Appendix A-5: INTERVIEW GUIDE--SNAP CASEWORKERS

The specific number and roles of the caseworkers or other staff interviewed will vary depending on how each particular SNAP office is organized. We will work with the SNAP office director or her designee to identify the relevant staff to be included in our interview schedule. We will seek to interview staff with responsibility for each aspect of the SNAP application and recertification processes, whether those responsibilities are taken by a single caseworker or shared across multiple staff roles.

<u>Respondent Background</u>

1. To start, would you please describe your current position or role? What are your responsibilities related to SNAP? What other responsibilities do you have?
2. Are you responsible for processing benefits for other programs (e.g., TANF, Medicaid, Child Care)?   Are you responsible for all aspects of an assigned SNAP case or do you only process new applicants vs. manage ongoing cases, or is there another model?

<u>Office Background</u>

3. We want to make sure we understand some of the processes and circumstances in your office.

    a. *[To the extent that this information is known ahead of time, tailor question to say, "I have in my notes that your office…"]* How often do clients need to recertify?

    b. When do clients need to report relevant status changes?

    c. For those with a 12-month recertification period, is a 6- month report also required? What information is required? How is it submitted?

    d. Does your office conduct face-to-face or telephone interviews for recertification?

    e. Does your office allow for on-line recertification? Mailing or faxing of required documentation?

    f. What are your office hours? What is the waiting time for someone who comes to the office?

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

5. What is the diversity among your staff and how does that compare to the diversity of the population you serve? (*Probe about racial, ethnic and language diversity.)*

6. Do your offices have sufficient staff to serve customers in a timely manner? .

Determining the process of churner re-entry

7. When someone has been off of SNAP for no more than a few months, what is the process of re-entry? 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? (i.e., is it different for someone who was off for one month versus four months versus one year?)

8. What happens when participants appear to be eligible but they do not recertify (i.e. do not show up for interview or provide necessary documents)? Is there any outreach to these households? Does the action taken depend on the type of household? If so, how? Administratively, is anything required? Do you enter a specific code in the file?

9. 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

10. How much time, overall, do you spend processing applications and recertifications in a given week?

    a. How much time is spent for a typical initial application (e.g., 1 hour)?

    b. How much time is spent recertifying a typical case?

    c. How much time is spent on a typical re-entry application (meaning someone who churns)?

11. What other activities do you spend your time doing? How much time do you spend on these other activities? Do you have a sense of whether any of these other activities would have an effect on churning?

12. When a client goes off and back on benefits in a few months' time, there might be costs that they wouldn't have had if they stayed on SNAP the whole time. What do you believe are the kinds of costs of churning for participants?

Examining the causes and relevant factors associated with churning

13. 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? Is churning a topic ever discussed among staff in your office?

14. What do you believe causes churning? (*Probe, if necessary.* New computer system? Case overload? Temporary ineligibility? Eligible people not recertifying?) Which causes are most common?

15. From your perspective, what percentage of cases does not recertify? What do you think are the common reasons?

16. In general, are there SNAP policies or practices that make it harder or easier for recipients to recertify or report status changes, which might have an effect on churning? (*Use the following probes, if not already answered.*)

    a. Do you think the length of the recertification period has any effect on churning? Why or why not?

    b. Do you think any of the practices we've been discussing (face-to-face or phone interviews, mailing documentation, office hours, 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?

    c. Does your office have any other policies or practices that make it harder or easier for recipients to recertify or report status changes?

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

18. Are there ways that enhanced technology has improved (or, maybe could improve) your business processes to potentially reduce churn? For example, better access to data about who is churning and why their cases were closed? Are there ways that technology contributes to churning? For example, when computer systems are down or there are computer glitches?

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

20. You mentioned *[refer to answers given above]* as a possible cause of churning. Is there anything

caseworkers or the SNAP agency could do to reduce address this? *[Note: specific wording will depend on the specific issues being discussed.]*

21. Do you think some cases are more likely to churn than others? Which ones? Why? To what extent do you think that SNAP participants' personal characteristics (i.e., health issues, small children, household composition changes, work schedules, etc.) might make it more challenging for them to follow SNAP rules and complete administrative processes?

22. Are local community-based organizations involved in assisting SNAP recipients to apply for or maintain benefits?   Which ones?

    a. What is the role community-based organizations play in helping cases maintain certification or recertify? How important are community-based organizations in preventing or addressing churning?

    b. (*Probe, if not already answered*) What actions can community-based organizations take to help SNAP applicants and recipients? Do you know what percent of cases receive assistance from community-based organizations?

23. Is there anything unique about your area or office, such as 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 how information about cases is entered into 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.

24. Who is responsible for entering information about SNAP participants?

25. If a case closes because they don't comply with procedural requirements (i.e. don't submit documentation or have an interview), what information do you enter in the computer? Is there a specific code number or name for that?

26. If, instead, a case closes because the client is ineligible due to income or assets, what information do you enter in the computer? Do you need to enter information saying the case is closed, or does the computer determine that based on the information about the income and assets? Are there specific code numbers or names that are used for cases that are closed due to income or assets?

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.

27. Are there data elements in your system that are often skipped? If so, are these left blank or do they show a default (e.g. Field says "Female" unless you change it to "Male").
28. Are there data elements that are often miscoded (e.g. contain incorrect information)? If so, which ones? Why?
29. Are there other idiosyncrasies about how you enter information into the computer that would be important for us to understand?

Wrap-up

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

31. 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?

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