

Public Burden Statement: An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this project is 0584-0547. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to be 108.25 hours per response including the time for participating in the interviews and providing the extant data collection. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Office of Research and Analysis, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014, Alexandria, VA, 22302, ATTN: Rosemarie Downer

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE Eligible Non-Participants

A. Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to come to this discussion group today. My name is [NAME], and I work for Mathematica Policy Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the government.

We are doing a study for the US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service to learn about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, which [is called NAME here in STATE and] was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, and how it works in [STATE]. As part of the study, we want to learn why some people don't participate in the program and what people think is required to apply for SNAP benefits.

Before we start, I want to mention some rules for our discussion group.

- First, we want you to know that taking part in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer a question if you wish. ***Participating in this discussion will not affect any of the services and benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid) you receive.***
- I am going to ask some questions and I'd like everyone to speak up. Let's try to have equal "air time" so everyone will have a chance to speak. Please speak one at a time and as loudly as I am speaking. It's important to avoid side conversations with your neighbors.
- Please respect each other's point of view. There are no right or wrong answers. So just say exactly what you think, whether it's something good or bad.
- At times, I may need to move the conversation along to be sure we cover everything. If I interrupt you, it's not personal. I just want to get to everything that's on the agenda.
- After you leave today, we ask that you respect each other's privacy by not repeating any of the discussion you've heard.
- I would like to tape record our discussion so I can listen to it later and accurately report *what* was said. Everything you say here is private, except as otherwise required by law. No one besides our study team will listen to the tape. Your names will *not* be included in our report or on any document we submit to anyone outside of the investigators.

- If you want to say something that you don't want taped, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder. Does anybody have any objections to participating or to my taping our discussion?¹
- The session will last about 1½ hours, and we will not take any formal breaks. But please feel free to get up at any time to stretch, use the restroom, or help yourselves to something to eat or drink.
- At the end of the session, you will receive \$25 as a thank you for coming today and sharing your opinions.
- Are there any questions before we get started?

To get started, please introduce yourself and tell us:

- Your first name
- How long you have lived in the area

B. Knowledge About SNAP

1. Let's begin by talking about the Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program or SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, [and called NAME here in STATE] Before today, had anyone heard of this program?
2. Do any of you have relatives or friends who receive SNAP benefits?
3. What types of people are eligible to receive SNAP benefits?
 - Do you need to have children to be eligible for SNAP benefits?
 - Where can you use SNAP benefits?
 - What kinds of things can you buy with SNAP benefits?
4. Have any of you received SNAP or Food Stamp Program benefits before?
 - IF YES: OK, I'll want to ask you some more questions about your previous experience with SNAP benefits in a few minutes.

C. Use of Assistance Programs

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about other assistance programs that you may be using. I'll be asking about programs that may be run by the government, churches, or other organizations.

¹ If a second request to turn off the recorder is made, the moderator will inform the participants that the recorder will no longer be used so that we can ensure the focus group proceeds as efficiently as possible. Mathematica will then rely solely on the detailed notes that will be taken during the focus group session. In addition, Mathematica will closely monitor each of the focus groups to identify this and other issues that may arise. We will keep FNS informed of any such issues and take the necessary steps to resolve them.

1. Where in this community can people who may not have enough money to buy food get help?
 - Are there food pantries or soup kitchens in the community? Are there other groups, such as church organizations, that provide assistance?
 - Do any of you use these kinds of places when you need help getting food?
 - Would you say that you use these places frequently, occasionally, or rarely?
2. Have you ever needed to ask friends or family for help when you didn't have enough money for food?
3. The government runs several programs that can give people money or other forms of assistance if they meet certain requirements.
 - For instance, some families can get Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (that may be called NAME in STATE).
 - How many of you know about the TANF program?
 - Are any of you currently receiving TANF benefits?
 - Have any of you received benefits from TANF program in the past?
 - Seniors and people with disabilities can receive benefits from programs like Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and SSI (which stands for Supplemental Security Income).
 - Are any of you receiving benefits from Social Security Disability or SSI?
 - Do any of you live with someone receiving benefits from Social Security Disability or SSI?
 - There are several programs that can help people pay for medical expenses such as doctors' visits and prescription drugs. For example, there are the Medicaid and Medicare programs, [also known as STATE MEDICAID and STATE MEDICARE NAMES].
 - Are any of you enrolled in a program that helps pay for medical expenses or prescription drugs?
 - Do any of you live with someone who is enrolled in a program that helps pay for medical expenses or prescription drugs?
 - Do any of you receive help paying utility bills, such as gas and electricity?

- Are there any other places that you turn for help when you run out of money?

D. Reasons for Not Applying for Food Stamps

1. How many of you think you would **not** qualify for SNAP benefits right now?

- Why don't you think you would qualify?

PROBE: Is it because of your income? Your savings? Or, something else?

- If you did qualify, would you apply for SNAP benefits?
- IF NO: Why wouldn't you apply for SNAP benefits?
 - Are any of you concerned about not being able to find a place where you can apply for SNAP benefits? Why?
 - Are any of you concerned about the length or difficulty of the application process? Why?
 - Are any of you worried about the way that applying for SNAP benefits makes you feel, or makes you look to others? Why?
 - Are there other things that you are concerned about that would prevent you from applying for SNAP benefits?
- Is there anything that the government could do differently that would change your mind about applying for SNAP benefits?

2. How many of you think you **would** qualify for SNAP benefits right now?

- If you think you are eligible, what are the reasons that you have not applied for SNAP benefits?
 - Are any of you concerned about not being able to find a place where you can apply for SNAP benefits? Why?
 - Are any of you concerned about the length or difficulty of the application process? Why?
 - Are any of you worried about the way that applying for SNAP benefits makes you feel, or makes you look to others? Why?
 - Are there other things that you are concerned about that would prevent you from applying for SNAP benefits?
- Is there anything that the government could do differently that would change your mind about applying for SNAP benefits?

3. [IF APPLICABLE] I noted earlier that some of you are participating in other government assistance programs. Is there a reason that you are willing to participate in those programs but not in SNAP?

4. Do any of you have relatives or friends who may be eligible for SNAP benefits but will not participate in the program? [IF YES] Why won't they participate?
5. Earlier I noted that some of you have participated in SNAP in the past. For those of you who have participated:
 - Did you participate while living in [STATE]?
 - How long ago did you participate?
 - How would you describe your experience in dealing with [STATE AGENCY] while you were receiving SNAP benefits?
 - Was it easy or difficult to get answers to questions?
 - Once you were enrolled in the program, were you required to do anything to continue participating?
 - Tell me about the process of applying for SNAP benefits at that time.
 - Was the application difficult or easy to complete?
 - Did you have to complete an interview with a caseworker? [IF YES] What was that like?
 - What could have been different to make the application process easier?

E. Encouraging Participation

1. If you were interested in knowing more about SNAP, what would you do to get more information?
2. Where could you go to complete an application for SNAP benefits?
PROBE:
 - Anywhere else?
 - Are there other organizations that should provide SNAP applications? Why?
3. About how long do you think it would take to apply for SNAP benefits?
4. These days, many places require you to use a computer to get information. How comfortable are you with computers?
 - How frequently do you use a computer now?
 - Where do you go to use a computer or do you have a computer at home?
 - What kinds of things do you use a computer for?
 - Would you say your computer skills are low, medium, or high?

5. Would you be willing to use a computer to apply for SNAP benefits?
 - IF NO: Why not?
 - Would you be comfortable by yourself or would you want someone nearby who could answer questions or help you with the computer?
6. What about other government services? Would you be willing to use a computer to register your car or get a driver's license?

F. Modernization Initiatives

The state has done a number of things to improve the way SNAP is administered. We are interested in learning whether you think these things will lead to better services for people.

PASS OUT A DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVES THAT HAVE GONE INTO EFFECT IN THAT STATE AND READ ALOUD WHILE PARTICIPANTS READ IT SILENTLY.²

1. Are any of you aware of anything that has been done in [STATE] to change the way people can get information about the program or apply for SNAP benefits?
 - Which changes are you aware of?
 - Do you think people in general are aware of these things?
2. Do you think these changes make it easier or more difficult to apply for SNAP benefits? Why?
3. Are there any things listed here that you would not want STATE NAME to start doing?
4. What do you think of the idea of an online application?
 - Would that make you more or less likely to apply?
 - Would it make people you know who may qualify for SNAP benefits more or less likely to apply?
5. What about the idea of applying over the telephone?
 - Would that make you more or less likely to apply?
 - Would it make people you know who may qualify for SNAP benefits?
6. What other things do you think are needed to improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and make it more accessible to people who need assistance?

² The handout will differ for each state depending on the modernization initiatives that have taken place in that state. An example of one is included at the end of this discussion guide.

G. Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with SNAP, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in (STATE).

[FOCUS GROUP HANDOUT - SAMPLE]

Changes to the Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program

- **Electronic Applications**—Individuals can apply on-line.
- **Community Partners**—Schools, libraries, hospitals and other organizations provide applications and application assistance.
- **Self-Service Centers**—At [STATE] offices, computers, fax machines, copiers, and a secure drop-off box are available to apply for benefits or report income changes.
- **Shorter Eligibility Interviews**—Some individuals qualify for expedited interviews
- **Toll-Free Information Line**—Provides information about the program and allows participants to report income changes

