

Appendix B-4: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE—SNAP PARTICIPANTS

[Ask participants to write their first name on a tent card.]

Introduction/Icebreaker

1. *[MODERATOR: Start with an icebreaker]* Please tell us your first name and tell us about how long have people lived in this area?
2. *[MODERATOR: Transition to getting a rough timeline of participants' history of SNAP use]* When did you first apply for SNAP? Are you receiving anything else from *[LOCAL HUMAN SERVICE OFFICE]*?

SNAP Churn

1. *[MODERATOR: Make sure to distinguish between short spells where someone churns versus instances where someone leaves the program for a long period of time and then comes back; also distinguish between instances where someone reapplies and when they recertify.]* We're interested in talking about any interruptions to your SNAP benefits.
 - a. Over the past five years, how many times has the SNAP office SNAP stopped your benefits?
 - b. Over the past five years, how many times have you reapplied for SNAP?
 - c. Over the past five years, have you ever lost your SNAP benefits and then applied again within a few months?
2. How did you apply? What was that like?
3. How do you usually communicate with staff at the SNAP office? Have you had to for any reason?
4. Has there been a time when you've had to [renew/recertify/resubmit paperwork]? Did you? What was that like?
 - a. *[If applicable]* Why didn't you reapply?
 - b. *[If applicable]* Why weren't you eligible?

[MODERATOR: 1) Select questions based on issues mentioned by discussants 2) After covering these topics, proceed to the remaining questions, if any.]

5. Some of you have mentioned [OR sometimes people have] personal circumstances (like health issues, small children, changes in the number of people living in your household, work schedules, etc.) that make it hard for you to complete the processes needed to continue receiving SNAP (like getting to an interview or submitting paperwork on time). Has this been your experience? What other personal circumstances have made it hard for you to keep SNAP?
6. Some of you have mentioned [OR sometimes people say that] SNAP rules or office procedures can make it easier or harder for you to recertify or report status changes. In your experience, are there things that your office or caseworker does to try to make it easier for you to recertify or report changes?
 - a. When it's time to [recertify renew/recertify/resubmit paperwork] for SNAP or you have to report changes, can you do it over the phone, on the internet or by mail or fax, or do you have to go into the office and meet with a worker? If you have a choice, which method do you use to recertify? Why?
 - i. Do you have access to a computer where you could get on-line to recertify? If so, do you know how to recertify on-line?
 - ii. Do you have access to a fax machine if you wanted to fax SNAP paperwork?
 - iii. Is the office open at times that are convenient for you? When you go to the SNAP office, how long do you usually have to wait to see someone?
 - b. Did you have a choice of having your SNAP interview on the phone or in the office? If you do have a choice, do you prefer having your interview on the phone or in the office? Why?
 - c. Are there times when you have no choice and you need to go to the SNAP office in-person? If so, what are the reasons you have to go into the office?
 - d. How do you know when it's time to recertify for SNAP? Do you know how often you need to recertify (e.g. every 6 months? Every year?) Does the SNAP office notify you that you need to do something, or do you need to remember to do it on your own?
 - e. If your situation changes while you are receiving SNAP, such as getting a job or working more hours, do you need to report changes right away or can you wait until the next time the SNAP office asks for information? In what situations do you need to report changes right away?
 - f. How do these office procedures [*repeat specifics identified during discussion*] affect your ability to recertify or report status changes?

Causes of Churning

I'd like to begin with a very broad question that will help guide the rest of our discussion today.

7. What do you believe causes churning or an interruption in SNAP benefits– the process of losing SNAP benefits and then reapplying again within a few months? What was your experience? *(Probe: Temporary ineligibility because your circumstances have changed? For example, you're working more or earning too much? Paperwork issues at the SNAP office? Eligible people not completing the process for renewing your SNAP benefits?)*
8. [QUESTION TO BE ASKED OF MIXED GROUPS OR GROUPS OF “ELIGIBLE” CHURNERS] Sometimes people who are eligible to continue receiving SNAP don't [renew/recertify/resubmit paperwork] on time so they lose their SNAP benefits for a few months. If this was your experience, what prevented you from [renewing/recertifying/resubmitting paperwork] on time? Did you think you weren't eligible anymore because your circumstances had changed? Are there other reasons?
9. [QUESTION TO BE ASKED OF MIXED GROUPS OR GROUPS OF “INELIGIBLE” CHURNERS] Sometimes people lose their SNAP benefits because their circumstances change and they aren't eligible. Then their circumstances change again and they can receive SNAP again. If this was your experience, what changed to make you lose eligibility and then what changed to make you eligible again a few months later?
10. After your SNAP benefits stopped, did anyone from the SNAP office reach out to you to see why you didn't recertify or to help you recertify for benefits?
11. Are there other things your office or caseworker does that make it easier or harder for you to report changes or recertify for SNAP?

Determining the Process of Churner Re-entry

I would like to shift our discussion now to hearing about the specific process you went through after losing SNAP benefits and reapplying within a few months.

12. When you reapplied for SNAP after losing the benefits for a little while, do you think the application process was any different from when you first applied for SNAP? (i.e., possibly having to provide less documentation or go through a shorter process?)
 - a. When you reapplied for SNAP after losing the benefits for a little while, what did you need to do to make sure you received SNAP benefits once again?
13. Are you aware of any local community organizations that are able to help with part of the application process for SNAP? Can you tell us about any help you received from any community organizations? Do you think it would be useful to get help from a community organization? If so, what things would help you?
 - a. *If the CBO we visit is not mentioned by name, ask:* Did any of you go to [NAME OF CBO WE VISITED] for help signing up for or recertifying for SNAP? What can that organization help with?
 - b. How important have [THE CBO WE VISITED] or other outside organizations been in helping you...

- a. ...keep your SNAP benefits?
- b. ...renew your SNAP benefits?
- c. ...resubmit SNAP paperwork?
- d. ...reapply for SNAP benefits?

Costs of Churning

I would like to hear about your experiences during the short time when you were not receiving SNAP, before you started getting SNAP again.

- 14. Did you stay off of SNAP because you didn't think you needed it? Was it difficult to get by without SNAP?
 - a. How did you get groceries when you didn't have SNAP? Do you go to food pantries more?
 - b. During your time off of SNAP, did you have other supports from TANF, family, or local community organizations?
- 15. How did the loss of SNAP for that period affect your family?
- 16. What brought you back on to SNAP?
- 17. When a family goes on and off of benefits in a few months' time, there might be extra costs that you wouldn't have had if you stayed on SNAP the whole time. For example, it takes time to recertify for SNAP after you've lost your benefits and you might also need to pay for gas or bus fare to get to the SNAP office. Did you have costs like these as a result of losing SNAP benefits and reapplying? If so, what kinds of costs did you have?

Wrap up

- 18. Do you think that churning -- the process of losing SNAP benefits and reapplying with a few months -- is a major issue? Why or why not?
- 19. What can the SNAP workers or agency do to reduce or prevent churning? How can the SNAP process be improved?
- 20. We've talked a lot about the time and effort it takes to enroll in SNAP and maintain those benefits. It's a big challenge. Can you tell me what your worker or the agency has done well to be of assistance through this process, that you think other SNAP office should do to help their clients?

Let's summarize the key points we've discussed today..... Do you have any final thoughts, comments or recommendations? Or do you have any questions for us?

Thank you.

Ask participants to complete the “Participant Information Form” (B-5) and sign the “Participant Receipt Form” (B-6).

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-XXXX. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection.