APPENDIX B-1

STATE FSP AGENCY INTERVIEWS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

State Food Stamp Agency Administrators and Staff

Introduction/Purpose of the Study

My name is _____ and I'm a researcher from the Urban Institute, an organization based in Washington, D.C. that conducts policy-related research on a variety of social welfare and economic issues. I'm here today because the Urban Institute was awarded a contract by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service to conduct a major study of the range of efforts states are undertaking to enhance food stamp certification and to modernize the FSP. This study focuses on four types of modernization efforts: policy changes to modernize FSP application (case management and recertification procedures), reengineering of administrative functions, increased or enhanced use of technology, and partnering arrangements with businesses and nonprofit organizations. The goals of the study are to develop a comprehensive, national inventory of FSP modernization efforts, both large and small, undertaken in all the states; identify successful modernization efforts across the country that can potentially be replicated; and help avoid implementation pitfalls among states currently planning similar kinds of modernization initiatives.

This study is comprised of three major phases of data collection. Phase 1 entailed exploratory site visits to four states (Massachusetts, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin) which were conducted in Spring 2007; Phase 2 includes a national "inventory," or survey, of all states, including a sample of counties as well as partner organizations; and Phase 3 entails more intensive case studies in 14 states and up to two local sites within those states. The purpose of these Phase 3 case study site visits is to provide an in-depth, comprehensive picture of initiatives in selected states that have implemented or are implementing modernization efforts that affect the certification and/or recertification processes. In each site we visit, we plan to speak with state and local administrators and staff, and administrators and staff from community (community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs)) or vendor partners. We also plan to conduct brief "exit" or "intercept" interviews with FSP applicants and/or participants as they are leaving the local offices to ask them about their experiences with the services they received. Focus groups with FSP participants and eligible nonparticipants will also be convened in conjunction with the site visits.

Confidentiality Statement:

Before I begin our discussion, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I know that you are busy and I will try to be as focused as possible. I have many questions and am hoping to talk with a number of people in your state, so please do not feel as though I expect you to be able to answer every question. Our aim is to learn from your insights and experiences, not to audit or judge your work in any way. In addition, I want to let you know that although we take notes, information is never repeated with the name of the respondent in any reports or in any

discussions with supervisors, colleagues, FNS, etc.   When we write our reports and discuss our findings, information from all the people we spoke with is synthesized and compiled. No individual will be quoted by name. Do you have any questions before we begin?

A. General/Background

A.1.   Respondent Background *(Review/confirm contact information (e.g., title, phone number, e-mail address) obtained prior to the visit. Use this discussion as an icebreaker.)*

- Please describe your current position (e.g., overall responsibilities, reports to whom)
- How long have you worked for this agency? In this position?
- What is your experience/background in this field? (e.g., education/relevant experience)

A.2   Organizational Background/Overview of the FSP

- Please give me an overview of the programs administered by this agency (e.g., TANF, Medicaid). *(Review state website prior to visit so you are familiar with programs/structure of agency.)*

- How many local food stamp offices are there in the state? *(Fill in in advance, if possible, and confirm.)*

- Have there been any major organizational changes since 2002? Have there been any efforts to restructure/reorganize/integrate the TANF/ Medicaid/FS programs? If yes, have these efforts had any impact on the FSP? Please describe.

- Where does the FSP fit into the agency structure? What is the current organizational structure of the FSP in this state? Have there been any major organizational changes to the FSP in this state since 2002?

- Can you provide me with an overview of how FSP policy is communicated to the local offices? How does the state/local agency keep program staff aware of FSP policy changes?

- To what extent is there variation in how counties administer the FSP program? How much flexibility do county administrators have to implement FSP program activities and/or policy? How would you describe the relationship between the state and county offices?

- To what extent are the responsibilities for key program functions (e.g., FS certification, reporting, recertification, case management) centralized versus decentralized?

- What process is used to review decisions made by the county/local administrators? How do county/local administrators report changes in program administration/local policy to state administrators? What process is used to review and follow-up on case errors?

- Does the state/county FSP target (e.g., outreach activities) any special populations, such as persons with limited English proficiency or persons with disabilities?

- Overall, have there been any recent changes in the state economy that might affect program enrollment and/or your outreach efforts?

B. Food Stamp Modernization Activities

B.1. Planning and Early Implementation
Please describe the planning process for these modernization activities.

- What groups/constituencies were the key impetuses or motivation for these efforts? *(Probe: Federal/state/local attention and priority; pressure from advocacy groups; lawsuits; funding became available; federal emphasis; previous work in this area; etc).*

- Who was involved in the planning process? Who were the key players in this process? *(Probe: The Legislature? The Governor's office? The state FS agency? One or more local county offices? Advocacy groups?)* What were the roles of the key players? What was the nature of their involvement? What were their key concerns and issues?

- What mechanisms were used during this planning process (e.g., workgroups, steering committees)? *(Probe: Was the decision-making process top/down? Bottom/up?)*

- Over what period of time did the planning process occur? *(Probe: Number of years/months?)* **(Focus on 2002 to the present.)**

- What were the key funding sources for your modernization efforts? (*Probe: new funding or shifting funds by restructuring/cost savings? FS program funds only? Costs shared by other programs? Specify which programs.)*

- What, if any, were the funding challenges associated with these efforts*? (Probe: Lack of available funding resources? Larger state budget issues?)*

- What were the major start-up/early implementation challenges you faced with these efforts? Were these resolved? How? What, if any, of these start-up challenges continue to be a problem?

- Were other state programs/agencies (e.g., Medicaid, Child Support, TANF) involved in discussions or planning of these modernization activities? Was there any discussion of sharing costs of modernization efforts with other programs?

B.2. Modernization Activities

I have a general understanding of the types of activities related to food stamp modernization that your state has undertaken but I'd like to review and confirm them. My understanding is that your state is currently implementing (or planning to implement) the following activities:*. (List activities and confirm.)*

Are there other activities I haven't mentioned? If yes, please describe.

For our purposes, we're grouping these activities into four categories, so let's discuss your state's activities within each of these groupings. *(Note: Review all available information about the state's modernization efforts so you are familiar with their activities and have the necessary background prior to this discussion to help guide this discussion; confirm the background information, filling in the gaps and adding new information as needed. For each type of activity, determine the goal/purpose of the change, implementation stage (planning, early implementation and fully implemented)) and the geographic scope for each activity.) [The background information for each state will be organized to mirror the format for the Organizing Framework for Data Collection and Analysis as shown in Exhibit 2 in the Phase 1 Data Collection and Analysis Plan.]*

- policy changes to modernize FSP application, case management, and recertification procedures (e.g., policy options, waivers, legislative changes)*)*
  - Are there other waivers this state is considering but haven't yet requested?
  - Were any waiver requests denied? If yes, why? What effect did this have on your planned modernization activities? Please describe.
  - Were there any policy options, waivers, or legislative/regulatory changes that your state considered but did not pursue? If yes, why?

- reengineering of administrative functions
  - Were there any changes in administrative functions that your state considered but did not pursue? If yes, why (e.g., costs, staffing issues, union issues)?

- increased or enhanced use of technology
  - Were there any technology changes or enhancements that your state considered but did not pursue? If yes, why (e.g., costs, existing MIS)?

- partnering arrangements with businesses and nonprofit organizations (*Note: We are interested in partnering arrangements with community partners (including community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs)) and with private vendors who are performing tasks related to the certification/recertification process - not with vendors who are contracted to do IT systems upgrades.).*
  - Were there any partnering arrangements that your state considered but did not pursue? If yes, why (e.g., lack of qualified/suitable partners)?

- Do the activities that your state considers "modernization" activities fit in these categories? If no, what other types of strategies or activities meet your definition of food stamp modernization? *(Probe: Please describe those activities that don't fit in these categories.)*

    - What is the overall goal or purpose of each of these efforts? ***(Note: Use prepared checklist that lists activities to determine goals for each separate activity.)***
        Probe:
        - *Reducing administrative costs*
        - *Increasing access for applicants/beneficiaries or specific subgroups*
        - *Improving customer service*
        - *Maintaining program integrity (e.g., achieving and maintaining low error rates)*
        - *Advances in technology*
        - *Integrating the FSP with other benefit programs*

    - How do the goals of the FSP modernization efforts fit with the overall goals and objectives of your organization/agency? Are there conflicting goals?

    - Determine implementation stage for each activity. How would you characterize the overall implementation status of your state's modernization activities (e.g., planning, early implementation, fully-implemented)? When were each of these activities/changes implemented? Are they still in operation? If no, why not?

    - Was there a specific impetus for each of these activities? If yes, what was the impetus for each of these changes?

    - Determine geographic scope of each activity. Were each of these activities implemented statewide? If no, in what counties/cities were they implemented? Why were they implemented in selected localities? Who made these implementation decisions? ***(Note: When different activities are implemented only in selected areas of the state, subsequent questions must be tailored to capture those differences and address each separately.)***

    - Have you made any major changes to your activities since they were first implemented? If yes, please describe. Any strategies implemented and then dropped? Any additions?

B.3. Impact of Modernization Activities on Clients and Staff

Now, let's talk about the impact of these changes/modernization efforts on the application/certification process for clients.

- Overall, from the applicant's/participant's perspective, how is the application/certification process different now than it was before these changes? How have these changes/modernization efforts affected the application/certification process for clients? Have the basic steps in applying for program benefits and becoming recertified

changed for applicants and participants? What aspects are different? How/in what manner are they different (e.g., staff attrition, RIFs, etc.)? *(Note: Use the background information to help guide discussion regarding changes for staff at all 13 points in the application/certification process, as described in the organizing framework. Address changes separately for each type of modernization activity implemented. State respondents may defer these questions to local staff.)*

- Now let's address the impact of these changes on the roles and responsibilities of staff assigned to these tasks.

- Overall, from the perspective of staff, how is the application/certification process different now than it was before these changes? What aspects are different? How/in what manner are they different (e.g., staff attrition, RIFs, etc.)? *(Note: Use the background information to help guide discussion regarding changes for staff at all 13 points in the application/certification process, as described in the organizing framework. Address changes separately for each type of modernization activity implemented. State respondents may defer these questions to local staff.)*

- How are these activities staffed? What are the responsibilities and duties of staff performing these FSP modernization activities? Were any new positions created? Were any new staff hired specifically for these activities? How were staff chosen/assigned for these activities? Were any positions eliminated? If yes, what types? How many?

- What is the average monthly caseload for these workers? FS only caseload? What proportion of your office caseload are clients who are eligible for food stamps only? Have the characteristics of your food stamp caseload changed recently (e.g., more working clients, more elderly)? Has the size of the food stamp caseload changed recently?

- Have there been any turnover issues among staff performing these duties? Has this had any impact on the agency's ability to provide services as planned?

- Thinking broadly, did implementation of these efforts change the overall way work is organized (e.g., food stamp application processing, certification and recertification decisions and general case management)? Please describe.

- Have these modernization efforts had any impact on the operation of/service delivery for any **other** programs (e.g., TANF, Medicaid and Child Support)?   Please describe.

B.4. Staff Training

- Was any special training provided to staff prior to roll-out of these efforts? If yes, please describe. Who conducted the training? Who participated? How long was the training? What was covered? Has any additional training been provided subsequent to start-up? Are there any plans for future training sessions?

C. Key Linkages/Organizational Partners

Now let's discuss the other agencies/organizations/vendors involved in these efforts.
(*Note: We are interested in partnering arrangements with community partners (including community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) and with private vendors who are performing tasks related to the certification/recertification process - not with vendors who are contracted to do IT systems upgrades.).*)

- Who are these organizations? What types of organizations are these? (e.g., CBOs, FBOs, new technology vendors)

- What roles do they play? What are their duties? To whom and where do they provide services? *(Note: Use the Guide Card to break out activities.)*

- Are these new collaborations or had you previously established partnerships with these organizations for other initiatives?

- Are there formal partnership arrangements (e.g., MOUs, contracts)? What are the key features of these agreements? Are these organizations paid for providing these services?

- What issues/concerns did partners raise about their involvement in these activities?

- How were the partners recruited/selected? How difficult was this process? (*Probe: Significant interest vs. limited interest*) What challenges came up in setting up these collaborations? How were they resolved? What aspects of the coordination were particularly successful? What aspects continue to be challenging?

- Please describe the mechanisms in place for communicating/collaborating with these partners. How often do the partners meet? At the state level? At the local level?

- Has there been any turnover among partners? If yes, please describe.

- What types of training were provided to the partners involved in modernization activities?

D. New Technology

- What, if any, changes was your state required to make to your MIS to accommodate changes to the application, certification, reporting and recertification procedures? What hardware and software changes did this involve? What challenges were associated with this process? Are there outstanding issues related to this process? Where do you stand in terms of completion of these efforts?

- What additional software and hardware are/were partners required to procure to carry out their roles in the modernization efforts?

- To what extent did you rely on contractors/vendors vs. in-house staff to plan, design and make MIS changes/modifications? Why were these choices made?

- What kind of technology training was provided to both staff and partners?

E. Data Reporting/Outcomes

Note: Ask the person (s) who is responsible for entering and tracking data on modernization activities to walk you through the process, show you the forms, etc.

- Please describe your data tracking efforts for these modernization activities (e.g., data tracking beyond that required for FNS reporting.) What goals/outcomes are you attempting to track (e.g., improved application processing times, higher participation rates, error rates, lower administrative costs, reduction in paperwork)? How are you tracking these outcomes? How do you measure whether these goals are being met? How are you tracking this information?

- Have there been any challenges or issues in terms of tracking/providing the data required? If yes, please describe? Did this require any new procedures?

- What outcomes have been observed to date? Are these outcomes different than what you expected to find? If yes, what explanations can you offer for these differences?

- Are you aware of any unintended negative effects of modernization? If yes, please describe? Any unanticipated positive effects? If yes, please describe

- *(If providing additional access points to the FSP)* Are you tracking data on the usage of new access points by applicants and recipients? Are you tracking this data by population subgroups? Please describe. What has your data shown thus far?

- Which data are easiest to compile/provide? Which are most problematic?

- What have been the statewide trends in FS participation during the period of your modernization activities? What data show this?

  - [if there is a trend] Do you think this trend is related to the modernization activities?
  - [if modernization activities are less than statewide] Do you have participation data that separates the modernization area from the rest of the state?
  - [if yes] How do those compare?

- What have been the statewide trends in total benefits during the period of your modernization activities? What data show this?

  - [if there is a trend] Do you think this trend is related to the modernization activities?
  - [if modernization activities are less than statewide] Do you have benefits data that separates the modernization area from the rest of the state?
  - [if yes] How do those compare?

- What have been the statewide trends in error rates during the period of your modernization activities? What data show this?

  - [if there is a trend] Do you think this trend is related to the modernization activities?
  - [if modernization activities are less than statewide] Do you have error rate data that separates the modernization area from the rest of the state?
  - [if yes] How do those compare?

- What have been the statewide trends in administrative costs during the period of your modernization activities? What data show this?

  - [if there is a trend] Do you think this trend is related to the modernization activities?
  - [if modernization activities are less than statewide] Do you have error rate data that separates the modernization area from the rest of the state?
  - [if yes] How do those compare?

F. Contextual Issues

- Are there any features/issues/concerns unique to the counties/sites implementing FS modernization activities that might have an impact on successful implementation (e.g., local labor market conditions, staffing issues in the local offices, new local office administrators)?

- What are the key barriers to FSP access in these communities (e.g., language barriers)? Have they changed over time?

- Have there been any notable changes in the make-up of the FSP population recently (e.g., influx of immigrant population)?

G. General Perceptions/Opinions

- Looking back, which aspects of the planning and implementation process seem to have been the most successful at this time? The most challenging? Are there any lessons or insights that might be important for others undertaking a similar effort to know? Any recommendations?

- What are the major implementation challenges or barriers you faced with these modernization efforts? What strategies have you adopted to overcome these challenges? *(Note: Don't ask if you have already dealt with this in previous questions.)* What challenges still remain?

- *[If implementing multiple interventions]* Among the activities that your state has implemented, from your perspective, which do you think are the most successful? Why? The least successful? Why? If you were launching this effort again, what would you do differently?

- Do you feel that these efforts have been successful in terms of meeting the stated goals? Why or why not?

- How do local FSP staff and partners view the FSP modernization activities? Based on feedback you may have received, how have they responded to the changes?

- In terms of lessons learned, what, if anything, should states and contractors do differently to facilitate implementation and maximize positive outcomes?

H. Future Plans

- What are your plans for the next 2-3 years in terms of these new modernization activities and changes to the certification/recertification process? Will these activities continue? Why or why not? *(If applicable)* Will the efforts currently operating be expanded to other counties/locations? Please discuss.

- Do you intend to seek a federal waiver to carry out a demonstration project? If yes, for what?

- Still thinking ahead to the next 2-3 years, do you have any plans to launch any additional modernization efforts or new changes to the certification/recertification process? If no, why not? If yes, what will these new efforts require in terms of: policy changes; reengineering of administrative/organizational functions; increased or enhanced use of new technology; and partnering with businesses and nonprofit organizations?

- Is there anything else we haven't asked you about that you think we should know about your efforts?

THANK YOU