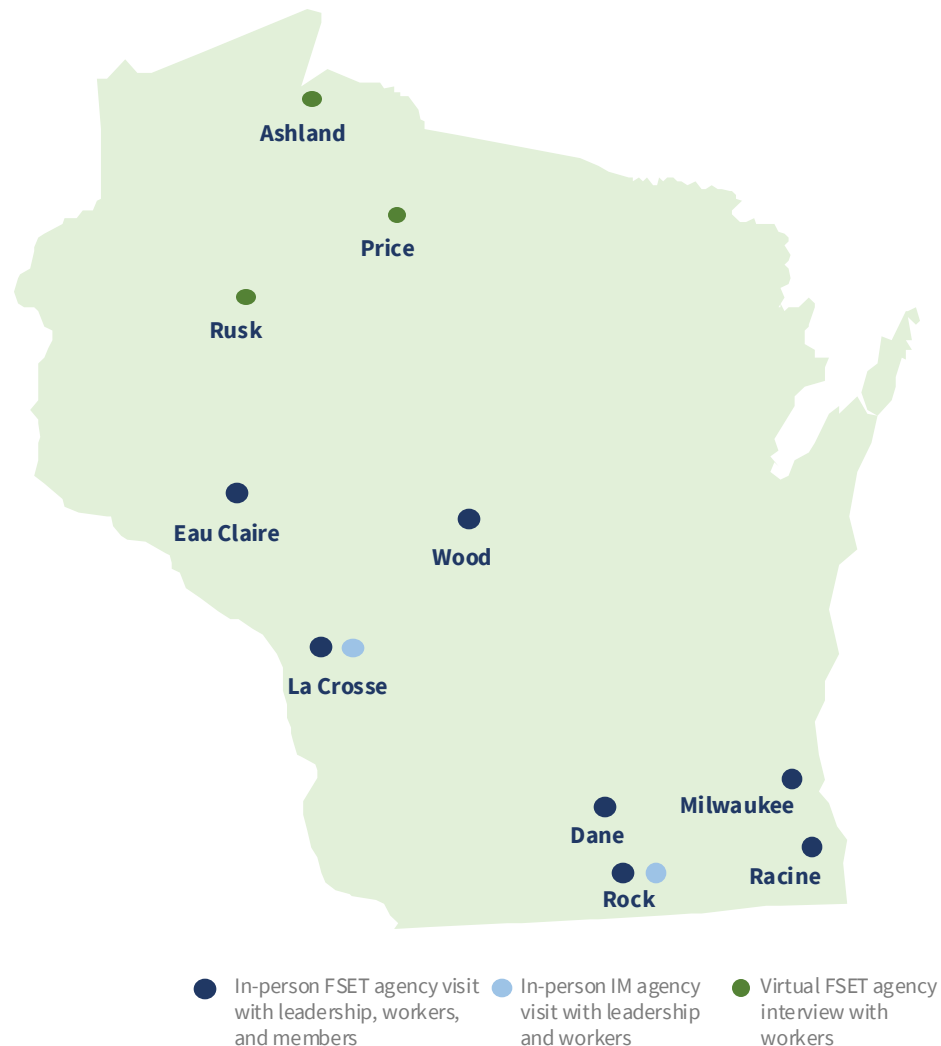
Maddy Ganser



Ryan Vosters

Our approach

| Our approach



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES



Field Research

In the field research and site visits, including:

- **Seven FSET agencies** across the state, interviewing leadership at the agencies, and conducting “intercept” interviews with members
- **Two IM agencies**, interviewing leadership at the agencies, and conducting “intercept” interviews with members
- In some cases, FSET vendors were able to provide members with a \$50 gift cards, usually in the form of a gas, Amazon, or Visa gift card, for participating through their supportive services funds.



Desk Research

Internal fact-finding and review of available data, including:

- Reviewing FSET **vendor orientation materials**, handouts, pamphlets, and recordings
- Analyzing **member data** to understand **trends in members who lose TLBs**
- Reviewing current **DHS communications to members** on FSET (e.g. TLB notice)
- Documenting the current **online “path” to FSET**

| Our approach - Who we talked to

Staff



7

FSET agencies
visited



2

IM agencies
visited



9

IM and FSET staff and
leadership teams interviewed

Members



26

Interviews with 28
unique members



32%

Of members were ABAWDs



21

Were ongoing FSET program
participants



36%

Would meet the FoodShare
definition of homeless



8

Self-identified as Black/African
American or Hispanic/Latinx



6

Individuals had prior
justice involvement



12

Members had at least a high
school education



2

Reported
accessibility needs

Our Findings – Full Report

| FSET feedback is overwhelmingly positive

INSIGHTS

- Gratitude was the primary emotion expressed by ongoing participants
- Participants wish they knew about FSET sooner
- 100% of participants would recommend FSET to family and friends



A word cloud of positive feedback. The most prominent words are 'thankful', 'above and beyond', 'helpful', and 'informative'. Other visible words include 'beneficial', 'reliable', 'valid', 'simple', 'welcoming', 'service', 'outstanding', 'no judgement', 'easy', 'empathetic', 'heard', 'welcome', 'godsend', and 'fantastic'.

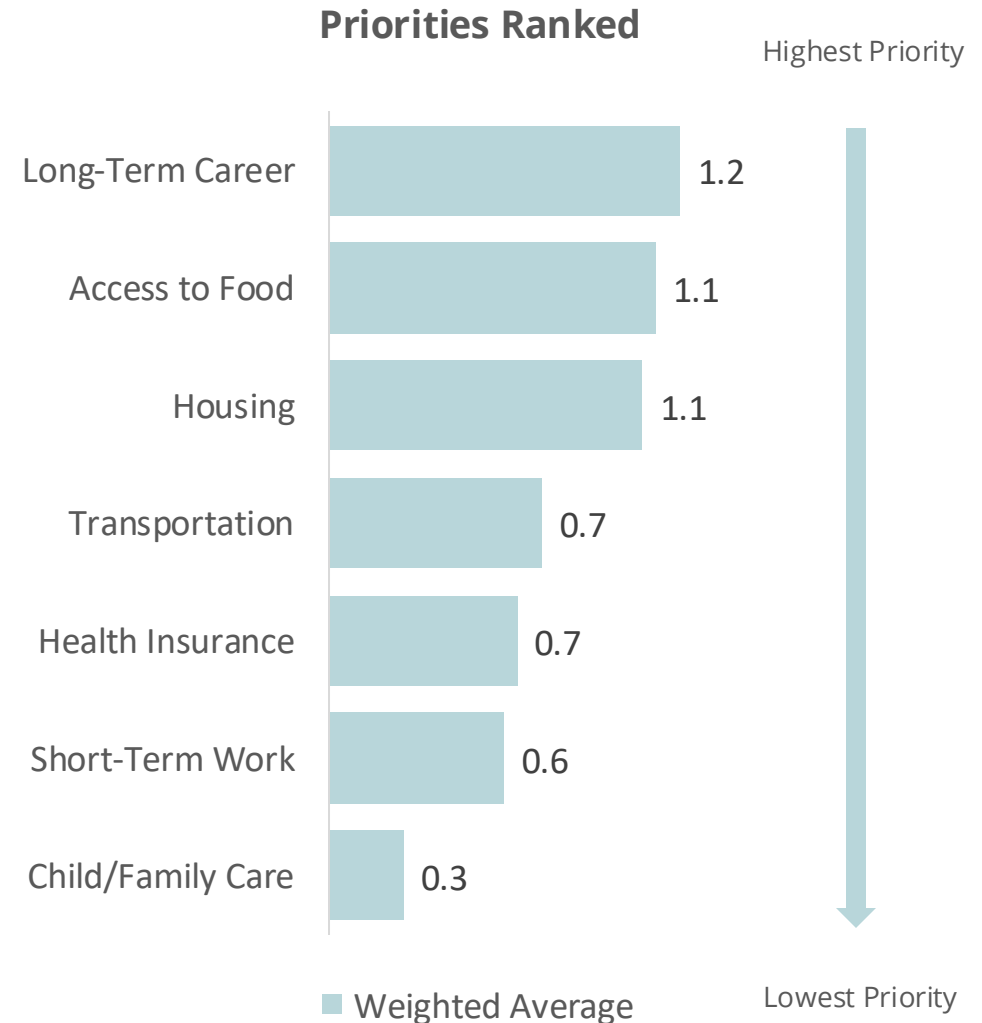
"I would have loved to have known about FSET when I applied for FoodShare. That was a month before we became homeless. **That could have changed our entire situation. Having this program could have helped us get a job and stopped us from becoming homeless.**"

– Existing participant in La Crosse County

| What motivates people to join

INSIGHTS

- View FSET as “good” for them
- Friends and family are often pivotal in connecting participants to FSET
- Supportive services are motivating for participants
- Many participants are driven to get a certificate or advance their education
 - Certifications are most popular among non-ABAWDs
 - CDL and CNA are the most popular



| Keys to a positive FSET experience

INSIGHTS

- Providing structure and direction, but with enough flexibility to support member needs
- FSET agency colocation with other community services
- FSET agencies fostering a welcoming environment, prioritizing and supporting the whole person
- 1:1 relationship with caseworkers is key, and participants appreciate the responsiveness of case managers
- Caseworkers help decode eligibility policies for participants, and identify and report exemptions



Our Findings – Pain Points

Member Pain Points

INSIGHTS

- Members face external challenges
- Getting connected to FSET is confusing and frustrating
- Members get lost between the FSET referral and orientation
- Unique challenges facing members with different backgrounds

ADVERSE LIFE EXPERIENCES

17 of the 28 members

we spoke with disclosed an adverse life experience¹¹ (e.g. death of a loved one, unanticipated job loss) that related to them needing public assistance

UNRELIABLE TRANSPORTATION

79% of FSET participants

statewide reported lack of reliable transportation as a barrier to participation in the program

HOUSING INSECURITY

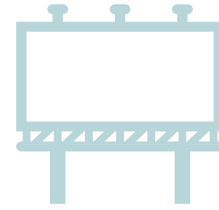
62% of FSET participants

statewide reported housing security as a barrier to participation

Recommendations



Refine the member archetypes to better support communications development



Consider a more comprehensive, nudge-based outreach approach for the program

In progress



Explore a program and policy rebrand



Explore solutions for non-English speaking members

Current Policy Improvements

1. Clarify physically or mentally unfit for work definition
2. Define "questionable" for verification policy

Future Policy Improvements

1. "Welcome month"
2. Final chance after accruing 3 TLBs
3. Additional work requirement exemptions for populations unable to work
4. Consider sliding scale reduction in benefits for members who don't meet the work requirement
5. Positive incentives for meeting the work requirement
6. Policy solutions to minimize the benefit cliff



Explore data sharing across programs to expand reach of FSET referrals



Evaluate CWW flexibilities to make the workflow of FSET more intuitive



Explore getting more information about the work requirement and members directly to them

Complete: Postcard mailing about FSET

In progress: TLB email and text campaign to members

| Program administration – Recommendations for FSET agencies



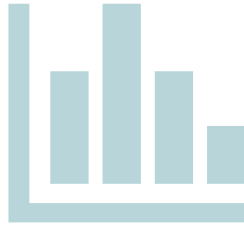
Provide flexible and tailored orientation experiences

Expand career supports



Offer incentives and social supports

| Program administration – Recommendations for DHS



Reevaluate FSET metrics and performance standards

Explore options for referring tribal members to county programs



Expand supportive services

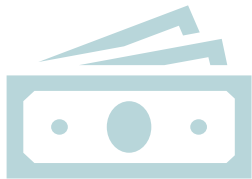
Improve interagency collaboration



Establish regular standing meetings with FSET-related teams



Improve the IM to FSET handoff



Increase FSET agency resources

Improve IM understanding of FSET and IM/FSET collaboration



Questions?