

3SquaresVT Outreach Talking Points

The following talking points are designed to assist advocates and service providers speaking with potential participants about applying for 3SquaresVT. 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.

Pride, Stigma, & Embarrassment: “Food Stamps are charity”; “Others need it more than me”; “I don’t want people to know I need help”

- ❖ 3SquaresVT is a vital nutrition program run by the US Department of Agriculture that helps people to buy the food they need for good health.
- ❖ 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. About 78,000 Vermonters currently use 3SquaresVT every month. Many more are eligible, and they may not even know it.
- ❖ 3SquaresVT benefits 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 receive SSI and have a checking or savings account, you will get an EBT card with a cash benefit for your first month, but then your cash benefits can be deposited right into your bank account. You can use 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 into Vermont. Every federal dollar of 3SquaresVT spent in Vermont generates \$1.84 worth of economic activity.
- ❖ 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 like 3SquaresVT run by the USDA.
- ❖ If you get 3SquaresVT, you may be eligible for [Jobs for Independence](#), a free job readiness and training pilot program.

“I’d rather go to the food shelf.”

- ❖ You can go to the food shelf even if you are receiving 3SquaresVT benefits. For example, if you get cereal at the food shelf, then you can use your 3SquaresVT benefits to buy the milk.
- ❖ The food shelf can also help you apply for 3SquaresVT. With 3SquaresVT, you can shop whenever is convenient for you!



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- ❖ There are times when food shelves have limited choices. 3SquaresVT lets you choose the foods you like in a grocery store. You can buy the foods you know your kids will eat.

“I’m probably not eligible.”

- ❖ **Income eligibility** guidelines change. If you were denied in the past, 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, if you have less income, 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 60 or older or have a disability, you may be able to get benefits. If you also have health care costs, you may be eligible for a higher benefit.
- ❖ You can own a car and a house and still get 3SquaresVT. You can have savings in the bank too. Most 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 may also deduct child care expenses to get more benefits.
- ❖ If your household situation changed due to a disaster like flooding, a hurricane, or fire, you may be newly eligible for 3SquaresVT. It's worth it to apply and find out.

“It’s too hard to apply.”

- ❖ There are many ways to apply for the program – use the method that is easiest for you. Find your local district office by dialing 2-1-1 if you want to apply in person. You can also apply online. Go to www.mybenefits.vt.gov to get started or visit www.vermontfoodhelp.com to learn more or request a paper application.
- ❖ Community Action Agencies, Agencies on Aging, and others across the state will help you with the application form and process. Dial 2-1-1 to get connected, or call the Senior Helpline at 1-800-642-5119. You can also call the Vermont Foodbank for application assistance at 802-477-4136.
- ❖ The interview process is easier. You can have your interview on the phone instead of in the office. Interviews are "on demand" which means you choose the date and time that works for you before your deadline. Interviewers are on the line to take your call.
- ❖ Most households now only have to reapply once a year. Most seniors and people with disabilities only need to reapply every two years.

Language or Literacy Barrier

- ❖ If you would like an interpreter, the 3SquaresVT office will provide one for you. Just call 1-855-247-3092 and stay on the line to be connected to a spoken language interpreter.



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