APPENDIX C

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Performance Standards and Reporting for SNAP Modernization Initiatives

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical source of support for many low-income families and individuals. More than 1 in 10 American households face food insecurity or hunger at some point during the year. The program supports a large number of low-income participants, serving an average of 32.8 million people per month in the first three quarters of 2009.

In recent years, many states have implemented new procedures and policies aimed at reducing administrative costs and increasing program access. Known as modernization, these changes rely on new technologies; organizational, procedural, and policy changes; and partnering and contracting with outside organizations to create efficiencies in and reduce administrative costs and increase program access. In many cases, these changes represent a significant departure from the traditional way of operating the SNAP. Almost all states employ some modernization strategies, though state initiatives vary considerably. States also vary with respect to whether and how they assess and measure performance of their modernization initiatives.

Mathematica Policy Research is conducting a study with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Authorized under 7 USC 2020, to explore how states are measuring the performance of their initiatives. For the purposes of this study, we focus on initiatives that fall into four categories: application tracking, technology, administrative changes, and policy changes. The application tracking category represents the steps in the application process that will help identify if states are able to track the point at which applicants and participants fall out of the system and the characteristics of those individuals. In the technology category, the four initiatives are (1) call centers, including computer phone systems, change centers, interviews, and application processing, (2) online systems, including the online screening tool, online applications, and online accounts, (3) document imaging, and (4) kiosks for application access and submission. The administrative changes category includes SNAP partnering arrangements. The policy change category consists of three initiatives: (1) the waiver of face-to-face interviews, (2) a shortened interview process, and (3) the capacity for clients to complete expedited applications online.

Major goals of the study are to:
1. Create a conceptual framework for performance management in SNAP
2. Describe each state's SNAP performance measures and standards in detail
3. Provide detailed description of how performance measures are implemented, what results are observed, and how the results are used in each state
4. Assess the pros and cons of applying alternative performance measures and standards across states.

The study will proceed in four overlapping stages:

Stage 1: Mathematica will request that all state SNAP agencies, the District of Columbia, and numerous county and local SNAP offices complete a survey of performance measurement activities across modernization initiatives. Included with the survey will be a request for the SNAP offices to provide 12 months of performance data for each measure calculated.

Stage 2: We will conduct ninety-minute phone interviews with the same state, county, and local SNAP agencies that completed the survey to obtain a greater level of detail about the implementation of SNAP performance measurement.

Stage 3: We will conduct sixty-minute phone interviews with numerous SNAP partners, such as community based organizations that assist applicants or participants or businesses that provide contracted services. We will gather details about how the arrangements operate and the performance data the partners collect. We will also request 12 months of performance data from partners for each measure calculated.

Stage 4: We will conduct site visits in ten states to collect more in-depth information on how states conceptualize, create, analyze, and use information from their performance management systems.

For questions or concerns about this study, contact Laura Castner, Project Director: (202) 484-3282 or LCastner@Mathematica-MPR.com