

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Sarah Zapolsky

**FROM:** Kathryn Edin and Sara Sternberg Greene **DATE:** 03/08/2011

**SUBJECT:** SNAP Food Security In-depth Interview Guide Pretest Results  
Contract No: GS-10F-0050L  
Memo No: 010

This memo summarizes the results from the pretest of the SNAP Food Security in-depth interview guide which was conducted on March 2 and 3, 2011 at two Head Start locations in the East Boston neighborhood of Boston, MA; one regular Head Start facility and one Early Head Start. We chose the neighborhood location because it includes a wide range of racial and ethnic groups in the city, including Spanish speakers. In each Head Start location, the site coordinator contacted 3 families and asked them to participate in the pilot study, including a mix of English and Spanish speakers. Due to cancellations and rescheduling, we interviewed five English speakers and one Spanish speaker. Racial and ethnic origins of our test respondents were mixed, as noted below:

- 1 African American
- 1 Puerto Rican
- 3 White Hispanic
- 1 White

Interviewers included Kathryn Edin, Sara Sternberg Greene, and Betsy Santos, who conducted the interview in Spanish. Also present were the FNS project officer, Sarah Zapolsky, and the Survey Director for Mathematica, Dawn Nelson. All interviews were observed by one or two other project staff who took notes during interviews on what seemed to work well and what did not. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the observers' presence. We conducted three interviews each day. After each day of interviewing, we met for a debriefing session, where ideas were collected and revisions were suggested. In day 2, we experimented with several of the suggestions that were offered at the conclusion of day 1. The respondents were each given \$45 cash for participating in the 1.5 hour interview.

After the pilot interviews and debriefing sessions concluded, Kathryn Edin, in conjunction with Sara Sternberg Greene, substantially revised the qualitative interview guide.

Rapport between interviewers and respondents was excellent throughout the pilot. Respondents were eager to participate and easily moved between a set of more general questions about their monthly expenditures and sources of income or in-kind assistance to more specific questions about shopping habits, nutritional views, general health, food hardship, and a set of

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detailed questions about SNAP and WIC. However, through experimentation with a variety of questions, we were able to identify questions that worked much better than others.

Based on our observations, we added questions to help clarify how long respondents' latest SNAP participation period has been and questions clarifying how many distinct SNAP spells respondents had had. We also added questions about trigger events that prompted initially applying to SNAP, as well as questions about food storage capabilities and how this affects how much and what food respondents buy. In addition, we found that new questions to clarify household rosters were needed, as well as questions clarifying respondents thoughts about SNAP verses WIC and how they use these two programs together.