

**Attachment A1:**  
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ZERO INCOME STUDY -- English

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Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin, I'd like to tell you a little bit about why we are doing these interviews. They are part of a study for the Food and Nutrition Service – the agency that provides Supplemental Nutrient Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program). We know that a growing number of people in this country are out of work and have no income. What we want to find out is, how are these people are getting by? For example, how do they manage to find food and a place to live? And how can the SNAP program provide the kind of help that people need most?

Everything you tell me is private and will not affect any benefits you may be getting. At the end of the study, we will summarize the information we get from everyone we interview, and share that summary with the Food and Nutrition Service. We won't, however, report your name. We will also take care to see that no one identifies your name with the information to anyone outside this study except as otherwise required by law. With your permission, I would like to record the interview so that I don't miss anything. Is that ok with you?

You will receive a \$25 gift card to thank you for your participation. You may stop the interview at any time and you may refuse to answer any question with no penalties to you or your SNAP benefits. If you decide to not respond to any questions, you will still receive the gift card to thank you for your time.

Do you have any questions for me?

Do I have your permission to begin?

SNAP History and use of other assistance

Goals are to find out:

- ✓ SNAP usage patterns
- ✓ Other food sources
- ✓ Other types of assistance used

Let's start by reviewing some basics. I understand you are currently receiving SNAP benefits, is that correct?

How did you first find out about the SNAP program?

How did you come to the decision to apply?

Possible probe: did you or anyone in the household not have enough to eat or not enough of the types of foods you'd like to eat?

Is this the first time you decided to apply, or have you used SNAP benefits before?

If you have used them before, when did you first start getting them?

Were you working then? Can you tell me more about that?

*If not working:* how long were you out of work?

*If working:* how long did you stay at the job, and did you ever earn enough to get off the SNAP benefits?

Have you been receiving SNAP benefits ever since you first applied or are you sometimes on and sometimes off?

*If on and off:*

- Can you tell me about when you received SNAP benefits and when you don't? What makes you go on and off?
- What is the longest period of time that you were getting SNAP benefits?

Other than SNAP benefits, do you get any other assistance, like *TANF* or *Medicaid*?

*Before moving on, interviewer will briefly summarize what the respondent has said, to make sure all information was captured, and to provide the interviewee with an opportunity to elaborate on anything.*

## **EMPLOYMENT**

Goals are to find out:

- ✓ Whether person is working now
- ✓ If yes
  - o what type of work
  - o whether its temporary/seasonal
  - o whether it is a stepping stone to another opportunity
  - o the extent to which it "pays the bills"
- ✓ If no:
  - o how long person has been out of work
  - o work history
  - o whether person is looking for work and if not, why not
- ✓ Work/income patterns
- ✓ Duration of no income spells

Let's talk a bit about work. A lot of people are out of work these days. What about you, are you working now?

### ***If working now:***

Can you tell me more about that?

- Do you have a steady job, or are you earning money here and there?

### ***Has a steady job:***

- What do you do there?
- How long have you worked there?
- Do you work full time or part time?  
[If part time] Would you like to work more hours? Full time?
- How did you come to find this job?
- How easy or hard is it for you to make ends meet working at this job?
- Overall, would you say that this job meets your needs, or would you rather have

something different? (If something different ask: what would you like to have in a job?  
Are you looking now?)

**Does not have a steady job:**

- What kinds of things do you do to earn money here and there?
- What has that been like? For example, how well are you able to make ends meet?
- Overall, would you say that this arrangement meets your needs, or would you rather have a steady job?

**If not working now:**

About how long have you been out of work?

*If respondent is unsure, try to establish a timeframe by asking about last place worked.*

Can you tell me about the last place you worked?

- What kind of work did you do?
- What were the hours like?
- About how long did you work there (can probe by asking about seasons, or holidays or years)?
- Why did you stop working there?

Some people get unemployment benefits when they lose their jobs. Are you familiar with that? Have you ever gotten unemployment benefits? (If yes ask: Tell me little bit about that, for example, how long did you get unemployment benefits?)

Have you been looking for work?

**Possible probes if looking for work:**

- How has your job search been going?
- What kind of work are you looking for?

**Possible probes if not looking for work:**

- I know there are all sorts of reasons that people stop looking for work. Can you tell me about your situation?

What's the longest period of time that you have been out of work?

How long did it last, and how did it end?

**HOUSING AND COPING STRATEGIES**

Goals are to find out:

- ✓ Where the person is living (house, apartment, shelter, etc)
- ✓ Whether he or she lives with other people
- ✓ Residential history: how long the person has been living there. If not long, where he or she was living before that. Has there been a lot of moving around or couch surfing and if so, how long has this been going on.
- ✓ Whether the person expects to be able to stay where he or she is living now
- ✓ How person is coping with no income
- ✓ How he or she obtains basic necessities, and how often he or she has had to go without those necessities
- ✓ What sources of support may be available

Now I'd like to talk a bit about how you have managed to support yourself when you have been out of work. Let's start by talking about some basic necessities, like housing.

I know some people have their own place, while other people don't, and they may end up

moving around a lot. Can you tell me about your situation?

*If not interviewing at home ask:* Where you are living these days?

- *[Probe]:* Are you living in a house, apartment, shelter? In your car? Are you homeless?

*If interviewing at home ask:* Is this where you are living now?

*If not already stated in a previous response:* Do you live alone, or with other people?

- If living with other people: Who else lives with you? (Find out how many people and their relationship to the respondent). [Why don't you tell me the first name of each person and their relationship to you?]

How did you come to live there/here?

- How long have you been living or staying there (here)?
  - o Has it been a few days, weeks, months, longer?
- Is this arrangement temporary or long-term for you?

***If temporary:***

How long do you expect to be able to stay there (here)?

What will you do when you can no longer stay there?

Can you tell me about the place where you were living or staying before now?

- How long were you living or staying there?
- Were other people living there with you?
- At the time, did you consider that a temporary place to live, or not?

*Interviewer should summarize respondent's living situation, for example, "OK, so you told me you are living..." If subject of housing costs has not come up, say:*

Please tell me about any housing expenses or arrangements you may have, for example, do you have rent, or a mortgage, or are you working in exchange for housing?

- *If paying for housing:* How do you cover those expenses?
- *If living with others:* Tell me about how you and the people you live with handle housing expenses. (e.g., do you put your money together to pay rent? How do you split it? What happens when one person doesn't have any money?) Are there other expenses you share, like groceries?

Let's talk more about these other kinds of expenses. Do you have regular bills you have to cover each month? Can you tell me what they are and whether you are able to cover them?

How do you manage to get things like food, other necessities (e.g., toothpaste, soap, shampoo, medication etc.), or clothes when you need them, especially warm clothes when you need them?

Do you sometimes end up having to do without these things?

***If yes:***

What things have you had to go without?

- Have you had to skip a meal? Can you tell me about that?
- How often does that happen? Does it happen more often at certain times of the week/month/year?
- Are you getting regular meals now? If so, how are you getting those meals?

***If no:***

How do you get the things you need when you don't have money?

- Is there anyone you can turn to for help?
- Have you ever tried bartering, selling things, or borrowing? Can you describe how that worked?

*If not already addressed:* Earlier, you told me that you are living with (refer to earlier answer).

- Can you tell me about how you and (identify others in the HH) handle household expenses? For example, do you put your money together to pay for things like groceries?
- What do you do when you or the other person doesn't have any money?

Does anybody ever give you food or free meals - like at a food pantry or a church or shelter?

- Is this a place where you eat or do they give you groceries that you can take with you?
- How often do you go there?
- How did you find out about this place?

Is there anyone who sometimes helps you cover your expenses?

#### **FAMILY**

Goal is to find out:

- ✓ If respondent has family members who depend on him/her for support, or if there are family members who can provide support

Now I'd like to gather some (more) information about your family.

*Summarize any information about family that has already been disclosed (e.g., ok, so you told me you have two children that are living with you...).* Are there other family members you keep in touch with?

*If no information about family has been shared, say:* Please tell me a little about your family.

- First, do you have any children? If so, how old are they? Where do they live? Are you in touch with them?
- Any siblings? What are their ages? And where are they? Are you in touch with them?
- What about parents? (Are they still living? Are you in touch with a mother/father/step-parent? Where do they live?)
- *If not already discussed:* Do any of these family members, or any you have not talked about yet, depend on you for support?
- *If not already discussed:* Is there anyone outside of your family who depends on you for support?

That's all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you would like to say before we end?

Thank you so much for your time.