

February 7, 2023

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and state partners information about the CalFresh Employment and Training (E&T) Laptop Loaner Program. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has partnered with Cell-Ed, Inc to provide digital accessibility to CalFresh E&T participants. Interested CWDs and state partners can implement the laptop loaner program upon release of this letter.



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ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: JENNIFER TROIA, CHIEF DEPUTY DIRECTOR
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: **CALFRESH EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING: LAPTOP LOANER
PROGRAM GUIDANCE**

REFERENCE: [ALL COUNTY LETTER 20-125; ALL COUNTY INFORMATION
NOTICE I-55-20; ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER
DATED APRIL 22, 2021; DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENT
RESOURCE GUIDE](#)

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and state partners information about the CalFresh Employment and Training (E&T) Laptop Loaner Program. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has partnered with Cell-Ed, Inc to provide digital accessibility to CalFresh E&T participants. Interested CWDs and state partners can implement the laptop loaner program upon release of this letter.

BACKGROUND

In response to the pandemic emergency and as described in [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-55-20](#), issued July 1, 2020, the CDSS partnered with Cell-Ed, Inc to create opportunities for CalFresh E&T participants to establish and maintain remote connections with critical workforce development programs and supportive services. The CalFresh E&T Laptop Loaner Pilot Program, referred to in this letter as the pilot, was launched in collaboration with the CDSS, piloting entities, and partners, to further these efforts through the distribution of laptops, smartphones, and other technology to eligible program participants. The pilot duration was May 2021 through September 2021, with an extension until January 2022. For more information regarding the implementation of

the pilot, refer to [ACWDL issued April 22, 2021](#). The CalFresh E&T Laptop Loaner Program structure and administrative processes, outlined in this letter, have been developed based on the outcomes of the pilot.

LAPTOP LOANER PILOT OUTCOMES

The CDSS launched the pilot to identify the administrative processes, participant needs, usage trends, and base inventory requirements. Additionally, it was necessary to assess the impact of technology on participant engagement and skills gained.

Administrative Processes & Procedures

The pilot assessed a variety of administrative processes and procedures, including device distribution, to ensure participants with digital learning needs could access devices effectively.

Prior to pilot implementation, pilot partners received training from Cell-Ed, which included an overview of Cell-Ed services, available content and programs, a demonstration of how to use the Cell-Ed platform, such as how to request a device, and the roles and responsibilities of participants and partner staff. Devices requested through the Cell-Ed platform were shipped directly to the participating pilot partner's office or participant's home address based on preference. The average delivery time from order to arrival was five calendar days.

Pilot participants identified the Cell-Ed Supportive Delivery Checklist for partner staff as particularly useful. This checklist outlines the processes and technical steps required for participant set up and resources for supportive delivery. Further, best practices were developed by pilot partners and included an "Expectations and Milestones" agreement for E&T participants. This agreement provides an explanation that the device is on loan through the program, guiding participants to better understand equipment inventory obligations and tracking assistance.

Participant Needs, Usage Trends, and Base Inventory

Information collected during the pilot indicated varying demands for laptops and smartphones based on participant needs. Some participants valued the option to use a laptop at home, while other participants valued the convenience and portability of a smartphone. Both devices allowed participants to independently continue their training remotely and with flexibility, which provided opportunities for continuous engagement, resulting in improved essential skill attainment and technical knowledge.

Additionally, the pilot uncovered that through the provision of laptops to participants, there was increased efficacy of in-office visits because it allowed participants to

complete required processes, such as filling out forms, ahead of time. Pilot partners stated that a primary advantage of the pilot was ensuring that participants had access to a laptop or smartphone at home to help continue their computer literacy development, apply for jobs online, remove technology as a barrier to learning, and increase participation and engagement in CalFresh E&T.

Programmatic Impact

The pilot measured participant engagement and skill attainment to determine program efficacy and value. Participants experienced tremendous advantages from having remote connections through access to a laptop or smartphone at home. Increased familiarity with technology allowed many to create resumes and conduct online job searches while engaging with other benefits of the virtual tool, like coaching and other digital resources.

Participants living in rural areas may have challenges accessing providers and securing transportation. However, with access to a device, participants were able to complete online training and successfully look for employment. Pilot partners reported that participants gained employment or improved their employment status.

LESSONS LEARNED

The pilot was intended to establish a program that would connect participants with access to remote services and devices to increase digital literacy. CalFresh E&T participants successfully accessed these supports during the pilot and were able to engage with or continue receiving E&T services via laptops or smartphones. Pilot partners agreed that providing participants this technology allowed their staff more opportunities to connect with participants and CalFresh E&T services.

To address skepticism, pilot partners were able to assure participants that there would be no financial burden and clearly explained the program objective to improve the digital literacy skills of participants through access to technology. To reduce the digital learning gap, pilot partners created a moderated process through basic computer training and one-on-one meetings to demonstrate how to operate a device and connect to the internet while at home. Participants were provided information about low-cost internet options as outlined in the [Distance Learning Student Resource Guide](#) and pilot partners were also informed that internet services are eligible for 50 percent federal reimbursement if identified as a reasonable and necessary supportive service as stated in [All County Letter \(ACL\) 20-125](#).

Future improvements to the participant experience will include a comprehensive onboarding process, video tutorial for device set up and use, step by step instruction

with screenshot displays, and reference guides to help participants connect to the internet and further learn basic computer functions.

LAUNCH OF LAPTOP LOANER PROGRAM

Upon release of this letter, interested counties and state partners must email CalFreshEandT@dss.ca.gov for approval prior to implementing the CalFresh E&T Laptop Loaner Program. Once approved, the program must be included in the county or state partner's annual CalFresh E&T plan. Cell-Ed and CDSS will provide technical assistance to all counties and state partners that choose to offer the Laptop Loaner Program, which will include comprehensive instructions for onboarding administrators and participants, as well as detailed next steps.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh E&T Section via email at CalFreshEandT@dss.ca.gov.