

Appendix B4
Case Study Interview Guide for
County SNAP/TANF Program

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WIC Nutrition Services Administration (NSA) Cost Study A National Study

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Office of Research and Analysis

Case Study Interview Guide for County SNAP/TANF Program

State:

Respondent/Title/Organization:

Phone:

E-mail:

Interviewer:

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this case study that is being conducted to compare the costs of administering the SNAP and TANF programs to the costs of administering the WIC Program.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service has contracted with Altarum Institute (Altarum) and RTI International (RTI) to conduct a comprehensive study of WIC Nutrition Services and Administration costs. As part of that study, FNS has asked Altarum to look at how administrative costs are handled in similar federal programs, such as SNAP and TANF. Altarum is a health and nutrition policy research and consulting institute. Our work focuses on helping to improve the health and nutrition status of children, families, and adults.

The focus of this interview will be to examine how your county administers the SNAP/TANF program, including a description of the core functions, program components, and factors that determine the cost of these components. For the purposes of this study we consider the core functions to include any and all activities spent to support eligibility determination and benefit delivery, outside of the food/cash benefit received by the participant.

[SNAP AGENCY] For example, for the SNAP program we are not interested in the cost of the monthly food benefit to families; instead, our focus will be on the processes used for certification and verification of eligibility, costs of providing services—such as employment and training support, outreach, child care support, SNAP nutrition education—and other services provided directly through your office or through contracts with community organizations. We are also interested in the total cost of administering the core functions, including both federal and state financial participation.

[TANF AGENCY] For example, for the TANF program we are not interested in the cost of monthly cash benefits to families; instead, our focus will be on the certification and verification of income process, cost of providing employment or transition services, cost of child care support (non-cash), family support services, education and training support, and other services that may be provided through your office or contracts with community agencies or county government.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

This interview will consist of a series of questions organized by various topics. The entire interview will take up to 2 hours. We can take short breaks as necessary.

Your answers will be considered private. Nothing said today will be identified back to you individually in any reports prepared for this study.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let’s get started.

Section 1: SNAP/TANF State Agency Organizational Structure and Staffing

Purpose: To obtain background information on the organization of the state SNAP/TANF agency relative to its core operations, and the extent to which services are provided to it from sources outside of the organization.

1. Let's start by discussing the organizational structure of SNAP/TANF here in [NAME OF COUNTY IN NAME OF STATE].

(a) Thank you for providing an organization chart for your agency in advance of this interview. I would like to go over this with you briefly to understand where various functions are located and who is responsible for them. Please briefly describe the overall service delivery functions for SNAP/TANF in your county-run program, including which parts of the organization are responsible for such areas as:

- SNAP/TANF Policy
- Local Operations
- Management Information Systems
- EBT Card Issuance and Production
- Program Monitoring
- Fraud and Compliance
- Financial Reporting

(b) With regard to the organization of SNAP/TANF itself, what is the operational structure by which your County agency conducts eligibility determination and provides benefits? For example, do you operate with local or regional service delivery units?

Note to Interviewer: Probe for layers of organization and approximate number of sites for each layer.

(c) For core functions provided at the county headquarters office, how many FTEs operate within the SNAP/TANF programs? [AGGREGATE NUMBER DESIRED.] How many of these positions are currently vacant?

(f) For eligibility determination and income verification of applicants, how many FTEs are currently authorized? How many of these positions are currently vacant?

2. Thinking about county staff, are there any staff members working in your County SNAP/TANF office who provide support for core SNAP/TANF functions that are supported by funds other than SNAP/TANF (e.g., social services block grant, special federal grants)?
 - (a) [IF YES:] What areas are being supported and how is funding for these staff obtained?
 - (b) [IF YES:] How many FTEs (full, partial) are supported by these 'other' funds?
 - (c) How do staff account for their time (e.g., timesheets)?
3. Can you please describe how funding decisions are made to support local program costs? If services at the local level are consolidated between SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, how do you determine which program provides its share of the local program costs (e.g., point of entry, fixed cost share, funding formula, percentage based on eligibility numbers)?
 - (a) Over the past three years, has your share of these costs increased, decreased or stayed about the same?
 - (b) [IF USING CALL CENTERS OR INTERNET-BASED ENROLLMENT] What percent of participants enroll through local offices as compared to call centers or Web-based applications?
4. For income or employment verification of applicants, to what types of support do eligibility workers have access (e.g., Work Number, IRS, PARIS, E-verify, Social Security)?
 - (a) How are these services paid for (e.g., contractors, direct bill)?
 - (b) How are cost shares determined?
 - (c) Are the costs of income verification incorporated into your baseline budget or do you contribute special funds for access to these services?
5. Do you obtain services from other parts of the county department, such as data processing support, accounting support, personnel support or general services?
 - (a) [IF YES:] Please describe these functions and how SNAP/TANF pays for them (e.g. direct charge, overhead, fixed costs).
 - (b) [IF YES:] How are these costs determined?
 - (c) [IF YES:] How often do charges change during one FFY?

6. Do you receive services from any contractors to support SNAP/TANF program services, such as MIS, EBT, audits or program evaluations?
 - (a) [IF YES:] Please describe.
 - (b) [IF YES:] Are these services obtained through competitive bidding, sole source or some other way?
 - (c) [IF YES:] Are any of these services obtained by other departments in your County organization?
7. Does the county department take a percentage of the SNAP/TANF federal grant for departmental general overhead?
 - (a) IF YES:] What is that percent?
 - (b) [IF YES:] How is that percentage determined?

Section 2: Sources of Funding

Purpose: To identify all sources of SNAP/TANF funding, including federal funds, state funds, and in-kind contributions.

8. What is the total dollar amount of your county's FFY 2013 SNAP/TANF grant from the State agency?? [WRITE DOWN \$ AMOUNT]
9. In addition to this, what is the total amount of County funds (match) that support your operations?
 - (a) Do you provide more than the required state financial participation percentage?
 - (b) [IF YES:] Are these funds budgeted for specific supplemental activities or are they part of basic operations?
 - (c) Do you receive any funding that comes from sources other than the State SNAP/TANF grant?
 - (d) [IF YES:] Please describe.
10. Does your county SNAP/TANF program benefit from any in-kind contributions to support program operations, such as free or subsidized office space or utilities, free equipment or materials or staff on another payroll?
 - (a) [IF YES:] Please describe.
 - (b) By what method do you estimate their value?

- (c) Are these contributions required to be reported at the federal level?

Section 3: Factors Influencing Cost of Program

Purpose: To look at how specific ways of conducting agency operations and other factors impacts SNAP/TANF administrative costs.

11. Over the past three years, did your program's costs increase, decrease or stay about the same? If they changed, what factors do you believe contribute the most to the increased or decrease in program costs and why?
12. In FFY 2013 did you make any policy, regulatory or practice changes designed to reduce program costs or improve program efficiency? If so, please describe. How effective were these measures?
13. In FFY 2013 did you apply through the State for and receive any FNS or ACF waivers that helped to reduced program costs or make the program more efficient? If so, what were these waivers and how did they impact your program costs?
14. In FFY 2013 did you apply for but were denied any waivers from FNS or ACF that you believe would have reduced costs or improved program efficiency? If so, why were the waivers denied? What was the impact on your program costs of this denial?

Section 4: Cost Allocation Methods

Purpose: To examine how the SNAP/TANF programs allocate funds to local service sites and supports these sites in other ways.

15. Please describe how you decide which funds are retained for County SNAP/TANF office administration versus allocated to local service sites] to provide SNAP/TANF benefits?
16. By what method do you allocate monies *between* local service sites or functional areas?
 - (a) Do you use a funding formula and, if so, may we have a written description about how this formula works?
 - [IF YES: GET A COPY, THANK INTERVIEWEE, AND CONTINUE TO NEXT QUESTION.]
 - [IF NO:] Please describe to me verbally then how monies are allocated between local service sites or functional areas?
 - (c) Has this method changed in last three years?
 - [IF YES:] How?

- [IF YES:] What are/were the internal and external influences driving the change?

That ends my formal interview questions. Is there anything I haven't raised about SNAP/TANF budgeting and administrative costs that you think is relevant and would like to share?

Thank you so much for spending the time with us to explain all the factors and influences on your budgeting processes.