

APPENDIX C
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

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As noted in the text of the Supporting Document, FNS is planning to conduct 90 in-depth interviews of SNAP participants to learn more about the dynamics of the relationship between SNAP receipt and food security. The aim is to obtain insights that cannot practically be obtained from a closed-ended data collection effort like the planned CATI survey. The planned data collection will be a semi-structured interview in which the interviewers will use a pre-set interview guide but will be authorized to depart from or extend the guide as seems warranted, given the interview objectives. To make this possible, these interviews will be done by professional survey researchers or policy analysts with masters degrees in Survey Methodology, Social Research, Policy Analysis and other similar credentials who fully understand the use of qualitative research to inform policy.

Following is the interview guide to be used for this work.

SNAP Food Security In-depth Interview Guide

Final Version

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Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 30 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. 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.

First I would like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it.

[GIVE CONSENT FORM TO RESPONDENT]

As you just read in the consent form, I would like to ask some additional questions related to some of the issues covered in the earlier survey we did with you. Like the earlier survey, this one is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which funds the SNAP program. The interview will take about 90 minutes, and your cooperation is completely voluntary. As a token of appreciation, we will be giving you \$\$\$ when the interview is complete. Do you have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before we get started?

1. These days, a lot of people are struggling to make ends meet each month. Tell me, how is your family?
2. Let's talk specifically about your big monthly expenses. Let's take last month, for example. What were your five biggest expenses? (\$\$)

Now I'm going to ask you about bills a lot of ordinary Americans struggle with from time to time. (INTERVIEWER NOTE: You do not need to get specific dollar amounts for the items listed below, unless they are offered).

3. (Probe as to whether they have a housing subsidy, and what kind, or whether they are doubled up and paying less as a result). Tell me about the last time you had a hard time paying your rent/mortgage. (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
4. How about utilities—heat, light, water and sewer? Tell me about the last time you struggled to pay your any of these bills. (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
5. What about your cell phone/land line/cable/internet? Tell me about the last time you struggled to pay any of these bills. (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
6. What about your credit payments? Tell me about the last time you struggled to meet these payments. (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
7. What about other debts, like education loans or medical debt? Tell me about the last time you fell behind on these payments. (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
8. What about child care? Tell me about the last time you struggle to meet those expenses? (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
9. How about transportation? Tell me the last time paying for transportation was a challenge? (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
10. What about medical insurance? (Probe for Medicaid, Medicare or SCHIP coverage) In your household, who is covered and who isn't? Tell me about the last time you struggled with how to pay for medical insurance? (IF IN LAST 12 MONTHS) How did you cope?
11. What about food? How much do you get from SNAP right now? How about over the last year? Are you receiving anything from WIC right now? How about over the last year?

12. Let's talk more about what you spend on food. Let's start with last month...(NAME MONTH). Take me through that month, starting with your biggest grocery shopping and what you spent. (\$\$)
13. Now let's talk about the other shopping trips you made last month. Let's talk about each of those. (\$\$)
14. What about each of the visits to the corner store to buy food last month. Let's talk about each of these. (\$\$)
15. So adding it all together, you spent about \$XX on food shopping last month. Is that about right?
16. Okay, so adding it all together, your major expenses totaled about \$XX last month, is that about right?
17. So tell me, how do you cover all these expenses? (GET \$\$ HERE WHEN POSSIBLE.)
18. A lot of people say there is a lot of month left at the end of the money.¹ How about for you? Over the last year, how have you coped during time where money was tight? Tell me all about the last time that happened? What about the time before that? How do you typically cope when the money gets tight?

(INTERVIEWER NOTE: Questions below about food hardship are especially sensitive to struggling families, who feel stigma in admitting that their children might have experienced food hardship. Thus, additional gentle probing might be necessary.)

19. We're especially interested in food. Tell me about the last time you ran short of what you needed to pay for food. How did you cope? How about the time before that? What do you typically do when the food budget gets tight?
20. People have all kinds of ways to make do when the food budget gets tight. Some skip meals. Others eat at a relative's house. Others go to food pantries or soup kitchens, that kind of thing. How about for you? (FOR EACH STRATEGY: Tell me all about that last time that happened.)
21. Some times of the year are easier on the food budget than others. For example, some families tell us it's a lot easier in months when their kids are getting free breakfast and lunch at school. Others say it's easier during the summer, when kids are off visiting relatives. How about for you?
22. For you, what are the toughest times to get by food-wise? How do you cope then? Tell me all about the last time that happened.

¹ This question is posed in an apparently leading way. This is intentional; families feel great stigma in admitting they can't meet all of their expenses. In the pilot test, families who could cover their bills with their expenses didn't seem hesitant to respond that that wasn't a problem for them.

23. Other people say that the food budget gets tight when there are more mouths to feed than you thought there would be—relatives stopping by, or visiting for an extended period of time. How about for you? Tell me about the last time that happened? How did you cope? How do you typically cope with this kind of situation?
24. Sometimes, our strategies just aren't enough. Tell me all about the last time you ran out of food. How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.
25. Tell me about the last time you or someone in your household had to skip a meal because there wasn't enough food. Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.
26. Tell me about the last time you or someone in your household actually went hungry. Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that?
27. Sometimes unexpected events can make it difficult to make ends meet and provide food for your family—an eviction or foreclosure, a job loss, a new baby, a divorce...even something small like a bunch of bank overdraft fees. Has something like that ever happened to you in the last few years? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.
28. So let's get even more specific. Think back to yesterday morning. Who ate breakfast at your house? What did they have? Tell me about anyone who had breakfast somewhere else, at school, ate out, etc.
29. Now what about lunch? Who ate lunch at your house? What did they have? Tell me about anyone who had lunch somewhere else, at school, ate out, packed a lunch, etc.
30. Who ate dinner at your house? What did they have? Tell me about anyone who had dinner somewhere else, ate out, etc.
31. Who cooked yesterday? Who was responsible for getting the food from the grocery store and planning the meals? Who paid for the groceries?
32. So how typical is yesterday of other days during the week/on the weekend (depending on whether yesterday was a weekday or a weekend). Tell me more about that (TMMAT).
33. Now let's talk about a typical day during the week/on the weekend.
(REPEAT QUESTIONS 29-33 ABOVE).
34. Now think back to all the special occasions you've celebrated over the last year...holidays, birthdays, etc. Who has hosted these celebrations? Who has cooked? Who has paid for the food? When you've had to cook or pay, how have you coped?

35. Now I'm going to use your imagination. Okay, typically you do your big shopping at what store? Alright, we've just arrived at that store. You are going to shop just the way you always shop—nothing fancy. Where do you head first. What do you buy. Where do you head after that? What's next? What's after that?

Let's make sure we didn't miss anything.

Fruits and Vegetables?

Meats/Fish?

Dairy?

Cereals, pasta, beans, rice, other dry goods?

The frozen section?

Canned goods?

Chips and soda?

Other snacks?

36. On this imaginary trip, where you are shopping just like you usually shop, is there anything you want to buy that you just can't afford?
37. What do you buy that you think you shouldn't be buying?
38. In general, how do you decide what to buy and what not to buy?
39. What do you put in your cart that you find yourself taking out and putting back later? Tell me all about the last time that happened.
40. Where else besides Big Store X do you shop? What do you buy there? Take me through that store, and tell me what you usually buy and what you usually don't buy and why.
41. Do you shop anywhere else? Take me through that other store, and tell me what you usually buy and what you usually don't buy and why.
42. Any other stores I've missed? Food you buy at the drug store, the dollar store, the farmer's market, and so on?
43. Families eat out or get carry out for all kinds of reasons—sometimes they need a break from cooking or have no time to cook, sometimes it's just a treat for the kids, sometimes there's no place to store your food or to cook, and sometimes it's just too hot to turn on the stove. What about for you?
44. Tell me about the last time anyone in your household ate out. What about the time before that?
45. Let's think back over last month, XX (NAME MONTH). Tell me about all of the times each member of your household ate out? Who paid each time? When you paid, what did you spend? So adding it all up, you spent about XX eating out last month. Is that about right?

46. Tell me how you first learned about SNAP? TMMAT. When did you first apply? Tell me the whole story of that experience from start to finish. What has been your experience with the program since then? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What do you like best about SNAP? What do you like least?
47. Now think back to when you didn't get SNAP. Was your budget situation the same, better, worse? TMMAT. Was your food situation the same, better, worse? TMMAT.
48. What about WIC? Tell me how you first learned about WIC. TMMAT. When did you first apply? Tell me the whole story of that experience from start to finish. What has been your experience with the program since then? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What do you like best about WIC? What do you like least?
49. What about other food programs you are part of. Tell me now you first learned about XX. When did you first start getting food from that program? What has been your experience with the program since then? What do you like best about that program? What do you like the least?
50. What do they tell you at the SNAP office about what foods to eat and so on? What do they tell you at the WIC office? What other places tell you about food and nutrition (ex. Head Start, a pediatrician). TMMAT.
51. How do you pay for food when you don't/can't use SNAP or WIC. TMMAT
52. A lot of families these days are coping by doubling up. A lot of other families are helping out by offering struggling friends and families a place to stay for a while. Sometimes people just stay for a few nights, sometimes it's a permanent thing, and sometimes it's somewhere in between. What about for you?
53. When people come in and out of the household, it can pose real challenges. Who pays what bills, who cooks, who eats what food, and so on. Issues around food can be particularly challenging. How about for you?
 - a. For example, sometimes people stay in the household, but eat elsewhere. How about for you? Tell me about the last time you faced challenges over who would eat where.
 - b. Other times, people stay in the household, but pay for and keep their food separately. How about for you? Tell me about the last time you faced challenges in this area.
 - c. Other times, people stay in the household, and everyone eats together. How about for you? In this situation, who pays for what? Tell me about the last time you faced challenges over who would eat where.
 - d. And other times, people eat in the household but don't stay there. How about for you? In this situation, who pays for what? Tell me about the last time you faced challenges in this area.
54. Sometimes within a household, some people are eligible for SNAP, WIC, other programs, while others are not. How about for you? How does that affect how your household handles food?
55. Some households face special issues related to food: food related allergies, for example. How about for you? Tell me more about that (TMMAT). How does that affect your monthly food budget?

56. How would you describe your health? TMMAT. What about the other members of the household? TMMAT.
57. Describe the most recent health problem you've faced. TMMAT. What about other members of the household? TMMAT.
58. When was the last time you went to the doctor. TMMAT. What about other members of the household? TMMAT.
59. Which of your health problems are related to diet? TMMAT. What about other members of the household? TMMAT.
60. People have a lot of different ideas about what healthy eating means for them. What about for you?
61. Most families have both healthy and unhealthy habits. What are your family's healthiest habits? What are your family's most unhealthy habits? What prevents you from having more healthy habits? TMMAT.
62. If you could afford to purchase the food you really wanted, how would your eating habits change? TMMAT.
63. Some parents tell us that they want to feed their kids healthier foods, but their kids refuse what's given to them. How about for you? TMMAT.
64. Now let's talk more generally about your expenses. Expenses vary a lot from month to month. It's spring/summer/winter/fall right now. What bills go up and down depending on the season? (Probe for specific amounts. Probe for increases during the winter due to Christmas shopping and heating bills (if cold climate) and increases in food expenses during the summer due to kids being out of school.)
65. Now let's talk about how you cover these expenses. Tell me about all the resources—big and small—that came into the household last month. (Probe for exact MONTHLY amounts. A month=4.33 weeks. Probe not only for formal income, but also financial help from family and friends and “under the table” jobs. Probe also for contributions from others such as teenage children, fathers of children, etc.).
66. Income varies a lot from month to month too. Tell me all of the ways your household income has varied over the past year.
 - a. Some people are only able to work some months during the year. How about you?
 - b. Some people say some months their baby's fathers help them out, while other months the well is dry. How about you?
 - c. Some people say their household income varies a lot month to month because different family members move in and out of the household. Did this happen to you?
 - d. Some people say they experience some kind of event that affects their household income. Has this ever happened to you? Something like divorce, a medical issue, that kind of thing?

67. These days, some people find they have to survive without any income from a job. How about for you? (IF YES) TMMAT. When was the last time that happened? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. In the past year, how have you usually coped with this situation?
68. When your income falls short of your expenses, what do you do? Tell me more about that. Tell us all about the last time that happened. Tell me the whole story from start to finish. Tell me about the time before that. Tell me the whole story from start to finish.
69. When your income falls short of your expenses, how do you prioritize things and how do you decide what to pay first, second, and so on? Think about the following expenses and tell me how you prioritize them:
70. In the last year, what hardships has your household faced as you've struggled to make ends meet? Tell me about how you coped with these hardships.
71. For some people, there is a big windfall at tax time, because they get lots of tax credits. How about for you? TMMAT. How did you spend the money and how did you decide what to spend it on?
72. What do you think can/should be done to help your family makes ends meet in these tough economic times?
73. What do you think can/should be done to help families struggling to feed their families?