

THE ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS OF AN INTERVIEW TO SNAP ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFIT DETERMINATIONS
TELEPHONE DISCUSSION GUIDE

(Moderator Note: Substitute appropriate State Program Name instead of [SNAP] where appropriate)

State	State Program Name ¹	Name of State EBT Card
OR	SNAP	Oregon Trail
UT	FSP (Food Stamp Program)	Utah Horizon

A. Recruitment Questions

My name is [NAME], and I work for Mathematica Policy Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the government. We are doing a study for the US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service to learn about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, which [is called NAME here in STATE] and was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, and how the application process works in [STATE]. As part of the study, we want to learn about your experiences with different stages of the [SNAP] application process and understand what makes completing the application difficult. We were given your name by the state [AGENCY NAME].

Let me assure you that this is not a sales call and at no time during our discussion will you be asked to donate money. We are simply interested in your opinions. Since we are looking for a wide variety of people who can represent different perspectives, I need to ask you a few questions about your background. This will take just a few minutes and if you are eligible, we would like to talk to you for about 30 additional minutes and you will receive \$30 Visa gift card as a thank you for your time.

The answers you give me will not be shared with anyone outside of our research team. Your answers to these simple questions will not affect any benefits you may receive from the government.

1. Would you be willing to answer these questions?

- Yes.....GO TO Q.2
- No.....

TERMINATE

¹ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/roll-out/state-chart.pfd>

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IF NO, SAY "Thank you for your time. These are all the questions I have for you today."

2. Did you recently apply for SNAP benefits in the previous three months?

- Yes...GO TO Q.3
No.....

TERMINATE

IF NO, SAY "Thank you for your time. Since you applied for SNAP benefits more than three months ago, these are all the questions I have for you today."

3. Was your SNAP application denied?

- Yes...GO TO Q.4
No.....

TERMINATE

IF NO, SAY "Thank you for your time. Since your SNAP application was not denied, these are all the questions I have for you today."

4. Was your SNAP application for a recertification of benefits?

- Yes.....TERMINATE
No..... GO TO Q.5

IF YES, SAY "Thank you for your time. Because this was not an initial application, these are all the questions I have for you today."

INVITATION

Thank you for answering these questions. We would like to ask you a few more questions about your experiences. The discussion will take about 30 minutes and we will send you a \$30 Visa gift card in the mail after the call. Are you willing to participate?

If no, "Thank you for your time. These are all the questions I have for you today."

If yes, continue to next section.

B. Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk with me. Before we get started, I'd like to tell you some more information about the study and get your consent to participate. Please bear with me as I have to read the consent information word-for-word.

As mentioned previously, you were selected from a list of people provided by [STATE]'s SNAP office who began a SNAP application in the last several months, but were unsuccessful in qualifying for benefits. To better understand how this occurs, we are talking with people like yourself who were denied benefits during the application process. The benefit of participating is it will help to improve the SNAP application process. Information about your experiences can help policymakers improve the program. You will be asked to share your experiences with different stages of the SNAP application process and what makes completing the application difficult. Throughout the discussion, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may also stop participating at any time without any penalty. The discussion will last about 30 minutes. At the end of the discussion, we will give you a \$30 Visa gift card for your participation. This payment will not affect your potential eligibility for SNAP benefits in the future.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Deciding to participate or not to participate will not affect any benefits you are receiving or will be eligible to receive in the future. By participating, you are giving us consent to use the information collected today in the reporting of the results of this study. All individual information is private and will not be used in any way that could identify you. Responses will only be reported in larger groups and no information will be shared with anyone outside the team. All data collected, including recordings, will be kept in secured locations and identifying information will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer required.

This research has been approved by our Institutional Review Board, New England Institutional Review Board. For questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact New England IRB at 1-800-232-9570. The call is free. For more information about this study, you can contact Angela D'Angelo at Mathematica Policy Research at (312) 994-1039. You will also receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

You will also receive a copy of this consent form in addition to your \$30 Visa gift card in the mail to keep for your records.

Do you agree to participate in the interview?

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- YES [MAKE NOTE IN THE CONSENT FORM WITH INTERVIEWER NAME, DATE, AND TIME OF THE CONSENT]
- NOT A GOOD TIME, SCHEDULE CALLBACK
- HUNG UP DURING INTRODUCTION
- REFUSED

Before we start, I want to mention some points for our discussion:

- There are no right or wrong answers. So just say exactly what you think, whether it's something good or bad.
- I would like to tape record our discussion so I can listen to it later and accurately report *what* was said. Everything you say here is private, except as otherwise required by law. No one besides our study team will listen to the tape. Your name will *not* be included in our report or on any document we submit to anyone outside of the study team.
- If you want to say something that you don't want taped, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder. Do you have any objections to participating or to my taping our discussion?²

Are there any questions before we get started?

TURN TAPE RECORDER ON AND SAY: "The tape recorder is on. Is it okay if I tape-record this conversation?"

C. SNAP Knowledge/Expectations Prior to Applying for Benefits

As you mentioned previously, you began a [SNAP] application in the last several months. Please focus on that experience in our discussion and not on any prior experiences with [SNAP].

1. Prior to applying for [SNAP] benefits, did you hear or read about any recent changes to the program?
2. What changes were you informed about?

[PROBE ON THESE TOPICS IF NECESSARY]:

- **Shorter Eligibility Interviews**—Some individuals qualify for expedited interviews, or may not need an interview at all.
- **Electronic Applications**—Individuals can apply on-line.

² If a second request to turn off the recorder is made, the moderator will inform the participants that the recorder will no longer be used so that we can ensure the focus group proceeds as efficiently as possible. Mathematica will then rely solely on the detailed notes that will be taken during the focus group session. In addition, Mathematica will closely monitor each of the focus groups to identify this and other issues that may arise. We will keep FNS informed of any such issues and take the necessary steps to resolve them.

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- **Community Partners**—Schools, libraries, hospitals and other organizations provide applications and application assistance.
3. How did you hear about those changes?
 - From [SNAP] representative
 - Saw notice/flier about changes
 - Word of mouth - heard about changes from a friend, family member or someone else
 4. Did you get any information about [SNAP] from other government programs you may participate in (ie., SSI, TANF)?
 5. In what ways was the actual process different from what you expected?
 6. Before this most recent experience, had you ever applied for [SNAP] benefits before?
 - Was the process application different this time from last? Describe.

D. Experiences with SNAP Application Process

1. Please describe what you had to do during the application process. Walk me through the process.
 - Did you fill out the paper application or did you complete the online version?
 - How complete was your application when you submitted it?
 - Did anyone review the application for missing information (in office applications only).
 - Were you asked to add information prior to submitting the application?
2. How well did you understand the instructions on how to complete the application?
3. Was the application difficult or easy to complete?
 - Did you seek help in completing the application? Describe
 - What kinds of help did you seek?
[PROBE ON THESE TOPICS IF NECESSARY]:
 - Online at [SNAP] website
 - Online at website other than [SNAP] website
 - Called [SNAP] office
 - Called toll-free information line
 - Called my specific case worker
 - Was it easy or difficult to get a hold of your case worker?

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- Went in person to [SNAP] office
- Asked a friend or family member for help
- Asked other government agency for help.
- Was it easy or difficult to get answers to questions?
- Was the help that you received useful/adequate? Why or why not?

4. Did you complete the entire application process?

5. [If no], Describe some reasons for your not completing the application process?

[PROBE ON THESE TOPICS IF NECESSARY]:

- Difficulties filling out the application
- Difficulties getting paperwork for verifications
- Did not know additional documents were needed
- Sent documents but they were not enough or not received
- Lack of help with completing forms
- Missed interview and did not re-schedule³
 - Why did you miss the interview: lack of transportation, no access to telephone, forgot, working?
- Did not need benefits anymore (income or living situation changed or improved)
- Thought I would probably be denied, so did not continue
 - Why did you think you would be denied? (Income requirements, immigrant status, lack of supporting documents)

5a. [If multiple reasons given,] was there a single reason that stands out?

E. Verification Documents

1. What verification materials or paperwork were you asked to provide to complete the application?

- Proof of Identification: birth certificate, driver's license, social security card, immigration status
- Children's identification: birth certificate, social security card
- Proof of where you live
- Proof of income/self employment (describe)
- Proof of resources

³ Only relevant in the non-pilot sites.

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- Proof of expenses: medical, shelter, utilities
- Proof of student status/federal student aid or work study

2. How did you know what to provide?

- How did you submit these items?
- Describe the process of submitting this documentation.

3. Did you have difficulty obtaining any of the verification materials that were required?

3a. If so, what difficulty did you have?

[PROBE ON THESE TOPICS IF NECESSARY]:

- Did not understand what they were really asking for
- Did not have the ability to obtain or could not find the documents
- Did not have original documents
- Could not obtain necessary documents in time for the application deadline
- Could not obtain the specific kind of proof requested
- Did not have transportation/could not travel to get documents
- Needed to make copies of documents, but could not get to a copy machine.
- Did not have stamp, fax machine, or transportation to get them in on time

4. If you could not provide verification materials, were you given other options for providing proof?

4a. If so, what were those options?

[Only discuss if need prompting. May include:

- *Providing verbal verification (example, worker calls employer to confirm employment and income)*
- *Letting the client verify information on an application such as household member identity, citizenship, age or date of birth as true and providing a signature.*
- *Using any available documents that provide proof of your eligibility. You do not have to give a specific kind of document or proof.*
- *Giving someone else permission represent you with the SNAP office and other agencies.*

- Were you familiar with any of these options while applying?

4b. If not, do you think knowing about other options for providing verification would have helped you complete the [SNAP] application process?

F. Interview or Client Contact

1. Did you have a formal interview (over the telephone or in-person) to complete the application process?

a. For Those Who Had An Interview...

1. If you had an eligibility interview either in person at a local agency office or by telephone, describe the interview process.

1a. Was your interview by phone or in-person?

2. How easy or difficult was it to schedule your eligibility interview? (OR); How difficult was it to contact a worker through the call center for an interview? How low was the wait? (Utah)

3. What topics were covered in the interview you had with the [SNAP] rep?

- Confirm the information you entered on your application; probed about certain questions
- Your rights and responsibilities as a [SNAP] client
- How to access and use the EBT card **[insert state name for card]**
- Recertification procedures
- Help and other resources available
- Where can you use [SNAP] benefits
- What kinds of things can you buy with [SNAP] benefits

4. During the interview, did you have an opportunity to ask questions?

5. Were you given information about other benefits you might be eligible to receive?

6. About how long did the interview last?

7. Did you have any follow-up contact with the person who interviewed you or another worker?

8. Do you think that *not* having an interview with a [SNAP] representative would have made the application process easier or more difficult? Why?

b. For Those with No Interview...

1. Did you receive information about any of the following:

- What information you needed to provide to complete your application
- Your rights as a [SNAP] client
- How to access and use the EBT card

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- Recertification procedures
 - Help and other resources available
 - Where can you use [SNAP] benefits
 - What kinds of things can you buy with [SNAP] benefits
2. How did you receive this information?
 3. Did you know that you could request an interview with a [SNAP] representative?
 4. Do you think that having an interview with a [SNAP] representative would have made the application process easier or more difficult to complete? Why?
 5. Did anyone from the SNAP office contact you after you submitted your application?
 6. Where you asked any follow-up questions about your application? (by telephone or mail?)
 7. What types of questions were you asked?
 - Did they focus on specific questions or confirm all information on the application?
 8. How long were you on the telephone with the worker?

G. Overall Impressions

1. [If answered “no” at qD4,] You mentioned you did not complete the application. At what point in the application process did you stop?
 - 1a. [If answered “no” at qD4,] What was the main reason you did not finish the [SNAP] application process?
2. What was the easiest part of the [SNAP] application process?
3. What was the most difficult part of the [SNAP] application process?
4. Is there anything you would change about the [SNAP] application process to make it easier?
5. Do you plan on re-applying for [SNAP] benefits? Why or why not? If so, will you apply the same way or a different way? Why
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the [SNAP] application process, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

H. Conclusion

Before we finish, let me make sure I have the correct spelling of your name and also get your address and phone number(s) so that we can send you the \$30 gift card as a thank you for your time.

FIRST AND LAST NAME: _____

HOME PHONE: _____

ADDRESS _____

PERSONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

WORK PHONE: _____

We have some additional background questions that will be used for research purposes only:

1. RECORD GENDER: (*Confirm if needed*)

- Female
- Male

2. Which of the following categories includes your age? **(READ & RECORD)**

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-59
- 60+

3. Are you currently working?

- Yes, Working
- No, Not working

4. What race or races do you consider yourself? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White

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Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in [STATE]. If you have any questions about your SNAP application and the reasons you did not qualify for benefits, you should contact your local SNAP office directly.

Interviewer's name _____
Date _____