

SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR

**EVALUATION OF THE UNDERSERVED ELDERLY AND WORKING POOR IN
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP): FY 2009 PILOTS**

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Prepared for:

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CONTENTS

Part		Page
B.	COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS.....	1
	B.1 Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods.....	1
	B.2 Procedures for the Collection of Information.....	2
	B.3 Methods to Maximize Response Rates and to Deal with Non-Response.....	2
	B.4 Test of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken.....	5
	B.5 Individuals Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data.....	5

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT, WORKING POOR

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT, ELDERLY

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP REMINDER LETTER

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP REMINDER CALL

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT, WORKING POOR - SPANISH

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP REMINDER LETTER - SPANISH

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP REMINDER CALL - SPANISH

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL – SPANISH

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

B.1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods

Evaluators from FNS's contractor, Mathematica, will conduct one focus group in each of the six demonstration states. The universe for the focus group data collection consists of the heads of elderly or working poor households that submitted an application for SNAP within the three months preceding the focus group (regardless of their SNAP eligibility status). Demonstration states will provide contact information for the target group from their own administrative records. The convenience sample approach that will be used to identify focus group participants precludes FNS from using any findings from the focus group discussions to generalize to the entire SNAP population, or to the subgroups targeted for the demonstration (for example, households that do not apply for SNAP will not be part of the focus groups). That is, these groups will not contain, and are not intended to contain, a representative sample of any larger population.

Mathematica will conduct all of the recruitment for the focus groups. Demonstration states will provide contact information for the target group from their own administrative records. Mathematica will order the list according to proximity of respondents' residence to the focus group location, and will proceed down the list, inviting respondents until 25 of them agree to participate. The anticipated response rate is 5 percent, based upon recent experience recruiting SNAP clients for focus groups for similar research projects. Specifically, for each focus group, we expect that Mathematica will contact 200 respondents to recruit 25 who agree to participate (anticipating that 10 will actually participate on the day of the group).

The Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 (P.L. 118-8) provided \$4.5 million for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to pilot and evaluate a range of approaches for expanding access to SNAP among two key underserved populations—eligible households with elderly

members and eligible households with adult members who are working or are looking for work (working poor households). In turn, FNS funded six state demonstration programs to increase SNAP access to either of these populations. In addition, FNS contracted with Mathematica Policy Research under contract number AG-3198-D-09-0073 to conduct an evaluation of these demonstrations. Through an evaluation, FNS will be able to advise Federal policymakers and state administrators on the best approaches to increasing SNAP access for two underserved populations.

The evaluation will describe changes the demonstration programs make to SNAP operations, rules, or policies; the rationale for those changes; and the process of implementing them. Specifically, by examining implementation procedures, changes in participant characteristics, the source and outcome of SNAP applications, and client experiences and satisfaction with the demonstration, the evaluation aims to identify the reasons for demonstrations' successes and challenges. Over four years, this evaluation will collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data from the American Community Survey (ACS), program documents, state administrative case records, state administrative expenditure (SAE) filings, site visits, and client focus groups. **This request for clearance covers only the focus group component of the project.**

B.2. Procedures for the Collection of Information

Evaluators will contact up to 200 respondents from the list provided by each state in order to recruit approximately 25 to each 90-minute focus group (expecting that approximately 10 will participate on the day of the group). Two to four weeks before the focus group, trained staff will begin calling applicants who live in the zip codes closest to the focus group location. This approach ensures that evaluators call first those for whom transportation is less burdensome,

hopefully increasing the number of contacted applicants who will agree to participate in the group. Calls for each focus group will continue until 25 applicants agree to participate. Staff will use a recruitment script (Appendix A or B, depending on the nature of the group) to introduce the evaluation, describe the purpose of the focus group, ensure the respondent is eligible to participate in the group, and ask the respondent to participate. Respondents will receive \$20 for participating in the focus groups, plus an extra \$20 to cover transportation and/or child care. Callers will recruit a mix of genders and ages (within the target age ranges for each group of respondents).

One week before the focus group, evaluators will send a reminder letter to each respondent who agreed to participate (Appendix C) along with directions to and a map of the focus group location. The day before the focus group, evaluators will call recruited applicants to remind them of the focus group date, time, and location (Appendix D). Contact information for all individuals contacted for this data collection will be destroyed following the focus groups, and they will be assured that participation (or declining to participate) will not affect their eligibility for SNAP.

One of the six demonstration projects focuses on a population that primarily speaks Spanish. For that site (one of the three focusing on working poor), translated recruitment, reminder, and discussion group moderation tools will be used (Appendices F-I). The three sites focusing on outreach to elderly clients serve English-speaking populations.

A trained and experienced professional researcher from Mathematica will conduct the focus groups using a semi-structured protocol to facilitate an informal group discussion that flows like a natural conversation. Another researcher will take notes during the focus group, to allow the group facilitator to focus on the conversation. In accordance with the FNS Privacy Act, Mathematica will safeguard all data, and only authorized users will have access to them. The focus group facilitator will tape record each focus group discussion beginning after all

introductions have been made. Respondents will be informed about the recording and instructed that they may request that the recording be suspending at any time. If there are any objections to the tape recording, the facilitator will not record the session. No identifying information will be asked during the focus group and we will only call respondents by their first names; thus no identifying information will be included in the tape recording.

FNS recognizes that the small number of participants and small number of groups, along with the sampling approach, means that the information gathered from the focus groups will be purely anecdotal. The focus group findings, therefore, will not be used to extrapolate to the larger SNAP population. Resource constraints and the study design prevent us from adding additional focus groups in each state.

B.3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates and to Deal with Non-Response

The expected response rate is 5 percent, which was calculated by dividing the expected number of participating respondents (10 per group) by the total number of clients (200) that we expect Mathematica may have to contact before identifying at least 25 who will agree to participate in the focus group.

To maximize responses and handle non-responses, Mathematica will recruit more respondents than needed, anticipating based on prior experience that more than half of the respondents recruited for a given focus group will not attend the group when it meets. Further, Mathematica will provide telephone and mail reminders to all recruited respondents as the focus group date approaches. Finally, Mathematica will offer incentive payments to focus group participants and will offset the cost of childcare and transportation (see section B.2 above), in the hope of alleviating some barriers to focus group participation.

B.4. Test of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken

Mathematica pretested the focus group instruments in Pennsylvania in February 2010, to assess the clarity and usability of the instruments. Mathematica made slight modifications to the instruments based on this assessment.

B.5. Individuals Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data

Mathematica and FNS staff contributed to planning for recruitment and management of the focus groups (Table B.5).

Table B.5 Individuals consulted on data collection or analysis

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