

3SquaresVT Outreach Talking Points

	The following talking points are designed to assist advocates and service providers speaking with potential participants about applying for 3SquaresVT, formerly the Food Stamp Program. There are many reasons why people do not apply. The talking points below speak to some of the most common barriers you may be faced with in speaking to eligible Vermonters. These messages may help you explain the many benefits of the program and why it is worth it to apply. These same messages may be useful if you are writing a local newsletter article or letter to the editor.
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Pride, Stigma, Embarrassment. "Food Stamps is charity." "Others need it more."</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	3SquaresVT is a vital nutrition program run by the Department of Agriculture that helps people to buy the food they need for good health.
	Everyone agrees that hunger and poor health are unacceptable. Hunger is more widespread in the U.S. than any other industrialized nation. We can all do our part to change that by supporting and participating in the food and nutrition assistance programs run by the USDA.
	3SquaresVT is an entitlement program, meaning that everyone who is eligible for benefits has the right to receive them. When you get benefits, you are not taking them away from anyone else. There is no limit to the number of Vermonters who can receive benefits.
	Many Vermonters need extra help to make ends meet. Over 80,000 Vermonters currently use 3SquaresVT every month. Many more are eligible, and they may not even know it.
	3SquaresVT benefits now come on a plastic card that looks and works like other debit cards used in grocery stores, so you can pay with privacy.
	If you are over 65 or disabled and have a checking or savings account, you do not get a swipe card. Instead, your benefits come in the form of cash deposited right into your bank account. You can tap into that account the same way you would withdraw cash from it or use a check or debit card to pay other expenses.
	When you use 3SquaresVT to shop locally or to buy local products, you support jobs and businesses in your community by bringing federal dollars back into Vermont. Every federal dollar of 3SquaresVT spent in Vermont generates \$1.84 worth of economic activity.
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>"I'm probably not eligible."</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	Income eligibility guidelines changed in 2009. You can now have more income and still get 3SquaresVT. If you were denied before, it's worth applying again to find out if you qualify now.
	A change in your household circumstances could help you get 3SquaresVT now, even if you couldn't before. For example, you can apply for 3SquaresVT again if someone in your household turned 60, or if it has less income, or if you have more bills every month (including medical bills), or if there is a change in the number of people living in your household.
	If you are 65 or older or have a disability, you may be able to get benefits. If you also have health care costs, you may be able to get even more.
	You can own a car and a house and still get 3SquaresVT. You can have savings in the bank, too. Resources and assets will not count if your income is under a certain level.
	Many people don't know that working parents who get the Vermont Earned Income Tax Credit may be able to get 3SquaresVT no matter their income or resources. Working parents can also deduct child care expenses to get more benefits.

This message was funded in part by the USDA, an equal opportunity employer and provider.

### 3SquaresVT Outreach Talking Points

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>"How can I be eligible and get \$0 benefits? Why should I even apply?"</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	Your income minus certain deductions may only qualify you for a \$0 cash benefit. However, it is still worth applying because you can get other important benefits such as discounted telephone service or free school meals. 3SquaresVT is more than just food.
	Qualifying for 3SquaresVT (even if it is for a \$0 cash benefit) makes your children eligible for free school meals, both breakfast and lunch! Over a year, this can save you up to \$700 per child! That's money freed up to put food on your table or pay other family bills. You don't have to fill out another long application - just give the school your food stamp case number. It's as simple as that! It also helps the school because the more children who get free meals, the more federal money the school gets to make the meals. If every Vermont school signed up just one more eligible student for free meals, that small step would generate about \$200,000 a year in additional federal support for Vermont's school meal programs.
	Taking part in 3SquaresVT makes you eligible for Lifeline (monthly credit of at least \$13 to help pay for phone service), as well as a Link Up credit to help pay the cost of installing a phone line.
	Being enrolled in 3SquaresVT is like having a food insurance policy. If something happens, like someone in the household loses a job or gets sick and your income drops, all you have to do is report that change to get higher benefits. Even if you're getting \$0 now, your open case is your insurance for the future. Without it, you have to go through the entire application process.
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>"It's too hard to apply."</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	Community Action Agencies, Agencies on Aging, and others across the state will help you with the application form and process.
	The application process is getting easier. You can now have your interview on the phone instead of in the office. In 2010 you will be able to apply and recertify online.
	Most households now only have to reapply once a year. Most seniors and people with disabilities only need to reapply every 2 years.
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>"I'd rather go to the food shelf."</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	3SquaresVT lets you choose the foods you like in a grocery store. You can buy the foods you know your kids will eat.
	You can go to the food shelf even if you are receiving 3SquaresVT benefits.
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Language or Literacy Barrier</b>
<b>Outreach Message</b>	If you need an interpreter, the 3SquaresVT office will provide one for you.