

APPENDIX B12. SFA DIRECTOR INTERVIEW (BY PHONE)

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Third Access, Participation,
Eligibility and Certification
Study Series

Third Access, Participation, Eligibility and Certification Study Series (APEC III)

SFA DIRECTOR INTERVIEW (BY PHONE)

SUMMARY

Home office staff will conduct in-depth interviews with a sample of SFA Directors. The in-depth interviews will take place during phase 2 and 3 (December 2017-May 2018) of data collection.

The home office staff will recruit and schedule an appointment to conduct the in-depth interview. A few days prior to the scheduled interview date, home office staff will confirm the date/time for the interview. Home office staff will conduct the in-depth interview over the phone. With the consent of the participant, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

Home office staff will ensure that respondents are aware that participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect any benefits their district may be receiving.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not 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 0584-0530. The time required for the SFA director to complete this information collection is estimated to average 45 minutes per response during each data collection round, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources,

APEC-III

SFA Director In-Depth Interview

I. Introduction

Welcome and Overview

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me today. My name is [interviewer's name] and as you know, I work for Westat, a private research company in Rockville, Maryland.

The US Department of Agriculture's, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is trying to improve the certification and meal claiming process for breakfast and lunch school meal programs. FNS has hired Westat to conduct a study that looks at errors in payments for the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program. This is the third Access, Participation, Eligibility and Certification study series (APEC III). Part of this study includes talking directly with School Food Authority Directors and Cafeteria Managers to better understand if there are parts of the certification or meal claiming process that could be improved.

Disclosures and Ground Rules

Before we get started there are a few things I should mention.

- This is a research study. While Section 305 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires SFAs to cooperate with FNS research studies, sharing your personal thoughts and opinions during this discussion is completely voluntary.
- Refusal to participate will not have any impact on your district or position as SFA staff.
- The thoughts and opinions that you share during our discussion will be kept private. Your name will not be linked to any of your responses; in our reports, we may include quotes from our

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respondents, but these will be presented without the respondent's name and in such a way that you could not be identified by the reader.

- Your name will not appear in any documentation shared with the Food and Nutrition Service, the school district, the School Food Authority, or your manager.
- The thoughts and opinions that you share during our discussion will be used for research purposes only. We will combine your responses with those from other SFA staff. They will not be used as an evaluation of your work, your staff's work or the district.
- Your feedback is important because input from SFA Directors like yourself help us better understand how the program can be improved.
- Once we start the interview, you can take a break, skip questions or stop participating at any time. Again, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you or your school district.
- Finally, with your permission, I would like to record this discussion. The recording will be transcribed, which will be used to help us recall exactly what was said when we go to summarize our findings. The recordings, transcripts, and any notes we have will be stored on Westat's secure server and will be destroyed after the project is complete.

We have planned for this discussion to last no more than 45 minutes.

Do you have any questions? [ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS]

Do I have your consent to participate?

IF NO: [ADDRESS ANY CONCERNS. ONLY PROCEED IF THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION IS YES.] Discontinue interview.

May I turn on the audio recorder now?

IF YES: [ONCE RECORDER IS ON, "Now that the recorder is on, do I still have your permission to audio record this interview?" MAKE SURE YOU GET AN AUDIBLE "Yes" FROM RESPONDENT.]

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IF NO: Do you agree to continue with this interview without being audio-recorded?

INTERVIEWER: IF THE RESPONDENT DECLINES TO BE AUDIO RECORDED PLEASE COMPLETE:

Person Obtaining Consent:

Date: _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

II. In-Depth Interview

A. Approving Free and Reduced Price Applications

In this section we will discuss the approval process for free and reduced price applications. Let's start by discussing the steps taken when reviewing income-based and categorically eligible applications. Later in our conversation we'll discuss topics such as direct certification, meal claiming, reporting and training.

1. To begin, please walk me through your district's process for approving income-based and categorically eligible applications. Tell me step by step to the extent you can.

Probe if needed: Who is responsible for approving the applications?

2. People reviewing these applications can sometimes make mistakes, such as miscounting household size, making a calculation error when determining income, or placing a family in the wrong eligibility category. What other types of reviewer challenges have you encountered? What kind of mistakes have you found to be most common?

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3. What strategies have you tried to reduce errors in the approval process? Which ones have worked well? Which ones haven't worked as well? Why not?
 - Are there any edit checks in place?
4. In your opinion, what could be done to reduce errors in the approval process?
5. What changes over time have you seen either in the types of reviewer errors or the frequency with which they occur? The change in frequency could be either an increase or a decrease in the number of mistakes.

IF CHANGE: What do you believe has contributed to these changes?

PROBE: Are there policies or requirements that are contributing to an increase in mistakes? Explain.

PROBE: On the other hand, are there policies or requirement that are reducing the number or type of mistakes you're seeing? Explain.

6. Now let's talk briefly about households and *their* experiences completing the applications. First, what are some common mistakes that households make when completing applications?
7. What changes, if any, have there been over time in the types and frequency of mistakes that occur among households on incomplete applications? Again, there could have been an increase or a decrease over time.

IF CHANGES: What do you think has contributed to those changes?

Probe if needed: How, if it all, has the change in application format impacted the problems that households have?

8. What does your reviewer do when an application is incomplete? For example, what happens if an application is missing:
 - A social security number?
 - An adult signature?
 - Income frequency?

Probe if needed: In your opinion, are there more errors on these types of applications?

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9. Under what conditions might a reviewer approve an application, even if it's missing some information, such as a social security number?
- In your opinion, are staff more likely to approve an application with a missing SSN if the household income and size information qualifies them for free and reduced price meals?

Thank you, this has been very helpful.

B. Direct Certification Process

Now let's focus on the direct certification process. Please just walk me through that process, as you did before for approving free and reduced price applications.

10. Which sources does your district use to identify certified students? How did you decide on those sources?

Probe if needed:

- I'm wondering about data sources such as SNAP, TANF, FDPIR?
 - o District letters?
 - o Lists of eligible students in foster care, or any others I haven't mentioned?

If needed: Which sources, if any, has your district opted not to use? Explain.

11. What have been your experiences with using these sources?

Probe if needed:

- Are these sources generally available in time for you to use them to identify certified students?
 - Have there been any challenges to using these sources?
12. In your experience, what errors, if any, occur when using any of these sources? Describe in more detail.
13. What, if anything, about the direct certification process specifically do you think contributes to those problems?

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14. What strategies have you tried to reduce errors in the direct certification process? Which ones have worked well? Which ones haven't worked as well? Why not?
15. In your opinion, what could be done to reduce errors in the direct certification process?

This has been very helpful. Thank you.

C. CEP /ISP Process

Now let's talk about your experiences with the Community Eligibility Provision (also known as CEP) and how you determined the Identified Student Percentage (or ISP) rate.

Are there CEP schools in your district?

IF NO: SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION.

16. Please describe how your ISP rate is determined.

If needed:

- **The Identified Student Percentage** is the proportion of students who are directly certified for free school meals through means other than a school meal application and not subject to verification. In addition to determining CEP eligibility, the ISP is the basis of the claiming percentage to determine the Federal reimbursement.
17. SFAs can use up to 10 sources to identify students including SNAP, TANF and Medicaid. Which sources did you use? How do you identify and decide which ones to use? What are your reasons for not using certain sources?
 18. SFAs may differ in how they use sources. For example, if an SFA uses SNAP as a source, some will identify a certain number of students and once reaching that number they stop. Other SFAs may go through the entire list to make sure all students listed are identified. Do you use all of the sources completely? If not, when do you decide to stop?

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19. Some districts may report an ISP rate that is lower than it actually is. Can you share your thoughts on why this might happen?

D. Meal Claiming Process

My next questions are about meal claiming errors. Meal claiming is the point at which cafeteria staff identify meals as reimbursable or not reimbursable. Meal claiming errors occur at the end of the serving line, after a student has filled his or her tray, typically at the point of sale or cash register.

20. In your experience, what types of errors are most common in meal claiming?
21. What, if anything, about the meal claiming process do you think contributes to those errors?
22. What strategies, if any, have you tried to reduce errors in the meal claiming process? What's worked and not worked among the strategies tried?
 - Are there edit checks in place?
23. In your opinion, what could be done to reduce errors in meal claiming?
24. Do you have both CEP and Non-CEP schools in your district?

IF NO: Go to section E.

IF YES:

25. Is the procedure for determining the number of meals claimed and reported different in CEP vs Non-CEP schools? Please describe.
26. Is there anything that may lead to errors that are specific to the process for CEP schools? Please explain.
27. Is there anything that may lead to errors that are specific for Non-CEP schools? Please explain.

E. Aggregation/Reporting Process

Thanks, now I'd like to ask about reporting errors. By reporting errors, we mean errors in the counting and claiming paperwork sent from the school to the SFA and then the SFA to the State and the State to USDA.

28. Please describe the counting and claiming process starting with the data you receive from the school.

Probe if needed:

- What are the roles or titles of staff members who are involved? We are not interested in specific names of staff.
 - Is it an automated process?
 - How often does the SFA office receive the counting and claiming data from the schools?
 - What is the SFA office's process upon receipt of claims from the school?
 - How often do you send the counting and claiming paperwork to the State?
29. What do you think contributes to counting and claiming errors at each step in the process?
30. Have you tried any strategies to reduce errors in the reporting process? What's worked and not worked among the strategies tried?
31. In your opinion, what else could be done to reduce errors in counting and claiming?

F. Training

Now I'd like to learn more about training and guidance that you or your SFA staff receive on the topics we've discussed so far.

32. What type of training or guidance does the person certifying the applications receive?

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- the person doing the meal claiming ?
 - the person completing the meal counting and claiming paperwork?
33. What, if anything, would you like to change about the training or guidance that is currently provided? Explain.
- Are there “refresher” courses for any of your staff?
34. What types of resources are available for you or your staff?
35. Do you feel you have enough resources to adequately train your staff? If not, what resources would be most helpful?

Thanks for your feedback.

III. Closing

36. We covered a lot during our call. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that can be done at the school level to reduce errors? Anything at the SFA level, the State or the USDA?

Those are all the questions I have for you. This was a great discussion; thank you very much for your time and thoughtful responses. If you have any questions about the study in the future, you can contact 1-800-820-6138.