

**PROTOCOL FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNER  
ORGANIZATIONS**

**SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) STUDY OF  
ADVANCED MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES**

**INTRODUCTION**

My name is [X], from Mathematica Policy Research.

As you may know, Mathematica is collecting information from state and local SNAP offices and their partners and vendors regarding advanced SNAP modernization initiatives.

Our final report will describe the range of responses expressed by staff, and may list the names of agencies and partners who contributed information, but we will not quote you or anyone by name or title.

I expect our conversation will take approximately 60 minutes.

*OPTIONAL IF INTERVIEWER CHOOSES TO RECORD:* I want to be sure I am keeping track of everything you are saying. May I record our discussion so that I can listen to it later when I write up my notes? No one outside of our research team will have access to the recording.

- IF YES: Thank you. It will be helpful if you speak up, speak clearly, and speak one at a time.
- IF NO: That's no problem. I'll take notes as you talk, but I may sometimes need to ask you to slow down or repeat so that I can get all the information.

First, do you have any questions in general for me about the project or what we will be discussing today?

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**I. BROAD OVERVIEW**

**A. INITIATE DISCUSSION AND DEFINING “MODERNIZATION”**

States have implemented many new procedures and policies in their SNAP programs with the goal of reducing administrative costs and error rates while maintaining or increasing program access. For the purposes of this study on state efforts and experiences with modernizing their SNAP programs, we are using four broad categories to define what we mean by modernization: (1) expanded uses of technology, (2) policy changes, (3) administrative restructuring, and (4) working with community partners or vendors.

1. Although we recognize that there may be some overlap in these categories, does this definition generally capture all the recent changes to SNAP in [STATE] you would consider to be modernization?
2. Are there any changes that do not fall under these four broad categories that you think also should be included?
3. Is there anything in this definition that you would not consider to be modernization?

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**II. OVERVIEW OF KEY CHANGES**

***INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER***

***Begin this section of the interview by confirming state profile info on the specific modernization changes undertaken by [STATE].***

**A. MOST IMPORTANT KEY CHANGES**

First, I'd like to talk about the most important modernization initiatives that took place in your state.

1. Of all the changes STATE has made, which do you think is (are) the most important?

PROBE IF EXPLANATION IS NOT PROVIDED:

- Why?
2. Which change or changes have made the greatest difference for the way SNAP is administered?
    - And for clients' experience with the SNAP program?

**B. PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**1. Decision-Making**

Next, I would like to turn your attention back to the most important modernization initiatives you identified earlier and discuss the planning and other steps involved in their implementation.

1. Which (agency[ies]/individuals) were involved in the initial decision-making process to initiate this undertaking/change?
  - When did planning for this key change commence?
2. Which (agency[ies]/individuals) were most involved in the planning process?
  - Describe the involvement of relevant parties engaged in planning.
3. Do you think this was the right mix of agencies/expertise for this undertaking?

PROBE:

- Were the right people at the table?

PROBE:

- Would the decision-making/planning process benefited from having other kinds of expertise/perspectives at the table?

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**2. Planning and Implementation**

1. What were the key challenges faced during implementation of this key change?
  - In hindsight, do you think anything could have been done to avoid or mitigate these challenges?
2. What ongoing challenges are associated with this change?
3. What new challenges have emerged?

**E. CHANGES TO THE WAY SNAP IS ADMINISTERED**

1. How have these changes affected the way SNAP is administered?

**PROBE:**

- How have these changes affected the [SNAP LIFE CYCLE: application, certification, recertification, case management] process?

**F. CHANGES TO CLIENT INTERACTION WITH SNAP**

1. How do clients currently interact [e.g. apply, recertify, report changes] with SNAP as a result of this key change?
2. How is this different from how clients interacted [e.g. applied, recertified, reported changes] with SNAP prior to this key change?

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**III. ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING STRUCTURE**

**A. ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING**

Next I'd like to discuss how the organization and administration of SNAP has been restructured.

1. Please describe the current organizational structure and functional responsibilities of your partner organization as it relates to the administration of SNAP.
2. How have the organizational structure and/or functional responsibilities changed as a result of implementing any SNAP modernization changes?
3. What are the major advantages and disadvantages of restructuring functional responsibilities this way?
  - What are the trade-offs?

**B. PARTNERING ARRANGEMENTS**

1. Please describe any functions/activities that your organization performs in relation to [SNAP LIFE CYCLE PROBE]?

SNAP LIFE CYCLE PROBES:

- Application
  - Certification
  - Recertification
  - Case Management
2. Where do your staff conduct these activities (e.g., at your offices, a SNAP office, elsewhere?)
  3. What is the arrangement or nature of this partnership?

PROBE:

- Is it a formal or informal arrangement?

**INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER**

***If the arrangement is formalized, ask the following:***

- Please describe the terms and nature of the formalized arrangement.

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***INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER***

***if a formal contract exists with the partnering organization, ask the following:***

4. Is your organization compensated by the SNAP agency?

PROBE, IF YES:

- For which activities is your organization compensated?
- What is the basis for this compensation (e.g. fixed fee, per hour, per application processed, reimbursement for cost incurred, etc.)?
- What SNAP related activities if any are not compensated?

PROBE, IF CERTAIN ACTIVITIES ARE NOT COMPENSATED:

- Why are certain activities not compensated?
- How does this get decided?

5. Is the performance of the partner tracked or evaluated?

PROBE, IF YES:

- Please describe.
- What criteria are used to evaluate the partner's performance?

6. How long has this partnering relationship existed between your organization and the SNAP agency?

7. How was the relationship established?

8. Have there been any changes in this partnering arrangement since its inception?

PROBE, IF YES:

- Please describe.

9. What are your organization's primary activities outside of the partnering arrangement with SNAP?

**C. TRAINING**

1. Please describe any training you received from or provided to SNAP staff who have assumed new roles and responsibilities as a result of any modernization changes that have been implemented.

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***INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER***

***For each type of training identified in previous question, ask the following:***

2. Who conducted the training (e.g. in-house by staff, external training vendor brought in, etc.)?
3. Who received it?
4. Was this training voluntary or mandatory?

PROBE, IF VOLUNTARY:

- If voluntary, was it well attended?
5. Were any incentives provided to encourage participation?
  6. What topics did the training cover?
  7. What methods are used to administer training (e.g. face-to-face classroom sessions, online learning, educational materials, etc.)?
  8. Was the training helpful or useful?
  9. Was the training sufficient?
  10. Are there additional types of training you think are needed?
  11. If mandatory training was required, has this helped you to address changing roles and responsibilities?

**D. OUTSTATIONED WORKERS**

***INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER***

***These questions are specific to the roles, responsibilities and functions of outstationed staff.***

Next, I would like to discuss your organization's interaction with any outstationed workers from SNAP agencies. Outstationed workers are SNAP agency employees whose primary work location is not at that agency's offices.

1. Are any workers from the SNAP agency outstationed with your organization?
2. What tasks do outstationed workers perform?

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**IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND PERFORMANCE**

**A. PARTNERS' EFFECT ON PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

For this next portion of the interview, we will be discussing the implementation and performance of community partner involvement with SNAP modernization initiatives.

1. What effect has the use of community partners for outreach or application assistance had on program outcomes?

PROBE:

- Has the use of community partners for outreach or application assistance increased or decreased program participation?
  - Has the use of community partners for outreach increased or decreased application errors?
  - Has the use of community partners or application assistance increased or decreased application errors?
2. Has the impact of changes brought about by community partners varied by client populations?

**B. ADDITIONAL ACCESS POINTS**

1. Does the use of community partners for application assistance/submission vary by client population?

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**V. STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION**

**A. CLIENT AWARENESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Next, we'll be discussing how modernization changes may or may not be obvious to clients and how the change may affect customer service and satisfaction.

1. Which aspects of modernization are clients aware of?
2. To what extent have modernization changes in [STATE] affected customer satisfaction?

PROBE:

- How is this tracked or measured?
3. Are changes in customer satisfaction more evident in certain client populations?
  4. Which aspects of modernization are most responsible for changes in customer satisfaction?

PROBE:

- If respondent has not mentioned call centers, online application, changes which staff clients interact with, or changes in documentation required, ask about the effects these changes have on customer satisfaction.
5. Was there anything about how changes were implemented that caused an increase/decrease in customer satisfaction?
  6. What could have been done differently in STATE that to improve satisfaction among applicants/clients?

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**VI. SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS LEARNED**

**A. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES**

Now, thinking from a broader perspective....

1. On balance, what is your assessment of the full package of modernization changes?

PROBE:

- Do you think they have had an overall positive or negative effect on [Efficiency, Access, Integrity]?

2. Which changes do you think had a positive effect?

PROBE:

- Please specify which program outcomes were positively affected and any other positive effects.

3. What are the greatest successes of modernization changes?

4. Which changes do you think had a negative effect?

PROBE:

- Please specify which program outcomes were negatively affected and any other negative effects.

5. Do you agree with the goals of modernization?

6. Is there anything you would add, remove, or change in [STATE]'s modernization goals?

7. Has [STATE] addressed its modernization goals in an effective way?

8. What are the biggest challenges to meeting the goals of modernization?

9. Have these challenges been resolved?

- If so, how?

10. What could STATE have done differently to meet its goals more effectively?

**B. LESSONS LEARNED**

1. What advice would you give to another state that was considering implementing similar modernization changes?

2. Are there particular changes you think are critical for modernization?

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3. Are there aspects of modernization you would advise other states to avoid?
4. Is there a particular order in which changes should be undertaken?
5. Is there anything else states should keep in mind when planning, testing, and implementing modernization changes?

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**VII. CLOSING**

1. Is there anything you think is important for the Food and Nutrition Service to know about [STATE]'s SNAP modernization initiatives that we did not ask about?

Thank you for your time and helpful feedback. The information you have shared will be valuable to our team as we look across states and localities for themes and ideas that we can share with FNS.

Are there any questions you have for me before we finish?

**END OF INTERVIEW**