Appendix A-4: INTERVIEW GUIDE--SNAP ADMINISTRATORS

Respondent Background

1. Please describe your current position/role (e.g., job title, overall responsibilities, any specific responsibilities related to SNAP)

Organizational Overview

2. *[Note: This question should be tailored based on information obtained prior to the interview. For example, "My understanding is that this office also administers____. Is that right? Does this office administer any other programs?]* Does this office administer other programs in addition to SNAP? If so, what are they? (e.g., SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, Child Care)

3. Can you describe for me the process for applying for SNAP in this office? When someone walks into the office to apply for SNAP, what is the procedure? Can they apply for other programs, such as TANF, at the same time? *(Use probes below, if not already answered.)*

    a. Are there forms that can be completed online? (If online, what is the take-up rate/access to computers?)

    b. Does your office require face-to-face or telephone interviews for SNAP? Does your office allow for on-line or telephone recertification? Mailing or faxing of required documentation?

    c. Are SNAP forms translated into other languages? If so, how many other languages? Which ones?

    d. What are your office hours?

    e. What is the waiting time for someone who comes to the office?

4. *[To the extent that this information is known ahead of time, tailor question to say, "I have in my notes that …"]* How often do clients need to recertify? When do clients need to report relevant status changes? For those with a 12-month recertification period, is a 6- month report also required? What information is required? How is it submitted?

5. How many staff work in this office? How many staff are responsible for processing SNAP cases? Are they responsible for processing other types of cases as well? Are these workers

responsible for all aspects of a SNAP case or are different staff responsible for different tasks, such as processing new applications or recertifications? Who is responsible for entering data regarding closures for SNAP participants?

6. What is the diversity among your staff and how does that compare to the diversity of the population you serve? Do your offices have sufficient staff to serve customers in a timely manner?

Determining the process of churner re-entry

7. What is the process of re-entry for churners? What steps are involved?

   a. Does the process for churner re-entry differ from the standard application or recertification processes? (i.e., possibly having to provide less documentation or go through a shorter process?)

   b. Does the re-entry process depend on length of time off the program? For example, are there different requirements if a recipient has been off SNAP for less than 30 days?

   c. Does this vary by office or region within a state?

8. What happens when participants who appear to be eligible do not recertify (i.e. do not show up for interview, do not provide necessary documents, or do not even begin recertification process)? Does the case manager know (i.e., does a warning pop up in their computer record that a household has missed recertification?) Is there any outreach to these households?

9. Are there any differences in the action taken among types of households that fail to recertify? For example….

10. How have these policies changed in recent years? If they've changed, what were the perceived (or documented) effects of these changes?

Calculating the cost of churning

11. Do you track the cost of churning for the program? If yes, what are those costs and how do you measure them?

    a. Do you know how many hours it might take to process a typical initial application? a typical recertification? a typical re-entry (churn)? Does it vary by client, caseworker, or both? How so?

    b. Do you know how much time is spent on ongoing case maintenance functions that might prevent churning, such as sending follow-up letters or making calls reminding the participant that the recertification date is near?

c. Do you often have to reschedule appointments that are made? How long does it take on average to get a client on the phone to complete a telephone interview?

d. What other case management activities do case workers perform for SNAP cases?

e. Do you have a sense of whether these actions actually have an effect on churning?

Examining the causes and relevant factors associated with churning

12. Among the many program issues that receive your attention, how important an issue is churning in SNAP (going off of SNAP and then back on again within a few months), in terms of its prevalence or how much of a burden it creates?

13. Do you have a feel for whether different types of SNAP units might churn more (for example, families with earned income)? Why do you think so?

14. What do you believe causes churning? (New computer system? Case overload? Auto-closures or paperwork backlogs? Temporary ineligibility? Eligible people not recertifying?) Which causes are most common? Why do you think this is the cause?

15. When cases don't recertify, why do you think this happens? In general, are there SNAP policies or office practices that make it harder or easier for recipients to recertify or report status changes?

    a. Do you think the office practices we discussed earlier (e.g. office hours, availability of on-line or telephone services, etc.) have any effect on clients' ability to recertify or report status changes? Do you think they have any effect on churning? If so, how?

    b. Do you think recertification periods have any impact on churning? Why or why not?

16. Does your office have any other policies or practices to simplify reporting? (For example….) Has the state received any waivers that have enabled you to reduce the extent of churning?

17. Do you believe that the number or diversity of your staff has any effect on churning? Why or why not?

18. We have heard that in some SNAP offices, paperwork backlogs and auto-closures as cases reach the end-date of their certification period can result in eligible families having their cases closed and then needing to be restarted, contributing to one kind of churning. Does that sometimes happen in your office?

19. Are there ways that enhanced technology could improve (or, has improved) your business processes to potentially reduce churn? For example, better access to data about who is churning and why their cases were closed…" or "Are there ways that technology contributes to churning?

For example, when computer systems are down or there are computer glitches …" Regardless of resources, what would you do or what would you need to improve the way you do business?

20. What, if any, policies has your state [or county, for state-supervised systems] made that are specifically intended to reduce churning? (e.g. length of recertification) Do you think other policies that were not specifically intended to affect churning have anyway? Which ones, and it what ways?

21. Do you (or your office) have any plans to implement any new policies or procedures specifically designed to address churning?

22. Are there any additional actions caseworkers or the SNAP agency could take to reduce churning? If so, what prevents you from taking that action now?

23. Are any local community-based organizations (CBOs) involved in assisting SNAP recipients apply for or maintain benefits? Is this a formal relationship with your office, or do you just know that they help people? What is the role CBOs play in helping cases maintain certification or recertify? How important are CBO's in preventing or addressing churning? Which CBOs provide assistance to SNAP applicants and recipients in this community?

    a. What actions can CBOs take to help SNAP applicants and recipients? Do you know what percent of cases receive CBO assistance?

24. Is there anything unique about this area/office, the types of clients that you typically serve or the barriers that they face that might affect churning patterns?

Determining the rate and patterns of churning

I have a few specific questions about the information in your computer system. We are analyzing data from state data systems to determine the rates and patterns of churning. We want to understand how information is entered into the computer system so we can be sure that we are interpreting the data correctly in our analyses.

25. Do you ever see data that has been extracted from your computer system (i.e. data reports)? If so, do you ever see data on reasons for case closure (e.g. because case was income ineligible or did not submit necessary paperwork)? Do you have a sense of how accurate the data on case closures are?

26. Data systems sometimes include some data elements that aren't required. For example, in some states there is a race/ethnicity data field or a gender data field available, but not required. Even when a data element is required, there may be missing or miscoded data.

    a. Are you aware of any data elements in your system that are often skipped?

    b. Are you aware of data elements that are often miscoded (e.g. contain incorrect information)? If so, which ones? Why?

c. Are there other idiosyncrasies about the data that would be important for us to understand?

<u>Wrap-up</u>

27. What other issues related to SNAP churning would you like to tell me about?

28. We've talked a lot about the time and effort it takes to enroll someone in SNAP and help them maintain those benefits. It's a big challenge. Can you tell me what one thing you think is working best in your office to move clients through this process more efficiently and effectively?

29. Do you have any final questions for us or comments you would like to add?

30. If we have any follow-up questions as we are writing our report, may we follow up by e-mail or phone?