

Sited: The food is out there

How to get food stamps to the people who need them?

Massachusetts, with its liberal reputation, is the third worst in the country at getting the message out, with only 40 percent of qualifying people getting food stamps, according to a federal study.

That's why a Web site, gettingfoodstamps.org, moved into Spanish last month.

After the site's English-language launch in January, "the first question everyone asked was, 'When are you going to translate it into other languages?'" said Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba of the nonprofit Project Bread.

Ettinger de Cuba, who spent over two years in Bolivia with the Peace Corps, translated the Web site, and visitors opening a home page can choose Spanish or English.

Between confusing program regulations and the 13 documents needed to prove eligibility, applying for the food stamp program can be intimidating. "Think how many more barriers there are for people who don't speak English," says Ellen Parker, Project Bread executive director.

"Part of what we're trying to do is get the information out there," says Ettinger de Cuba, who does outreach about the site to community centers with computer labs.

"The site explains what the steps are in the process," says Roberto Flores, education and employment counselor at La Alianza Hispana in Roxbury, which has three computer labs for English classes and job training and information access.

"They feel more comfortable coming to an agency that serves Hispanics," says Flores, explaining that gettingfoodstamps.org provides information "without having to go to some downtown office."