

Appendix E3: State Agency Email to Selected LEAs (Interview and Application LEAs)

Dear [LEA Director],

We are writing to encourage your participation in an important Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) study, the national Evaluation of the Independent Review Process (“IRA Study”). This study will provide FNS with information about the effectiveness of the Independent Review of Applications (IRA) requirement for school meal programs, also called the second review of applications. The study will examine how State agencies and local education agencies (LEAs) conduct the IRA and report results to FNS, and assess whether IRA is effective in identifying and reducing administrative error in the certification of household applications. FNS contracted with Westat to conduct this study.

The IRA study is a national research study, not an audit or review. The study has three phases: 1) an online survey of all State Child Nutrition Directors, which was recently completed; 2) telephone interviews with selected LEAs that have conducted IRA; and 3) the collection and review of a sample of household applications from a subsample of the LEAs interviewed.

Your LEA, [INSERT NAME], has been selected to participate in both the telephone interview and to provide household applications for school meal programs. The interviews will occur first, and will take up to 90 minutes. The questions ask how the IRA process works at your LEA, and you may ask 1 - 2 key staff in your organization to join in the interview if you wish. Note that Westat will lead the discussion, and USDA staff will not join.

During the second phase of data collection, Westat will work with your LEA to obtain a sample of household applications for school meal benefits from your LEA. Westat will work with you to collect the data in a manner and format that is easiest for you, and will provide instructions to pull a sample of applications for two different school years. The study team will review all applications collected from all LEAs in order to assess the effectiveness of the IRA process.

The law governing the school meal programs requires *organizations* participating in the programs to cooperate in studies such as the *IRA Study*. While *your* participation in this study is completely voluntary, your feedback will improve the understanding of the IRA process and its effectiveness.

The final report will be published online after the study ends in February 2019. FNS will email study participants a link to download the report once it is posted.

Next Steps

Westat will contact you the week of [DATE] to answer any questions you may have, and schedule the telephone interview at a time convenient for you and your staff.

If you have any questions about the study, please email the Westat study team at [study email] or call us toll-free at [study phone number].

~~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-XXXX. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 3 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.~~

Sincerely,

[NAME AND TITLE OF STATE SENDER]