APPENDIX D

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Performance Standards and Reporting for SNAP Modernization Initiatives

1.   Who is conducting this study?

This study is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

2.   What is this study about?

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.

This study explores the methods and systems that states use to measure the performance of their program modernizations. Major goals of the study are to:
- Create a conceptual framework for performance management in SNAP
- Describe each state's SNAP performance measures and standards in detail
- Provide detailed description of how performance measures are implemented, what results are observed, and how the results are used in each state
- Assess the pros and cons of applying alternative performance measures and standards across states.

3.   What do you mean by "modernization"?

For the purposes of the study, the definition of modernization includes new technologies; organizational, procedural, and policy changes; and partnering and contracting with outside organizations to reduce administrative costs and increase program access. Specifically, we will focus initiatives that fall into four categories: application tracking, technology, administrative changes, and policy changes.

4.   What do you mean by "performance measures"?

Performance measures are used to monitor progress towards performance management goals, such as program access, payment accuracy, cost efficiency, and customer service. A performance measure is a calculation used to assess an activity and is typically displayed as a percentage or an average, for example, "Percent Calls Abandoned." Aspects of modernization, such as the streamlining of the application process, the specialization of worker functions, and the centralization of operations require performance management to ensure that SNAP goals are met.

5.   Why am I being asked to participate in this study?

Part of this effort includes conducting phone interviews with all state SNAP agencies in all states and the District of Columbia, as well as with hundreds of county and local agencies and community organizations and businesses that partner with the agencies. State, county, and local agency interviews will focus on state and local modernization efforts, their performance measurement, precise definitions of the measures, the rationale behind developing the measures, and the gaps in the measures. Interviews with commercial firms and community-based partners will center on measures that are specific to the modernization activities in which they are partnering with the states.

Without your participation, we cannot get a clear picture of the modernization efforts in your area, and we will lose valuable information on how to help other organizations develop their own modernization and measurement standards.

6.   What kinds of questions will you ask?

State, county, and local SNAP agencies receive a performance measurement survey to complete prior to their telephone interview, which will assist the interviewer in tailoring the interview to that agency. Interviews will last 90 minutes on average, and will include closed- and open-ended questions. Information collected will include: (1) the context for implementing the modernization measures, and (2) clarification of information in the survey. SNAP partners will not be asked to complete the survey, but will be asked similar questions in the telephone interview that is expected to last 60 minutes on average.

- State, county, and local agency interviews will focus on state and local modernization efforts, their performance measurement, precise definitions of the measures, the rationale behind developing the measures, and possible gaps in the measures.

- Interviews with SNAP partners will center on measures that are specific to the modernization activities in which they are partnering with the states.

All respondents will also be asked to gather 12 months of performance measurement data (or whatever amount is available), in whatever format is most convenient. The data will be used to gauge the performance that states are currently achieving with their modernization initiatives.

7.   Who is the best person in my office to respond to the survey and participate in the interview?

We are seeking feedback from staff who have direct knowledge of how your office monitors and reports program performance. Most of the time, the individuals best able to complete the survey are also best suitable to participate in the interview. Other staff with specific policy knowledge about modernized elements of SNAP in your location may also have vital information. Finally, if you contract or partner with another organization to serve SNAP clients, staff familiar with any performance requirements embedded in a contracting or partnership agreement may be able to answer some questions.

Our questions will focus on a few areas of modernization, including application tracking, technological innovation, administrative changes, and policy changes. Consider these roles and the types of questions we will ask when determining which individuals from your staff should participate in the study.

For example, if you are involved with:

- A call center, then a staff member familiar with either which data elements you track (such as hold time), or someone who is familiar with how those elements are reported and used for performance management, or both types of staff, should participate in the interview

- Online applications, then a staff member who is familiar with the fields you use to track online data (such as the applications that are started, abandoned, or completed), or a staff member who reviews online data reports to track performance, or both, should participate in the interview

- Partner agencies, then a staff member who oversees the activities that partner agencies conduct with respect to SNAP. At a state or local SNAP office, this might be a liaison to whom partners report their performance or who analyzes how work completed by partners assists the state or local office. At a partner agency, this might be the person charged with maintaining a reporting relationship with the SNAP state or local office, or the person who keeps track of the activities the partner organization is doing even if measures of those activities are not reported to the SNAP agency.

8.   How long will the survey take to complete?

The amount of time required to complete the survey will vary by site; we expect it will take two to three people approximately one to two hours each.

9.   Will anyone find out about what I say in this study?

The results of this study will be synthesized in two reports. The information will be displayed by state and modernization initiative. We will not identify names of respondents.

10.   How do I download the survey?

You can download the survey on performance measurement from our secure (SSL-encrypted) file exchange site: SNAP.mathematica-mpr.com. You will need the username and password that has been provided to you. If you need technical assistance, you may contact Amy Wodarek O'Reilly at Mathematica at (609) 945-3314 or awodareko'reilly@mathematica-mpr.com.

11. Do I need to get permission from FNS to participate in this study?

This study is authorized under 7 USC 2020 and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). They are aware that we are asking for your participation in this study and encourage your feedback. If you would like to contact them about this study, you may contact Rosemarie Downer, the Project Officer at FNS at (703) 305-2129 or Rosemarie.Downer@fns.usda.gov.

12.   Do I have to participate in this study?

Your feedback is appreciated by and will be informative to FNS, but you are liberty to refuse participation in the study. Mathematica and FNS have made efforts to minimize the burden that collecting this information will place on you and other respondents in an effort to make your participation as easy as possible. Participation is voluntary. Be assured that there will be no penalties if you decide not to respond to this information collection in whole or to a specific question.

13.   Is there someone I can call to get more information?

Yes, for more information you may contact the project director at Mathematica, Laura Castner, at (202) 484-3282 or LCastner@mathematica-mpr.com, or Rosemarie Downer, the FNS Project Officer at (703) 305-2129 or Rosemarie.Downer@fns.usda.gov.

14. Does this project have OMB clearance?

Yes, this study obtained OMB clearance on MM DD XX, 2010. The OMB approval number is xxxx-xxx, and clearance expires on MM DD, XX, 201X.

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