

B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

For this study, we will collect information on FSP modernization efforts occurring at the state and local levels in a manner which will help to reduce the burden on respondents, especially local FSP agency and partner respondents. The following section describes these information collection methods.

1. Potential respondent universe and sampling

The respondent universe for this study is state FSP agencies, local FSP agencies, FSP partners (faith-based organizations (FBOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and for-profit contractors), FSP participants, FSP applicants, and eligible FSP nonparticipants. Data will be collected from respondents through surveys and site visits. Surveys will be administered to 51 state FSP directors, 150 local FSP directors, and 150 representatives of FBOs/CBOs and for-profit contractors. Case studies will be conducted in 14 states and include interviews with staff at state FSP agencies, local FSP agencies, FBOs/CBOs and contracted organizations, and FSP participants, nonparticipants, and applicants.

Surveys of State, Local, and Partner FSP Modernization. Three surveys will be administered during this data collection—the State, Local, and Partner FSP Modernization Surveys. FSP directors from all 50 states and the District of Columbia will receive the on-line State FSP Modernization Survey and 150 local FSP directors will receive instructions for accessing the on-line Local FSP Modernization Survey. The largest county in each state, counties identified by state FSP administrators as conducting modernization activities, and additional counties selected at random will also receive the Local FSP Modernization Survey. The Partner FSP Modernization Survey will be administered to a sample of 150 partners—FBOs/CBOs and private contractors that work with the state and/or counties—that state and local FSP directors identify as being involved in some capacity with FSP modernization efforts.

Sampling issues arise in the selection of counties for the survey phase. Because the study's objective is to develop an inventory, and not to make any statistical inferences, purposive sampling techniques will be employed. The FSP director of the largest county (in terms of FSP participation) in each state will be surveyed and asked to identify counties that are conducting modernization activities. Local FSP directors of up to two additional counties per state, as nominated by their state FSP director, will be surveyed. If this yields a sample of less than 150 counties, the sample will be supplemented by a random sample of remaining counties. The following chart shows how the survey respondents will be selected.

Survey Sampling Plan

	State FSP Directors	Local FSP Directors	Partner Organizations
SAMPLES TAKEN	All states plus District of Columbia (51)	In each state, county with largest number of households reporting FSP participation (50) FSP directors in all counties identified by state FSP directors and not already surveyed in the category above (number to be determined) Additional counties, selected at random as needed to reach target total (100 minus number of identified counties)	Selected private, for-profit contractors and nonprofit community-based and faith-based organizations identified by state and local FSP directors that have direct contact with FSP applicants and participants (150)
TOTAL SURVEYED	51	150	150
TOTAL ESTIMATED POPULATION	51	3,140 ⁵	50,000 ⁶

Several survey procedures will be used to ensure a high response rate, including the establishment of liaisons for each state, receipt of a packet containing a FNS letter of introduction and detailed instructions for completing the survey on-line or by hardcopy (see Appendix E for a sample of these letters), and reminders through email, phone, and postcard at appropriate intervals. (See B.3 for more information.) It is expected that these steps will produce response rates of 100 percent for the state FSP agency officials, 95 percent among local FSP agency officials, and 90 percent among partner organizations.

FSP Modernization Case Studies. A sample of 14 states will be selected for local site visits. The overall goal is to select states that represent a broad range of variation across these four factors: 1) state characteristics; 2) type of FSP modernization initiatives; 3) extent of FSP modernization initiatives; and 4) stage of implementation. States selected will differ by the following specific measures:

⁵ This number does not include the District of Columbia.

⁶ This is the number of charitable organizations working with America's Second Harvest. America's Second Harvest is the nation's largest charitable hunger-relief organization. It supports approximately 50,000 local charitable agencies operating more than 94,000 programs including food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, Kids Cafes, Community Kitchens, and Backpack Programs. See www.secondharvest.org for more information.

- State Characteristics/Context
 - Size (FSP participants)
 - Geographic region
 - Demographic characteristics of population
 - Application approval rates
 - Administrative costs
 - FSP error rate
- Type of FSP Modernization Effort
 - Policy changes
 - Restructuring administrative functions
 - Expanding application of technology
 - Partnering with commercial businesses and non-profits
- Extent of FSP Modernization Initiative
 - Statewide
 - State initiative piloted in selected counties/regions
 - Single county initiative
 - Single change versus multiple changes
- Stage of Implementation
 - Planned
 - Early implementation
 - Fully implemented

Since there are more criteria than the number of states to be selected, choices will have to be made. FSP data on state characteristics available from FNS for all states, and survey data on modernization, will be used to categorize states and guide the selection process. Ensuring that the states selected represent a broad range of modernization activities will be crucial.

It is estimated that, per state, site visit teams will interview approximately: five state agency staff; one staff from other state agencies (e.g., TANF); 18 local agency staff; five to six staff of FBOs/CBOs or contractors; and 12 food stamp applicants and participants. Site visit teams will hold two focus groups per site visit – one group of food stamp participants and one group of eligible nonparticipants – with approximately six respondents per focus group. At the state level, interview respondents include the state FSP administrators and staff; state FBO/CBO partners or vendors responsible for modernization activities providing certification/recertification services (does not include information technology or management information services); and any additional state- or local level respondents identified as knowledgeable about and involved in state modernization efforts.

Local sites that provide illustrative examples of different kinds of FSP modernization initiatives will be selected based upon the information obtained in the surveys and other background data collected. Up to two local sites that are involved in modernization activities will be visited per state. Interviews will be conducted with FSP administrators and staff, and representatives from local FBO/CBO partner staff and vendors. Due to time and resource

constraints, it will not be possible to visit all FSP service locations and partner organizations in a state. Selections of counties will be made on the basis of size and diversity, and in consultation with the state and local FSP agency staff. For example, FSP service locations and partners that serve the largest number of FSP participants within the county will be visited. In addition to selecting sites that represent a range of modernization activities, whether the service location and/or partner organization focuses on a particular subgroup of the target population will be considered for site selection purposes.

The local site visits will include focus groups with a small sample of FSP participants and eligible nonparticipants and intercept interviews with FSP applicants and participants. One participant focus group and one eligible nonparticipant focus group will be held in each state. For each focus group, it is expected that approximately 12 respondents will attend. For the intercept interviews, FSP staff will be asked to help recruit applicants and participants at the offices. Approximately six FSP applicants and six FSP participants will be interviewed in each state.

The following chart shows the potential respondents for the case study phase of the data collection:

Potential Respondents for Case Studies

Categories of Respondents	Estimated Number Per State	Types of Respondent with Category
State Food Stamp Agency <i>State FSP Interview Discussion Guide</i>	5	Director Policy and Operations Staff Staff responsible for MIS modernization activities Staff responsible for FSP outcomes reporting
Local Food Stamp Office (up to two counties visited per state) <i>Local FSP Interview Discussion Guide</i>	14	Director Office supervisor Eligibility worker(s) Staff responsible for MIS/reporting Participants/applicants (brief intercept interviews) Participants (focus groups) Nonparticipants (focus groups)
Other State Agencies/Departments <i>State FSP Interview Discussion Guide</i>	1	TANF agency, budget agency, information technology department
State or Local Contractor/Vendor <i>FSP Partner Discussion Guide</i>	3	Vendor(s) responsible for implementing FSP modernization activities (e.g., call centers, document imaging, eligibility) or a local vendor representative working directly with the local agency
FBO/CBO Partner (State or Local) <i>FSP Partner Discussion Guide</i>	3	Representative of partner organization working with local FSP office (if applicable)

Categories of Respondents	Estimated Number Per State	Types of Respondent with Category
Other Local Respondent <i>Local FSP Interview Discussion Guide</i>	4	County MIS staff, TANF agency case managers, representatives of local advocacy group
Food Stamp Applicants <i>Applicant/Participant Intercept Interview</i>	6	
Food Stamp Participants <i>Applicant/Participant Intercept Interview and FSP Participant Focus Group Discussion Guide</i>	18	
Food Stamp Eligible Nonparticipants <i>FSP Eligible Nonparticipant Focus Group Discussion Guide</i>	12	
ESTIMATED RESPONDENTS PER STATE	66	

2. Procedures for the collection of information

Sampling Procedures. Statistical sampling will be conducted for this study to help reduce the burden on respondents. The survey of state FSP directors on modernization efforts is a census of all state Food Stamp Programs, including the District of Columbia. However, the survey of local FSP directors and the survey of local FSP partners will sample the population of these respondents. The survey of local FSP partners (i.e., FBOs, CBOs, contractors) will use a convenience sample based on the recommendations from state and local FSP directors. The survey of local FSP directors will use a combination of convenience and simple random sampling to draw from the population. The following describes these sampling methods.

Statistical methodology for stratification and sample selection. Three sampling methods will be employed for the local FSP directors' survey. First, as described in B.1, the FSP directors in each state's largest county, in terms of the number of food stamp caseload, will be surveyed. The second subsample of local FSP directors is a convenience sample to be derived from the recommendations of the state FSP directors. The state respondents will be asked to provide a list of the counties considered the most active in advancing modernization efforts. The third subsample will be a simple random sample of the local FSP directors.

Estimation procedures. This survey is intended to develop an inventory of modernization efforts, not make statistical inferences about these efforts. As this survey methodology for the local FSP agencies and partners uses convenience sampling (as opposed to random), it is not possible to establish confidence intervals.

Statistical techniques to ensure accuracy for the purposes described in this justification. This study is intended to develop an inventory of modernization efforts, not make statistical inferences about these efforts (see above). The data collected will be used to describe these

activities in all states and a small sample of local agencies and partners to capture modernization efforts at a particular point in time. Thus, no statistical techniques will be used to ensure accuracy.

Specialized sampling procedures to correct unusual problems. No specialized sampling procedures will be used.

Periodic data collection cycles to reduce burden. This is a one-time data collection effort and will not require period data collection cycles.

Procedures for Data Collection. This section describes the data collection procedures developed for this study to provide quality assurance and consistent administration of the surveys and case studies.

Data collection procedures for the surveys. The survey phase of this data collection effort will begin upon receipt of OMB clearance. Prior to the surveys being fielded, state administrators will be contacted and asked to identify and provide contact information on county FSP agencies that have implemented or are pilot sites for state modernization initiatives and county FSP agencies that have implemented their own modernization initiatives. State FSP directors will also be asked to identify partner organizations and vendors involved in modernization activities at the state and local levels. Once the local FSP offices are selected (see full sampling procedure above), they will be contacted and asked to identify partner organizations and vendors involved in modernization initiatives at the local level. The surveys will be fielded once the full list of respondents is compiled.

A letter from FNS introducing the project and the survey accompanied by a letter from the Urban Institute explaining how to complete the on-line survey will be sent to state and selected local FSP directors and partners (see Appendix E for sample letters). A hard copy of the survey will be mailed or faxed upon request. The same package will also be sent via email to these respondents.

The survey will be developed for distribution primarily as an on-line survey, with hard copy and mail-in options provided. The survey will be uploaded into Ultimate Survey, an on-line survey tool. The surveys will be tested both internally and externally to ensure that they can be navigated seamlessly and without any malfunctions. Technical support by phone will be available to individuals completing the surveys from 9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday, while the survey is being fielded.

Surveys completed electronically will be automatically uploaded into a Microsoft Access database. Survey team members, trained on the survey instruments and data entry formats, will manually edit all completed hard copy surveys before data entry within two days of receipt. To ensure accurate and complete information, programmed edits will detect keying errors for immediate corrections and flag others for later correction. As each survey is reviewed, follow-up e-mails and telephone calls will be made to those respondents whose surveys contain errors, unclear responses, or missing information. If a survey team member is uncertain about how to code a response or whether follow-up is needed, the study's survey team leader will review the

item. All coding decisions made in such cases are documented to assure consistency in coding. A PC-based tracking system will be used to monitor the receipt of surveys, status of follow-up reminders, attachments provided by respondents, completion of data entry, and need for further clarification.

Data collection procedures for the case studies. For the case studies, one senior Urban Institute staff member with significant and recent FSP experience will lead each site visit team. An advance letter from the Urban Institute (see sample letter in Appendix E) will be sent to states letting them know they have been selected as a case study site. Staff will then work closely with each site to develop a schedule to meet with the appropriate respondents. Below is a sample site visit schedule that shows how the visits can be scheduled to assure that all needed respondents are interviewed.

Sample Site Visit Schedule for a Site Visit

Day One: State-Level Data Collection

Time	Site Visitor 1	Site Visitor 2
9:00 – 11:00	State Food Stamp Director	
11:00 – 12:30	State Food Stamp Policy & Operations Staff	
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch	
1:30 – 3:00	Staff responsible for FSP MIS modernization activities	
3:00 – 4:30	Staff responsible for FSP modernization outcomes reporting	

Day Two: State-Level Data Collection

Time	Site Visitor 1	Site Visitor 2
9:00 – 10:30	Staff responsible for state-wide MIS modernization	
10:30 – 12:00	Vendor or other partners responsible for state-wide modernization efforts	
12:00-1:00	Lunch	
1:00 – 4:30	Additional meetings, as determined	

Day Three: Local-Level Data Collection

Time	Site Visitor 1	Site Visitor 2
8:00 – 10:00	Local FSP Office Administrator	
10:00 – 11:30	Local Office Supervisor	
11:30 – 12:30	Eligibility worker	On-site observation
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	
1:00 – 2:00	Intercept interviews	Eligibility worker
2:00 – 3:00	On-site observation	Intercept interviews
3:00 – 4:30	Representatives from FBO/CBO Partner	
4:30- 6:30	Break	
6:30 – 8:30	Focus group — FSP Participants	

Day Four: Local-Level Data Collection

Time	Site Visitor 1	Site Visitor 2
8:00 – 9:00	Eligibility worker	Eligibility worker
9:00 – 10:30	Focus group — nonparticipants	
10:30 – 12:30	Representatives from FBO/CBO partner	On-site observations/ document and data review
12:30 – 1:00	Lunch	
1:00 – 2:30	Representatives from local vendor	Real-time testing
2:30 – 3:30	Additional meetings, as determined	Intercept interviews
3:30- 4:30	Additional meetings, as determined	

Staff training will help assure consistency in data collection procedures and documentation. All site visitors will participate in a training session that reviews the data collection instruments, and reviews site visit roles and protocols. The training will also cover logistics related to arranging focus groups, as well as focus group procedures and methods. Once the site visits are completed, all staff will use the same outline for internal site summaries, and site visit information will be coded and entered into a qualitative analysis software package.

3. Methods to maximize response rates and to deal with issues of non-response

As this is a qualitative study of FSP modernization efforts across the country, no statistical methods will be used to sample respondent populations. All 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, will be systematically surveyed. As all respondents in the universe will be surveyed, results from the survey will yield a full documentation and analysis of the modernization activities occurring in all states. The case studies will provide richer detail and further analysis on particular models of FSP modernization the states are undertaking. Study results will inform FNS policy discussions, and provide technical and procedurally relevant information to states. We will also create a centralized source of information that can be used for assessing ways to improve food stamp certification and responding efficiently to the variety of stakeholder queries received.

To ensure the full documentation of activities in all states, having the necessary response rates is vital to the study. The following methods will be utilized to ensure attainment of target response rates.

Surveys of State, Local, and Partner FSP Modernization. We expect that the steps outlined below will produce response rates of 100 percent among state officials, 95 percent among local officials, and 90 percent among partner organizations. These response rate estimates are based on previous survey work completed at the Urban Institute and by other organizations. Recent Urban Institute mixed-mode surveys achieved response rates above 98 percent among state officials in other policy areas. Also, the web-only GAO survey of 2002 Farm Bill options and the more recent GAO web-based survey on the use of alternative methods to apply for and maintain benefits obtained responses from all 50 states.⁷ In addition, FNS's strong support for

⁷ See GAO 2004; and GAO 2007.

the project and encouragement of participation is likely to have an impact on state and local officials, and on private contractors and community organizations.

The survey procedures are designed to ensure high response rates among respondents in all three categories. Respondents for each of the surveys will be contacted by both surface mail and email. They will receive a packet containing a FNS letter of introduction and an Urban Institute letter including the link, logname, and password provided to complete the survey on-line (see Appendix E for a sample of these letters). This letter will also inform respondents that a paper copy of the survey and prepaid return envelope are available upon request. The content of the surveys will be the same in either mode. An email reminder will be sent to those who have not responded within 4-5 days. This should result in an increase in returned surveys. Once the return rate has again significantly declined (usually 3-4 days), nonrespondents will be emailed the link to the survey with a shorter cover letter and a hardcopy reminder postcard that emphasizes the importance of the study. A second email reminder will be sent within 4-5 days to those who still do not respond, followed by telephone reminders from Urban Institute staff. Nonrespondents will be contacted at different times and days of the week than in the initial mailing.

FSP Modernization Case Studies. It is expected that all states and counties within states selected for the case studies will agree to participate in the study (i.e., a 100 percent response rate). To ensure that all key respondents are interviewed, site visitors will work closely with a person assigned to be the primary contact person (i.e., the assigned project liaison at the state level and someone who is identified to assume this role at the local site level) to help in scheduling the site visit. One member of the two-person site visit team will take responsibility for working with the primary contact person to handle the scheduling and logistics of the site visit. For the site visits, the logistical discussion will include recruitment of focus group participants and arranging a time and location for the focus groups. Dates for site visits will be made at least one month ahead of time to permit ample time to schedule interviews. Scheduling interviews will occur during the month before the site visit, and interviews will be reconfirmed with the site contact via email or fax 2-3 days prior to the visit. We will request that a quiet setting that is as private as possible (e.g., a conference room) be made available to interview those who do not have private offices, in order to encourage respondents to feel they can talk freely. Based on our experience, following these established field visit protocols leads to an interview completion rate approaching 100 percent of those scheduled in advance.

For those states or counties using contractors as part of their modernization initiatives, we will ask the state or local liaison to identify and provide contact information for appropriate individuals at the contractor organization. If the liaison prefers to make the initial contact, we will proceed in that manner. While we do not anticipate any difficulty speaking with contractors, if the liaison advises against an interview with the contractor, we will inquire as to the reasons (e.g., the state or county may be in the process of contract negotiations).

For the focus groups of FSP participants and nonparticipants, each group will consist of 7-12 individuals. FSP participants will be identified after consultation with local FSP agency staff. For the focus groups composed of FSP participants, we will rely primarily on lists provided by the local FNS office of newly approved or recertified participants to recruit

participants. FSP staff or site visitors, depending on the preference of the site, will conduct actual recruitment of FSP participants. Eligible nonparticipants will be identified with the assistance of local programs and organizations that are likely to serve populations who are eligible for the FSP, such as area agencies on aging, WIC programs, agricultural extension service programs, and food banks. In essence, this strategy requires recruiting a local-level organization to assist in the focus group recruitment process. We have found this strategy to be successful in recruiting hard-to-reach populations (e.g., immigrants) because these organizations have both the contacts and the trust of the population we want to interview.

To ensure that the desired number of people attends the focus group sessions (i.e., 7-12 people) we will need to over-recruit to allow for the incidence of no-shows. We estimate that we will need between 16-20 people to agree to attend a focus group session to ensure a group of sufficient size. An easy to read and colorful one-page flyer will be developed that local agencies can post in their offices and disseminate to potential focus group candidates. A small monetary incentive will be offered to potential focus group participants. Once focus group candidates are identified, they will be contacted by telephone to fully inform them about the purpose of the focus group and determine whether they are willing to participate. These candidates will be sent a personalized confirmation letter and then called by telephone 2-3 days prior to the focus group to remind them about the session and address any outstanding questions or concerns.

Brief intercept interviews with food stamp applicants and clients will be conducted at local offices, with an expected response rate of 80 percent of those with whom contact is made. These meetings are not scheduled in advance and are completely voluntary. Several techniques will be used to maximize the response rate. One site visitor will individually approach the prospective intercept interview candidate, introduce him/herself and organizational affiliation, provide a concise description of the study (including an easy-to-read description of the study), the specific purpose of the interview, and emphasize the brevity and voluntary nature of the interviews. To allay any potential concerns on the part of the prospective participant that could lead to lower response rates, an FSP staff person will be designated in advance as an official agency contact with whom prospective participants can speak to confirm the purpose of the survey and to answer questions.

4. Tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken

Pretesting of both the survey and case study instruments was conducted. The following describes these pretesting activities.

Pretesting of the Survey Instruments. The survey instruments (Appendix A) were pretested by three states, two counties, and three community-based organizations in August 2007. The states and counties were identified with the assistance of FNS Regional Office staff. States and counties were selected to include both county- and state-administered Food Stamp Programs. States, counties, and partner organizations with a range of modernization experiences were selected.

The three state agencies participating in the pretest were:

Minnesota Department of Human Services
444 Lafayette Rd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
40 N. Pearl Street
Albany, NY 12243

Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services
275 East Main St., 3E-I
Frankfort, KY 40621

The two participating county agencies were:

Bibb County Division of Family and Children Services
456 Oglethorpe St.
Macon, GA 31201

Hennepin County Human Service and Public Health
330 South 12th St.
Minneapolis, MN 55404

The three community-based organizations participating in the pretest were:

Food Bank of Central New York
6960 Schuyler Rd.
East Syracuse, NY 13057

Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger
2901 W. Hunting Park Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19129

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties
800 Ohlone Parkway
Watsonville, CA 95076

In addition, staff from the GAO; the Washington, DC Department of Human Services, Income Maintenance Administration; and the California Association of Food Banks reviewed and commented on the instruments during the pretest phase.

Initial phone calls soliciting participation in the pretest were made in late July and early August 2007. Advance letters and surveys were sent via e-mail on August 8th. Respondents were asked to return completed surveys to the Urban Institute within 10 days. Debriefing calls

with respondents took place the following week. Results of the pretest and comments were used to refine the survey instruments and study procedures. In particular, we clarified reference timeframes, reduced the number of response items for certain questions, and eliminated redundant questions.

Pretesting of the Case Study Instruments. The case study instruments (Appendix B) were pretested during spring 2007. Four states were visited and respondents were administered the semi-structured interview guides, applicant/participant intercept interview guides, and the on-site observation guide. The staff that conducted the site visits provided feedback on the instruments on aspects such as timing, redundancy, and gaps in content and refined the case study instruments accordingly. Overall, they found that the semi-structured questions for the state and local guides worked well. A few areas were identified where some refinements were in order, mostly having to do with flow and emphasis rather than specific wording of questions. For example, when using the state and local interview guides, it is important to take the lead from the respondent with respect to the order of the discussion and modernization initiatives that the state/local agency respondent believes are most significant or represent the greatest changes in the way they do business. The discussion guides then can be more effectively used to probe to make sure the full range of possible modernization efforts about which are asked.

The following state FSP agencies were visited during this initial phase:

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

Department of Workforce Services
140 East 300 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Department of Social and Health Services
Economic Services Administration
Division of Employment and Assistance Programs
1009 College St., SE
P.O. Box 45470
Olympia, WA 98504-5470

Division of Health Care Financing
WI Department of Health and Family Services
1 West Wilson Street, Room 365
Madison, WI 53701

5. Individuals consulted on statistical aspects of the design and the contractor

The agency responsible for receiving and approving contract deliverables is:

The Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014
Alexandria, Virginia 22302
Person Responsible: Rosemarie Downer
(703) 305-2129
Rosemarie.Downer@usda.gov

All data collection and analysis will be conducted by:

The Urban Institute
2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
Person Responsible: Carolyn O'Brien, Principal Investigator
(202) 261-5624
cobrien@ui.urban.org