

Attachment H.1 Elderly Participant Interview Protocol

Moderator Guide

This protocol will be customized for each of the three subpopulations of interest: SNAP participants, SNAP applicants, and SNAP non-participants.

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. My name is _____ and I work for a company called Social Policy Research Associates. I don't work for SNAP – the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which you might also know as [state program name] and which was formerly known as the Food Stamp program, but our discussion is part of a research study sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, which administers that program. We are talking with over 150 people like you, who are sixty or older, about [state program name for SNAP]. The information that you share with us today will go into a report that we will send back to the Food and Nutrition Service and then will be released to the public. Although I do have some specific questions, I would like for this to be more like an informal conversation.

I will take some notes as you talk, but I would also like to ask if it is okay to record our conversation so that I can mostly focus on listening to you. The recording will only be used by me and our research team to make sure that we have captured your feedback correctly. We will never use your name or otherwise identify you in a public report. We really appreciate hearing about your experience with [state program name for SNAP] because we hope that it will help make it easier for people to use the program and to get enough food when they need it.

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Background

1. To begin, I'd like to know a little bit about your background.

- How long have you been living in this area?
- Do you have any (other) family members or close friends living nearby?

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- o How often do you see them?
- o If you needed something, like getting a ride to the doctor or getting extra food at the end of the month, would you be able to ask any of these people for help?
- How often are you able get out of the house/apartment? Is there anything that keeps you from getting out as much as you would like to?
 - o Lack of transportation
 - o Health problems or disability
 - o Long distance from town (isolation)
- How do you normally get your food?
 - o Do you walk, drive, get a ride, take the bus or other public transportation? Or is your food delivered to you?
 - o Do you cook for yourself or does someone else cook or bring you meals?
 - o Do you do your own food shopping? Are there ever times when someone else will go shopping for you? If so, how often in the last year?
- Are you working?
 - o [If yes:] How many hours per week do you work?
- Do you have access to the Internet? If yes, in your home or outside your home? [Note that we'd like to ask additional demographic questions about age, income buckets relative to FPL, nativity, and preferred language over the phone prior to the interview.]
 - o [If yes:] How often do you go online?
 - o [If yes:] Do you find computers and the internet easy or hard to use?
 - o [If yes but no home access:] Where do you go to use the Internet? How long does it take to travel there?

2. In the last year, have you found it easy or hard to find food that you can afford?

- [If easy:] Can you tell me about where you get it and what makes it easy?
- [If hard:] What makes it hard? Has that been getting better or getting worse over time?

3. If you needed more food or if you could not afford enough food, who would you call or contact for help?

- Have you contacted them for help in the last year? <If yes>, can you tell us how that came about and what they did to help you?
- Where else can people in this community go if they do not have enough food or have a difficulty paying for food?
 - o Probe: food banks, churches, meals on wheels, other community organizations
 - o What about older people specifically? Is there a senior center that can help or another place in town that older people are likely to go?

- o Have you ever gone to any of these community centers or resources? <If yes>, can you walk me through how and why you decided to go to the place you chose to go to?
 - Do you think there are enough places for people to go in this community if they are having trouble affording food?
4. Now I'd like to learn a little bit about what you know about [state program name for SNAP], or what was formerly called the Food Stamp program. Can you talk a little bit about what you know about the program?

- Can you tell me what you think [state program name for SNAP] is?
- Where or from whom have you learned about [state program name for SNAP]?
 - o Radio or TV ad?
 - o Friend or family?
 - o Church or community organization?
 - o Doctor?
 - o Other?
- How and where can they be used to get food?
 - o Did you know that the benefits come loaded on a card, like a debit card?
- Who is qualified to use [state program name for SNAP]? What is your understanding of how one qualifies for the program?
- What do you know about how to apply for [state program name for SNAP] and where you can do that?
 - o [If local CBO helps with application process]: Did you know that [organization name] can help people apply for [state program name for SNAP]?
- Where do you go to get information about programs like [state program name for SNAP]? Who would you ask for more information?
- Do you think they are a good thing?
 - o What are the good things about the program?
 - o What are the bad things?
- Have you ever used [state program name for SNAP] or considered using them? Why or why not?
 - o [If yes:] Can you tell me about your overall experience? Positive and negative? What was your most recent experience like?
 - o [If yes:] Are you currently using [state program name for SNAP] or have you used them in the last month?
 - o [If no:] Why not?
- Are there other programs that you receive benefits from?
 - o [State name for TANF]
 - o Social Security
 - o Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - o Disability
 - o Unemployment compensation
 - o Meals on Wheels

- o Medicare or Medicaid
- o Housing assistance / Section 8?
- o Veterans' benefits
- How do you think these other programs compare with [state program name for SNAP]? Are some better than others in terms of how easy it is to apply, receive your benefits, resolve problems, etc.?
- Now I have a few questions about people in this community and what the general opinions are about [state program name for SNAP].
 - o Do you think people in this community use [state program name for SNAP] a lot? What about friends your age? Is it common?
 - o Do people in this area think that [state program name for SNAP] benefits are helpful for getting people the food they need?
 - o Does the program have a bad reputation or a good reputation here? Why?
 - o What do people here think about the amount of the benefits? Are the benefits high enough to help?
 - o Do you think people would be embarrassed or judged negatively in this community if others found out that they were using [state program name for SNAP]?
 - o Use of [state program name for SNAP] is much lower among older Americans who are eligible than it is among younger Americans and families. Why do you think that is?

5. If you had a friend who was having hard times, would you tell them that they should look into getting [state program name for SNAP]? Why or why not?

6. What other recommendations would you have for a friend facing hard times?

- What people or agencies do older people in this community rely on for help?
 - o Family and friends
 - o Religious leaders
 - o Food banks or other charities
 - o Community centers/senior centers
 - o Social workers or other government agencies
 - o Anyone else?
- Is there enough support here for older people who are having financial problems?
 - o How could it be improved?
 - o What are the biggest barriers older people face to supporting themselves here? (e.g., transportation, lack of medical care/accommodations, lack of jobs, lack of community supports)

Application Process [if Applicable]

1. Now I want to hear about your most recent experience applying for [state program name for SNAP]. Can you walk me through how you completed the application?

- When was it?
 - Over the phone?
 - Online?
 - By mail?
 - In person with a staff person or volunteer?
 - Some other way?
2. Can you tell me where you were when you completed the application?
 - At home?
 - At a community organization?
 - At a local social services office?
 - Somewhere else?
 3. Did anyone else help you fill out the application? Who was it?
 - Were they helping you in person or over the phone?
 - Can you describe how they helped you?
 - Did they offer to help you in another language if you needed it?
 - How helpful was the assistance you got? What else could they have done to make the process easier for you?
 4. Do you remember how long it took to finish the application?
 - Did you have to make more than one phone call or visit? [*if more than one*], can you describe what each call was for?
 - Did it take longer than you expected? Did you have to spend a lot of time waiting?
 5. As part of your original application, did you have to do an interview?
 - How did you feel about doing the interview?
 - Was it over the phone or in person? <If in person>: where did it happen?
 - How long did it take?
 - Did you learn anything new during the interview? What information did you receive?
 - Did you have a chance to ask questions?
 - How helpful was the person who interviewed you? Is there anything he or she could have done better to help you?
 - Did you find the interview useful or helpful in any way, or do you feel that it was not necessary?

Eligibility Determination [if Applicable]

1. When you applied for [state program name for SNAP], did you have to provide any information about your medical expenses?
[If yes:]
 - What information were you asked to provide?
 - How did you feel about providing this information?
 - How easy was it for you to find all the information you needed?
2. What other information did you have to provide about your income and other resources?

- How did you feel about providing this information?
 - How easy was it for you to find all the information you needed?
3. Overall, what were the positive things that you experienced when you applied?
 - Quality of staff assistance?
 - Time to complete the process?
 - Clarity of rules and steps?
 - [*English Learners:*] Availability of materials in the language you are most comfortable in?
 4. What were the negative things?
 - Quality of staff assistance?
 - Time to complete the process?
 - Clarity of rules and steps?
 - [*English Learners:*] Availability of materials in the language you are most comfortable in?
 5. Now, I want to ask about what happened after you applied. How did you find out whether or not you were approved for benefits?
 - Letter?
 - Phone call?
 - Other?
 6. Was your application approved the first time around?
 - [*If application was NOT approved:*]
 - Were you told why not?
 - Was it clear to you what additional information, if any, would have been needed for you to be approved?
 - At that point, did you try to resubmit your application? Why or why not?
 - [*If application WAS approved:*]
 - What information were you given about what to do next?
 - Were you told how long were approved for benefits for?
 - Were you told when you would need to provide updates on your financial situation and medical expenses, and what to do if your financial situation and medical situations change?
 7. Thinking back over your experience applying, what would have made it easier for you?
 8. What would you tell a neighbor or friend about how to prepare for the process?

Receiving Benefits [if Applicable]

Now I want to ask about your experience receiving [state program name for SNAP] benefits, and in particular, providing the information you need to keep your benefits.

1. Do you mind sharing how much you receive in benefits each month?
 - How does this amount compare with what you need for food for the month?
2. Where do you turn with any questions about your benefits?
 - Is there a number you can call or an organization that will help you?

- How long does it take and how easy is it for you to get answers to your questions?
3. In the last year, have you provided any updates on your financial situation and medical expenses?
 - [If yes:]
 - How and when did you provide them?
 - Do you get a letter or phone call?
 - Is it easy to read/ understand the information you receive about providing updates on your finances and medical expenses?
 - Is there anything that would make it easier for you to remember to provide this information?
 4. What would make it easier to get the information you need about your benefits?
 5. What would you tell a neighbor or friend about how to make sure to keep their benefits?

Wrap Up

1. How do you think [state program name for SNAP] could be improved?
 - What do you think would be the best way to help other seniors like you find out about [state program name for SNAP] so that they can get help paying for their groceries every month?
 - What would make it easier to apply?
2. What else would you like me to know about how [state program name for SNAP] can better help people like you?