

ATTACHMENT I

BPA STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

TITLE: EVALUATION OF FOOD INSECURITY NUTRITION INCENTIVES

SECTION C: STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

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C.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Agriculture Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) authorizes USDA to provide grants to eligible organizations to design and implement projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. It also directs USDA to undertake an independent evaluation of each project using rigorous methodologies capable of producing scientifically valid information regarding their effectiveness in increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating households. Congress provided \$100 million over 5 years to fund grants for project operations and to support the costs of USDA's administration, monitoring, and evaluation of the grant program. USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has invited interested organizations to submit applications for the fiscal years 2014-15 Food Security Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program. Subsequent grant cycles will be funded in fiscal years 2016, 2017, and 2018.

This solicitation and statement of objectives requests quotations to design, implement, analyze, and report on the results of the independent evaluation of the FINI Grant Program to measure short-term changes in fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption and basic measures of nutrition and health status among SNAP participants, with an initial focus on grants awarded in 2015 and 2016.¹

C.2 BACKGROUND

C.2.1 Policy Background

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the foundation of America's national nutrition safety net, the nation's first line of defense against hunger, and a powerful tool to improve nutrition among those with little income and few assets. In fiscal year 2013, SNAP served 47.6 million participants in an average month, providing a benefit to purchase food at authorized retailers and markets across the nation. While a growing body of evidence documents SNAP's effectiveness in reducing food insecurity, many low-income Americans still report difficulty putting enough food on the table. At the same time, many struggle with the consequences of overweight and obesity.

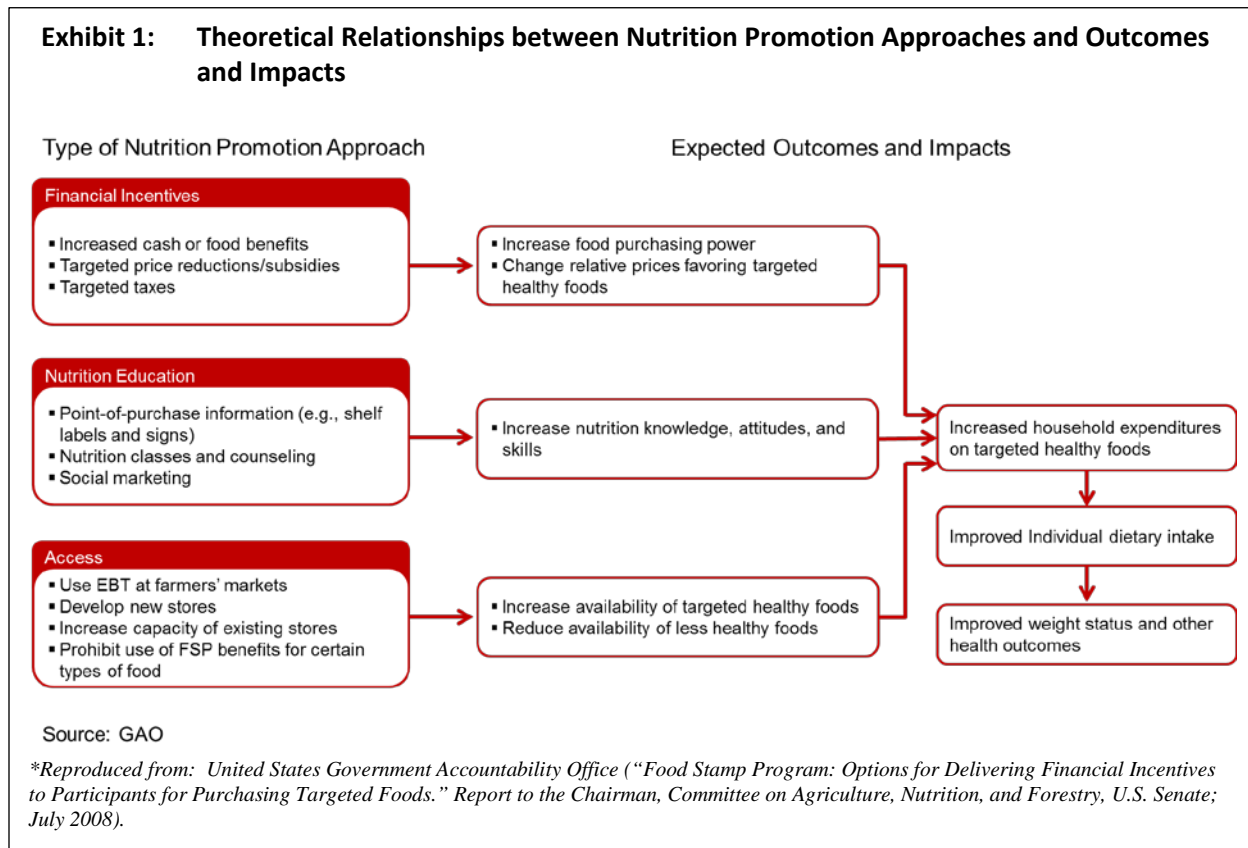
In recent decades, the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States has been a subject of growing concern. In 2009-10, more than one-third of American adults and nearly one in five children were obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). While the prevalence of overweight and obesity has stabilized in recent years, many Americans remain at greater risk for adverse health outcomes such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease and overall morbidity and mortality as a consequence of their weight (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Obesity Education Initiative, 1998). Although consuming adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables is widely seen as an essential part of reducing poor health outcomes, in general Americans eat fewer fruits and vegetables and more fats, added sugars, and calories than recommended (Krebs-Smith, Guenther, Subar, Kirkpatrick, & Dodd, 2010).

High prices and limited access have been identified by some as barriers to consumption of healthful foods by low-income and disadvantaged Americans. For example, Drewnowski and Specter (2004) found that prices are lower for energy-dense, high-calorie foods than for fresh, healthful foods. Ver Ploeg et al. (2009) described "food deserts," low-income neighborhoods across the United States in which residents cannot readily access supermarkets.

Many observers have identified targeted incentive, coupon, or voucher programs as promising approaches to encourage expenditures on fruits and vegetables (Guthrie et al. 2007; GAO 2008). Financial incentive

¹ Future task orders may be issued under this solicitation to evaluate grants awarded in 2017 and 2018.

programs are designed to make fruits and vegetables more affordable relative to alternative, less nutritious choices by affecting relative prices and enhancing individuals' overall purchasing power. Beyond these price effects, information effects may include increased awareness about healthful eating and implicit messages about the importance of healthful foods. Together these mechanisms are expected to influence behavior by increasing consumption of desired foods and thereby overall dietary quality, ultimately improving weight status and associated health outcomes [Exhibit 1].



A variety of organizations have acted in recent years to use financial incentives as a strategy to affect diet quality among SNAP participants and within low-income neighborhoods. The most common use added-value or bonus coupon programs; examples include New York City's Health Bucks, Wholesome Wave's Double Value Coupon Program, Fair Food Network's Double Up Food Bucks, and Roots of Change's California Market Match. The idea behind these initiatives is that adding bonuses to SNAP benefits may relieve some of the economic pressure that can lead participants to make unhealthy food choices with limited purchasing resources. Moreover, by restricting the use of the bonus funds to the purchase of foods at farmers' markets, these programs assist local farm economies by increasing the demand for fresh produce.² In 2012, four programs – Wholesome Wave, Fair Food Network, Market Umbrella, and Roots of Change – sponsored or managed 518 farmers' markets incentive programs that served more than 131,000 SNAP customers and engaged over 4,800 farmers/vendors in 24 states and the District of Columbia (Community Science, 2013). King et al. (2014) provide an extensive summary of the characteristics, roles, and relationships of organizations involved in such incentive programs.

² Fair Food Network's experience at farmers markets was brought to grocery stores in 2013 through the Double Up Grocery Store Project in Detroit.

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, with funding from USDA, recently tested a different approach in Hampden, MA. Under the Healthy Incentives Pilot, SNAP participants received on their SNAP Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card an incentive of 30 cents for every dollar they spent on targeted fruits and vegetables.³ The incentive was capped at \$60 per household per month, a level sufficiently high that few households reached it.

With an interest in building on and expanding these efforts, the Agriculture Act of 2014 provided USDA \$100 million over 5 years to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition incentives for fruit and vegetable purchases among low-income consumers. The primary goal of the FINI Grant Program is to provide nutrition incentives at the point of purchase to SNAP participants and evaluate their impact on purchases, consumption, nutrition, and health outcomes. USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has invited interested organizations to submit applications for the first grant cycle (fiscal years 2014 and 2015).⁴ USDA will give priority to projects proposed by eligible organizations that:

- maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to understanding how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts;
- develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience; and
- are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities).⁵

FINI projects are intended to bring together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system and to foster understanding of how they might improve the nutrition and health status of participating households receiving incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables. FINI projects are also intended to address the development of effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption that are replicable by others.

Applications are invited in each of three categories: (1) *FINI Pilot Projects* aimed at new entrants seeking funding for small-scale (less than \$100,000 over no more than one year) community-based projects in the early stages of incentive program development; (2) multi-year, *FINI Projects* to support local and state nutrition incentive programs on a moderate scale (less than \$500,000 over no more than four years); and (3) multi-year *FINI Large-Scale Projects* to support multi-county, state and regional

³ Targeted fruits and vegetables included fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, oils or salt, but excluded white potatoes and 100% fruit juice (the same set of fruits and vegetables eligible for the WIC Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Voucher).

⁴ See *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program: 2015 Request for Applications* issued September 29, 2014 for information on the request for applications for nutrition incentive grants (available on-line <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/cfp/fini.html> and at www.grants.gov).

⁵ Eligible organizations are limited to government agencies and nonprofit organizations, including emergency feeding organizations; agricultural cooperatives; producer networks or associations; community health organizations; public benefit corporations; economic development corporations; farmers' markets; community-supported agriculture programs; buying clubs; SNAP-authorized retailers; and State, local, or tribal agencies.

programs (more than \$500,000 over no more than four years). All grantees will be expected to conduct a self- assessment (the scale and scope of which depends on project type), and multiyear FINI Projects and Large-Scale Projects are required to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluation to determine the effectiveness of nutrition incentive programs in achieving the legislative goals of increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating households. NIFA anticipates that up to \$31.5 million will be distributed as grants in fiscal years 2014 and 2015.⁶

C.2.2 Research Background

There is a large literature on interventions and policies to increase fruit and vegetable intake. Some interventions focused on nutrition education or awareness campaigns designed to influence attitudes toward fruits and vegetables. Other research has explored the effect of prices on fruit and vegetable spending, and a small number of interventions included a financial incentive component.

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests participation in healthy food incentive programs can have a positive effect on fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption. The largest and most rigorous of these studies – USDA’s evaluation of the Healthy Incentives Pilot – used a randomized control trial to assess the causal impact of a financial incentive on fruit and vegetable consumption by SNAP participants, and on other key measures of dietary intake. It found that HIP participants consumed almost a quarter of a cup-equivalent more fruits and vegetables per day than did non-participants, a difference of 26 percent (Bartlett et al., 2014).

Herman et al. (2008) randomly assigned WIC mothers to one of two intervention groups (vouchers for grocery stores or vouchers for farmers markets) or a control group as part of a program offering fruit and vegetable vouchers. Fruit and vegetable consumption increased substantially and significantly in both voucher groups but not in the control group, with changes sustained 6 months after the voucher program ceased. Average increases in fruits and vegetables were 1.4 servings per participant for the farmers’ market voucher group and 0.8 servings for the supermarket voucher group, where one serving is equivalent to approximately ½ cup-equivalents of fruit or vegetables.

Another body of research suggests that financial incentives at farmers markets may be an effective pathway to increased fruit and vegetable purchases. Wholesome Wave (undated) indicates, for example, that 90 percent of Double Value Coupon Program customers reported that they increased or greatly increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables and 66 percent of participating farmers reported increased sales. Similarly, Fair Food Network (2013) indicates that 78 percent of customers reported that they increased the amount of fruits and vegetables they buy and 83 percent of farmers said they make more money at the farmers’ markets because of the Double Up Food Bucks program. A cluster evaluation sponsored by Wholesome Wave, Fair Food Network, Market Umbrella, and Roots of Change found that more than three-fourths of SNAP recipients reported that they increased their purchase of produce because of the incentives and that SNAP incentives were a strong factor in their decision to shop at a farmers’ market. The majority of vendors (at least 64 percent) reported that they sell more produce, make more money, and have more customers because of the SNAP incentives (Community Science, 2013). In addition, financial incentive programs can be an important draw for low-income shoppers: Karakus et al. (2014) report that SNAP participants who are aware of financial incentive programs are 40 times more likely to shop at farmers markets.

⁶ The Act provides a total of \$35 million in fiscal years 2014-15, \$20 million in 2016, \$20 million in 2017, and \$25 million in 2018. No more than 10 percent of the total provided each year may be used to pay costs associated with administering, monitoring, and evaluating each project. USDA has reserved 4 percent of the funds available for administration and monitoring of the FINI Grant Program.

The overarching goal of the independent evaluation of the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant Program is to expand this evidence base by subjecting a broader range of incentive programs in a wider range of community settings to a more rigorous evaluation to provide policy makers in USDA and Congress with credible information on which interventions work best.

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C.3 STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

C.3.1 Evaluation Overview

The authorizing statute requires an independent evaluation using rigorous methodologies capable of producing scientifically valid information regarding the effectiveness of each project in terms of increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating SNAP households. The scope of this study requires a vendor to design, implement, analyze, and report on the results of the independent evaluation of the FINI Grant Program to measure short-term changes in fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption and basic measures of nutrition and health status among SNAP participants.

USDA believes that a non-equivalent comparison group design offers the best balance within the limited resources provided for evaluation between the statutory requirements for scientific rigor and the limited administrative and evaluation capacity of some potential grantees. Respondents to this solicitation, however, are invited to propose alternative designs that are consistent with the Congressional interest in rigor, the statement of objectives set forth here, and the funding available. The independent evaluation will rely on a mix of operational and transaction summaries provided by grant sites and surveys or interviews of consumers, vendors, program administrators, and other stakeholders. The evaluation will have four main components:

- a *process evaluation* to identify barriers and facilitators to implementation of nutrition incentive programs in order to improve on existing program models inform others wishing to implement similar interventions,
- an *outcome evaluation* to assess the effectiveness of nutrition incentives in increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption among SNAP participants,
- a *comparative analysis* to integrate results across sites and approaches, attempting to answer the question of what works best in which contexts, and
- *technical assistance* to support consistent implementation of evaluation protocols.

All grantees will be required to undertake their own process assessments, and FINI Large-Scale Projects will be required to undertake their own outcome evaluation. USDA expects the independent evaluation Vendor to integrate and synthesize the process assessments from each project and supplement the Large-Scale Projects' outcome assessments with an independent outcome and comparative analysis.

The initial focus of the independent evaluation is on the larger FINI Projects and FINI Large-Scale Projects awarded grants in fiscal years 2015 and 2016, with future task orders to evaluate grants awarded

in 2017 and 2018.⁷ FINI Pilots – targeted on new entrants to the field – are exempt from the independent evaluation because these projects are in the earliest stages of development that do not offer a fair test of their potential effectiveness. The independent Vendor, however, will integrate implementation lessons revealed in the FINI Pilot Projects self-assessments into the process evaluation.

C.3.2 Key Research Objectives and Questions

The fundamental goal of the independent evaluation of the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant Program is to determine whether nutrition incentives at the point of purchase contribute to increased fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption among SNAP participants and whether different approaches are more or less effective than others.

C.3.2.1 Process Evaluation

Research Objective 1: Document each nutrition incentive program by describing its design and operations to identify (1) barriers and facilitators to implementation and (2) specific lessons learned to support replication of successful programs.

Research Questions:

- What is the demographic, social, economic, and nutrition context in which each program operates?
- How is each incentive program implemented?
 - What form does the incentive take, and how is it distributed to target recipients?
 - How are potential vendors recruited and reimbursed?
 - How is the program marketed to SNAP participants?
 - Is the incentive linked to nutrition education or other wellness activities?
- What challenges are encountered during implementation and how are they resolved?
- Are oversight and monitoring processes adequate to inform program administrators and key stakeholders?
- What are the implementation and operational costs of the nutrition incentive program?

C.3.2.2 Outcome Evaluation

Research Objective 2: Assess the effectiveness of each Multiyear FINI Project and Multiyear FINI Large-Scale Project in increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption among SNAP participants.

Research Questions:

- To what extent do SNAP participants take up the offer of nutrition incentives? To what extent are the benefits distributed to participants redeemed by farmers or vendors? What factors influence take-up and redemption rates?
- Does participation in the nutrition incentive program alter:
 - Knowledge and attitude about fruits and vegetables?
 - Frequency, amount, and type of fruit and vegetable purchases?
 - Frequency, amount, and type of fruit and vegetables consumed?
 - Perceived health status or well-being?
 - Participant shopping patterns?

⁷ USDA expects some adjustment to the scale, scope and form of the evaluation of grants awarded in fiscal years 2017 and 2018 based on the lessons learned and experience gained from the initial evaluation experience and on policy interests and research needs at the time future task orders are issued.

- How well do participants understand the incentive? What is their opinion of and satisfaction with the incentive?
- Does the nutrition incentive program alter the amount or variety of fruits and vegetables offered in the community?

C.3.2.3 Comparative Analysis

Research Objective 3: Compare the relative outcomes of different forms of incentives to help determine the most effective and efficient strategies for using incentives to increase purchase and consumption of fruits and vegetables among SNAP participants.

Research Questions:

- Are there combinations of program features that have a significant bearing on project outcomes?
- Are there particular roles for non-governmental organizations, states, and the Federal government that have a significant bearing on project outcomes?

C.3.3 Evaluation Design Parameters and Constraints

Vendors shall include in their quotations a clear study plan reflecting the research objectives and questions provided above and the design parameters and constraints below. It shall include a detailed study methodology, sampling procedures, data elements and definitions, data collection and processing procedures, draft data collection instruments, analytic methods to be used to address study objectives, plans to integrate results from the process, outcome, and comparative components of the evaluation, and plans for disseminating the results.

There are a number of unique challenges and expectations that will shape this evaluation:

- The scale and scope of the evaluation will be shaped by several funding constraints. The Agriculture Act of 2014 limits the amount of funding available for evaluation and makes it available over the course of 5 years. The Act provides \$35 million in fiscal years 2014-15, \$20 million in 2016, \$20 million in 2017, and \$25 million in 2018. No more than 10 percent of the total provided each year may be used to pay costs associated with administering, monitoring, and evaluating each project.⁸ Thus, funding for the evaluation is spread across multiple years and capped at varying levels. Respondents to this solicitation should structure quotations that are consistent with both the amount and timing of the funds available. USDA's goal is to produce the strongest, most rigorous evaluation possible within the resources provided by Congress.
- The number of projects awarded under the FINI Grant Program will depend on the level of community interest, the number of high-quality grant proposals, and the amount of funding available for distribution across the three grant categories. It is expected that projects will span the country, but the number subject to evaluation in the first funding cycle will not be known until after awards are made in or near March 2015. USDA expects to award a second round of grants in fiscal year 2016.⁹ For planning purposes, bidders should assume at least 10 FINI Pilots (only technical support required), 20 FINI Projects, and 5 FINI Large-Scale Projects in each of these two award cycles and

⁸ USDA has reserved 4 percent of the funds made available to cover the costs of administering and monitoring the FINI Grant Program.

⁹ USDA will make additional grant awards when fiscal year 2017 and 2018 funding becomes available.

provide contingency plans if the number of grant awards differs substantially from the planning targets.

- Many of the selected projects are likely to have limited experience with the design and execution of rigorous evaluations. While the grant agreements will require cooperation with the independent evaluation, the independent evaluation Vendor must define reasonable and appropriate expectations that balance the need to minimize burden on local projects with the need to capture information critical to the evaluation. In its quotation, Vendors should describe planned technical assistance on evaluation and data collection issues to individual projects as requested and as needed to ensure consistent implementation of evaluation protocols, timely reporting of the minimum core data set, implementation of informed consent, and outreach or marketing to achieve adequate samples. It should also discuss plans to engage interested stakeholders, challenges that may arise, and how they will be addressed.
- FINI projects are likely to vary substantially in scale and maturity, and grantees are likely to vary considerably in evaluation capacity and expertise. As a consequence, evaluation requirements differ for each of the three FINI grant categories. All grantees regardless of size will be expected to conduct a self-assessment of the process of implementing the nutrition incentive projects. FINI Large-Scale Projects will also be expected to conduct a rigorous outcome-based self-assessment following guidelines developed by the independent evaluation Vendor in collaboration with grantees to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. The results of all these self-assessments will be reported to the independent evaluation Vendor. All FINI Projects and Large-Scale Projects are required to cooperate with and contribute to the independent evaluation to determine the relative effectiveness of the incentive program in achieving the legislative goals of increasing fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating SNAP households.¹⁰ FINI Pilot Projects are exempt from the independent evaluation.
- FINI Projects and FINI Large-Scale Projects will be required to periodically provide the independent evaluation Vendor a minimum core data set to ensure common program tracking and enable meaningful comparisons across all projects.¹¹ FINI Projects and FINI Large-Scale Projects may choose at their option to collect additional information beyond the minimum as part of their self-assessments. The minimum core data set includes the following site, project, incentive program information:
 - Management or organizational structure of the program
 - Financial instrument used for SNAP and incentive purchases (tokens, scrip, electronic)
 - Retail locations, mobile routes, or other pertinent information to understand how the project improves access to healthy food for underserved, low-income consumers
 - Months of operation and operating days and hours

¹⁰ Cooperation entails supporting implementation of evaluation requirements (including but not limited to helping the independent evaluation contractor identify appropriate comparison sites or groups and providing the minimum core data set described below); meeting periodically with staff from USDA, the independent evaluation contractor, and other FINI grantees to review project plans, evaluation objectives and methods, data collection and reporting requirements, and analysis and reporting of results; facilitating access to or providing documentation of project implementation, operations, costs, and outcomes; and facilitating site visits and interviews with project staff, partners and program participants.

¹¹ The frequency of data reporting may depend on individual project site capacity. For planning purposes, bidders should assume that point-of-purchase transaction data will be aggregated by month and reported quarterly. Other data descriptive of program organization and operations may be reported annually.

- Whether it is a new SNAP incentive program or the continuation, expansion, or modification of an existing program
 - Whether program sites accept other nutrition assistance program benefits
 - Whether program sites collaborate with nutrition education programs or offer other experiential nutrition education activities
 - Expenses associated with establishment and operations of the program
 - Fruit and vegetable products eligible for incentives
 - Incentive level (ratio and maximum)
 - Incentive delivery mechanism
 - Number of SNAP participants (per site/per year)
 - Dollar value of SNAP purchases (per site/per year)
 - Number of SNAP transactions (per site/per year)
 - Dollar value of incentives issued (per site/per year)
 - Dollar value of incentives redeemed (per site/per year)
 - Average incentive value redeemed per recipient (weekly/monthly/annually)
- The independent Vendor is expected to supplement the minimum core data set with additional data needed to fully meet the research objectives, including, but not limited to, consumer-based information on:¹²
 - Gender; age; ethnicity; household size and composition;
 - Location of residence (e.g. ZIP code);
 - Whether participant has used SNAP at similar program sites before;
 - How they learned of the nutrition incentive program;
 - Whether their purchases of fruits and vegetables increased because of the incentive program, and if so by how much (e.g., percentage, dollar value);
 - Whether the type and variety of fruits and vegetables purchased changed, and if so by how much;
 - Whether their consumption of fruits and vegetables increased because of the incentive, and if so, by how much;
 - Whether the type and variety of fruits and vegetables consumed changed, and if so by how much;
 - Motivations for purchasing fruits and vegetables at that location, including price, shopping experience, freshness or quality of food, selection of foods available, convenience, participation in nutrition education or other activities at the site; and
 - Use of any other nutrition assistance program benefits at the site.

To strengthen the outcome measures of fruit and vegetable consumption, the independent Vendor is expected to make use of a relatively brief food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) or comparable alternative in surveys of SNAP consumers.¹³ The food frequency instrument would be uniform

¹² USDA has identified at least four options to define the consumer respondent population: (1) *all residents of neighborhoods* in which incentive programs operate, providing a potential measure of community-wide outcomes; (2) *all SNAP participants in neighborhoods* in which incentive programs operate, providing an indication of the incentive's penetration into target population, and thus overall outcomes; (3) *SNAP participants offered an incentive* (at venues that distribute incentives), providing some insight into the reasons that some may choose not to redeem available incentives and a reasonable measure of outcomes among those who use the incentive; and (4) *SNAP participants who redeem incentives* (at venues that accept incentives), providing the most efficient measure of outcomes among those who use the incentive. Bidders are expected to recommend and justify a target population based on the overall research objectives and feasibility of implementation.

across all sites, fielded by the independent evaluation Vendor, and analyzed according to standard protocols.

- The Vendor is also expected to gather data from incentive program administrators, retail and market operators (including store managers, farmers' market managers, and farmers/vendors), and local community organizations to document the evolution of the program and early lessons learned, track program implementation, and assess adherence to its intended model.
- Although the FINI Grant Program has long-term objectives related to permanent changes in overall dietary quality and, ultimately, reductions in obesity status and improvements in overall health, USDA has determined that it is not feasible to assess the effectiveness of the program in meeting these goals in depth given the relative newness of the initiative, the short timeframe for the evaluation, and the available resources. Moreover, past research has demonstrated a link between increased fruit and vegetable consumption and longer-term health outcomes; if the evaluation concludes that the FINI Grant Program increases fruit and vegetable consumption, one may infer that the intervention holds promise for achieving these ultimate goals. The evaluation Vendor will, however, identify and develop basic measures of nutrition and health status that may be reasonably captured in a brief consumer survey.¹⁴
- To conserve limited evaluation resources, the independent Vendor shall use existing data collection instruments to the maximum extent feasible. If new instruments are deemed necessary, the Vendor shall note that any pre-test with more than nine (9) respondents may require approval under terms of the Paperwork Reduction Act, described below. Information collection instruments intended for use among program participants must be available in both English and Spanish. Vendors should address how their plans for Spanish language audiences and other non-English speakers as needed.
- USDA believes that the quasi-experimental comparison design would be strengthened if resources permit a difference-in-difference analysis with at least one pre- and one post-intervention data collection. The timing and duration of any pre/post data collections is affected by at least three factors. First, the start of project operations is likely to vary across sites. Second, some projects (those that operate in farmers' markets, for example) are likely to be seasonal and of limited duration, while others (those in retail stores) are likely to operate throughout the year. Third, it is expected that any effects of the nutrition incentive on purchases will emerge relatively quickly. Although this solicitation does not require a pre/post design, bidders are encouraged to consider and propose a schedule for the timing, duration, and frequency of pre- and post-intervention data collections (or alternative design that enhances the overall evaluation) that is consistent with overall research objectives, maximizes efficiency and reduces cost, and accommodates the variation in project approaches.
- Past research suggests that the impact of nutrition incentives comparable to those offered to date on SNAP recipients' fruit and vegetable purchases is likely to be important but modest. The Vendor

¹³ There are several validated instruments such as (among others) those developed by the National Cancer Institute for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (<http://appliedresearch.cancer.gov/archive/usualintakes/FFQ.English.June0304.pdf>) and by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/questionnaires/pdf-ques/2013%20BRFSS_English.pdf).

¹⁴ For examples of potential candidate items, refer to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Questionnaire available http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/questionnaires/pdf-ques/2013%20BRFSS_English.pdf.

shall discuss considerations (including resource implications) for the sample sizes necessary overall and within each project area to detect meaningful differences in fruit and vegetable purchases. USDA is particularly concerned that the limited evaluation funding provided may support an overall sample that is large enough to detect moderate differences in fruit and vegetable purchases for the overall mix of projects considered in 2015 and 2016, but a sample in any given site that is too small to detect any but the largest changes. This will seriously impair USDA's ability to address the Congressional interest in knowing which approaches work best. Bidders are strongly encouraged to propose alternative strategies that maximize analytic power within the limited evaluation resources available.

- The Vendor must prepare the required publication notices and clearance package for submittal to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to obtain approval for all data collection activities in all components of the evaluation subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. The clearance package must provide an explicit, concise description of the direct links between the study objectives, research questions, variables, instrument items, data analysis plans and desired products. The PRA data collection package shall contain copies of all final data collection instruments and a supporting statement as set forth in the revised Standard Form No. 83a, "Instructions for Requesting OMB Approval under the Federal Reports Act, as Amended.
- Vendors are advised that obtaining approval for data collections under the Paperwork Reduction Act can be a lengthy process. The Vendor should be aware that the OMB data collection package will be reviewed by multiple groups within USDA. Revisions to the package may be required after each level of review and will not be complete until it receives official OMB clearance. Past experience has shown that it can take six to nine months from the first submission of a 60-day Federal Register notice to final approval of the information collection. Vendors are advised that clearance is often the primary rate limiting factor in many studies. Preparation of a high-quality initial draft of instruments and justification statements, followed by timely responses to required revisions, will greatly facilitate the approval process. For additional information — including detailed guidance, a checklist for final collection request submissions, and estimated timelines, see the following link (www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/information-collection). Vendors are advised that clearance package formats that have worked at other Federal agencies may be rejected by USDA.
- Full conformance with the OMB standards and guidelines for surveys is required. Vendors shall note that an 80 percent survey response rate is required; if response rates are less, a nonresponse bias analysis is mandatory. Vendors shall explain and justify their proposed procedures for ensuring that high response rates are obtained and demonstrate their understanding and acceptance of OMB standards and guidelines for calculating response rates and actions that are required if response rates are under 80 percent.
- The Vendor will be expected to work with USDA and FINI Grant Program sites to develop procedures and materials to ensure legally effective and prospectively obtained informed consent from participants in the evaluation sample. The informed consent process will (1) disclose to potential research subjects information needed to make an informed decision; (2) facilitate the understanding of what has been disclosed; and (3) promote the voluntariness of the decision about whether or not to participate in the research.
- USDA is interested in research of high scientific rigor communicated in a policy relevant fashion. The Vendor shall propose an approach to document, communicate, and present the results of the evaluation and supporting analyses to USDA, the broader research and policy field, and the programs and sites that participate in FINI Grant Program. USDA also has a strong interest in obtaining results as soon as possible from the initial round of 2015 grant awards and then expanding the evidence base as the initial projects mature and as subsequent 2016 awards are made. To this end, the Vendor shall

prepare and submit preliminary, interim and final reports that consolidate and integrate all information available from project self-assessments and the independent evaluation after approximately 18 months, 36 months, and 54 months, respectively, of operation of FINI Grant Program projects awarded in the initial funding cycle. USDA expects that the preliminary report will focus largely on early results from the 2015 projects, the interim report will broaden the focus to include follow-on results from the 2015 projects and early results from the 2016 projects, and the final report will present follow-on results from the 2016 projects and summarize the conclusions drawn from both award cycles. The final report shall be subject to peer review requirements for influential scientific information.

- The Vendor shall furnish all necessary labor, materials, services, facilities, and otherwise do all things necessary to execute the scope of work for this project. Within its technical quotation, bidders should present a set of tasks necessary to achieve the objectives of the evaluation. Within this task structure, the technical quotation should discuss:
 - future plans to revise the study plan as needed to reflect more detailed information and understanding of the activities required to meet the goals and objectives of the project than was reflected in the Vendor’s proposal based on the specifics of the 2014-2015 funded projects;
 - plans to develop final data collection instruments, administrative record protocols, and requests for approval under the Paperwork Reduction Act to collect data necessary to support the evaluation;
 - recruitment and training of data collectors;
 - timelines for collecting and processing outcome data from SNAP consumers, market operators and vendors, and key stakeholders; proposed sources for necessary and relevant data beyond the minimum core (including specific data items needed; the timing, frequency, and mode of data collection; and data management and quality control processes); and any potential challenges and proposed resolutions;
 - timelines for conducting the process evaluation synthesis; plans to ensure, to the extent feasible, the consistency of process data gathered; and any potential challenges and proposed resolutions;
 - timelines for conducting the outcome evaluation and comparative analysis, plans to analyze the data gathered (including the minimum core data set required of FINI Projects and FINI Large-Scale Projects), and any anticipated challenges and proposed resolutions;
 - plans for preparation, review, and revision of preliminary, interim and final reports and briefings of USDA policy officials and other interested stakeholders;
 - plans for creation of public use data files in a machine-readable and open format that is nonproprietary, publicly available and without restrictions on its use, consistent with OMB Memorandum M-13-13, [*Open Data Policy-Managing Information as an Asset*](#).
- In general, USDA expects to have multiple opportunities for engagement in the review and comment on most aspects and products of the independent evaluation, including revised study, data collection and analytic plans; data collection instruments and requests for PRA clearance; preliminary data tables and graphics; preliminary, interim, and final reports; briefing materials; and public use data files. The set of proposed tasks should clearly indicate proposed deliverables and timelines for USDA review, and comment, and subsequent revisions.