Attachment G.2 State and Local SNAP and Partner Agency Staff Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for participating in this important study. My name is [NAME] and I am from a company called [SPR/Mathematica Policy Research], which is a [describe organization]. We were hired by the Food and Nutrition Service at the US Department of Agriculture to conduct a study on the effectiveness of different strategies to improve access to SNAP among elderly individuals. We are not auditors—we are just here to learn about your experiences with these strategies and with different types of SNAP clients. We are talking with many people in and outside of the SNAP agency about this issue.

We will summarize our findings in a report, but no comments will be linked with respondent names in the report and we will not be sharing information with others, including your supervisors or other State or Federal staff, except as otherwise required by law. Participation is voluntary so you may skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering and there are no right or wrong answers. We will be taking notes throughout our conversation so that we can remember the information you provide when we are writing our report. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

[*Note to interviewers: Depending on how the local office is structured, each interviewee may not be able to answer all of the questions in the protocol. For example, in some offices, different staff may handle different aspects of case processing. In other States, there may be a separate unit that processes CAP or ESAP cases. Please tailor this protocol to cover the questions relevant for each respondent.*]

Background

Before we start I'd like to get a little background.

1. How long have you been with [NAME OF AGENCY]?

1. What is your official title and how long have you been in that role? What are your job responsibilities?

   - Do you work on multiple programs or just [SNAP/SSI/Medicaid/etc.]? If multiple programs, tell me a bit about which programs and how that works.

- [*For SNAP staff only*] If just SNAP, do any other programs share the SNAP office? If so, which ones and what kind of interaction, if any, do you ever have with these programs?

2. Have you held any other positions here in the past? Please describe.

Key Elements of Intervention(s) and Initial Rollout

Interviewer— In advance of the visit, mark the interventions we think are currently in place in the table below and confirm on site. Cycle through Questions 1-3 for each intervention that is marked in the table, one at a time. For partner agency administrators, only cover interventions relevant to their agency. For States with an ESAP, treat the ESAP as the intervention, rather than each of its components for the purposes of cycling through the questions.

	Check if State Implemented Intervention
Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP)	
Standard Medical Deduction (SMD) amount	
Community Partnership Interview Demonstration (CPID)	
Combined Application Project (CAP)	
Standard CAP with SNAP application received from SSA	
Modified CAP with use of the SSI/State data exchange (SDX) to identify potentially eligible cases	
36-Month Certification Demonstration	
Elderly/Disabled Recertification Interview Waiver	

We understand that currently... [*interviewer, insert text as appropriate*]

...there is a shorter SNAP application for the elderly than for non-elderly individuals, or a simplified application process for elderly individuals.

...some elderly applicants may receive application assistance or do their certification interview with a local Community Based Organization.

...elderly applicants do not need to go through a recertification interview.

...elderly participants are certified for SNAP for longer than the standard certification period.

...the SNAP agency or some other agency conducts data matching so that elderly applicants do not have to provide as much verification during the application process as they otherwise would.

...elderly applicants can claim a standardized medical deduction instead of actual medical expenses.

...there is a Combined Application Project (CAP).

1. In what year and month was [INTERVENTION] first implemented in this office? [*If respondent doesn't remember exactly, get a best estimate*.]

2. When and how did you first hear about the [INTERVENTION]?

   - What was your reaction?
   - In what way, if any, were efforts made to gain staff buy-in to implement this policy or procedure?
   - In what way, if any, were you involved in the planning and implementation process in your office?

3. What kind of trainings, if any, did you receive with respect to [INTERVENTION]?

   - When did the training occur and how many sessions were there? How long did they last?
   - What topics did the training cover?
   - Who conducted the training and who was trained (new staff, existing staff, both)?
   - What types of training were provided (group, individual, virtual, in-person, on-the-job, classroom, self-guided, etc.)?
   - How satisfied were you with any training you received?
   - Were you given reference material that you could refer to after the training?
   - How well prepared did you feel to implement [INTERVENTION]?
   - What kind of additional training, if any, do you feel you need?
   - Who do you go to if you have questions or problems related to the [INTERVENTION] and how knowledgeable and supportive is that person?

4. [*After going through all known interventions:*] In addition to the policies and procedures we have already discussed, are there any other ways in which policies and procedures for the elderly in your office differ from standard rules?

   [*Interviewer: If yes, ask for a brief overview of the intervention; probe as needed to understand what the policy does, how it affects the elderly, and when the policy began. If no, proceed to Implementation and Operations.*]

Implementation and Operations [for SNAP staff only]

1. Now I'd like you to walk me through a case step-by-step from the time the SNAP office receives an application through the eligibility determination and recertification process so I can get a feel for how policies and procedures for the elderly work in practice. Let's first take a household with **no** elderly members and no other special circumstances.

- How does the SNAP office first learn of a new application and assign it to a worker to process?
  o Do eligibility staff service all parts of a case and have a caseload, or is their work focused on a specific function, such as intake, counseling, verification, benefit determination, etc.?
  o How does the office determine who should get the application to process?
  o Does the state have an online application system and if so, do processes differ (and how) for applications that are received via mail, fax, or electronically?

- Once the application is with the appropriate worker, what happens next?
  o What are the procedures for determining eligibility/benefits?
  o For verification, what documents are necessary?
  o Is an interview required? When does this typically occur and how long does it typically last? Are telephone interviews permissible instead of in-person interviews and if so, for whom and under what circumstances?
  o Does technology play any role, particularly in terms of streamlining the verification process? If so, please describe. Is it primarily targeted at the client or staff?
  o What are the most common denial reasons?
  o What is the certification period?
- How do clients report changes in their case to the SNAP office?
  o Are there any technologies available to assist in change reporting? If so, please describe. Is it primarily targeted at the client or staff?
  o Who receives and processes changes reported?
  o Does the office rely on call centers (for change reporting, other case maintenance, or to field participants' calls) and if so, how well does that process work?
- What are the recertification procedures?
  o To what extent do procedures differ between initial application and recertification?
  o Does technology play any role, particularly in terms of streamlining the verification process? If so, please describe. Is it primarily targeted at the client or staff?
  o Which workers process re-certifications?

2. Now let's talk about what is different about these processes for households with an elderly member.

- Are there differences in the ways elderly clients can apply for SNAP?
  o If not, how well do the standard processes work for households with elderly and why? And, how do elderly applicants typically submit applications (through the mail, by fax, electronically)?

- o If so…
    - Is there a shortened/simplified application they can use? If so, how is it different from a standard application?
    - Where and how can simplified applications for SNAP be submitted?
    - [*For Standard CAP States:*] How is the integrated CAP application completed and processed? What kind of interaction does your office have with the SSA office?
    - [*For Modified CAP States:*] How are CAP applications different from non-CAP applications? How are CAP applications processed and who processes them? What kind of interaction does your office have with the SSA office?
    - Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
    - In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
        - Do they save time or take additional time?
        - Do they require you to have less or more interaction with applicants?
- What is different, if anything, about how new applications are assigned to workers?
    - o Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
    - o [*if differences exist*] In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
- What is different, if anything, about the initial application review or intake process?
    - o Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
    - o [*if differences exist*] In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
        - Do they save time or take additional time?
        - Do they require you to have less or more interaction with applicants?
- What is different, if anything, about the verification and eligibility/benefit determination process?
    - o How, if at all, are the interview requirements different?
    - o How, if at all, are the requirements for providing verification different?
    - o How, if at all are the procedures for determining benefits different? How does the medical deduction, in particular, work for elderly applicants? What information do they need to provide and how is the deduction calculated?
    - o Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
    - o [*if differences exist*] In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
        - Do they save time or take additional time?
        - Do they require you to have less or more interaction with applicants?
- What is different, if anything, about the certification period and periodic reporting requirements?
    - o Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
    - o [*if differences exist*] In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?

- Do they save time or take additional time?
- Do they require you to have less or more interaction with applicants?
- What is different, if anything, about the recertification process?
  - Do these processes work well for households with elderly? Why or why not?
  - [*if differences exist*] In what ways, if any, do these differences make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
    - Do they save time or take additional time?
    - Do they require you to have less or more interaction with applicants?

3. What kind of technological tools or data systems support the work you do with elderly applicants and participants?

- Are these tools or systems different in any way from those that support work with other applicants and participants?
- How user-friendly are these tools or systems?
- In what ways do these tools or systems make staff jobs easier or more challenging?
- Have there been any changes recently to the systems you use to process applications and determine eligibility (for anyone)? If so, what were these changes, when did they occur, and what do you like and dislike about them?

4. What kind of interaction, if any, do you have with community organizations who work with elderly individuals?

- What role do these organizations play in encouraging or helping elderly individuals apply for SNAP?
- In what ways do these organizations make staff jobs easier or more challenging?

Implementation and Operations [for partner agency staff only]

1. [*For SSA staff in Standard CAP States:*] How is the integrated CAP application completed and processed?

   - Does the process work well? Does the process make your job easier or more challenging?
   - What kind of interaction does your office have with the SNAP office?

2. [*For SSA staff in Modified CAP States:*] How are CAP applications different from non-CAP applications?

   - How are CAP applications processed and who processes them?
   - Does the process work well? Does it make your job easier or more challenging?
   - What kind of interaction does your office have with the SNAP office?

3. [*For partner agency staff involved in cross-agency data matching*] How does the data matching process work and who is involved?

   - Does the data matching process work well? Does it make your job easier or more challenging?
   - What kind of interaction does your office have with the SNAP office?

Perceived Outcomes of Intervention(s) [for SNAP staff only]

1. From your perspective, how have the [list the interventions] changed participation in SNAP among the elderly, if at all?

   - In what ways do you think the interventions have affected participation and what is it about the interventions you think contributed to these changes?
   - For which types of elderly do you think the interventions have the most impact on participation (younger, older, living alone, etc.) and why? What about the least impact?
   - What do you think elderly clients find to be the most and least valuable aspect of the interventions?

2. What are the most common reasons why elderly applicants are denied?

    - In what ways have denial reasons changed over time?
    - To what would you attribute these changes?
    - What role, if any, do you think the different application and re-certification procedures for elderly clients have played?

3. From your perspective, how have benefit levels among the elderly changed over time?

    - What are the main reasons you think these changes have occurred?
    - What role, if any, do you think the different application and re-certification procedures for elderly clients have played?
    - Have changes been more or less pronounced for certain types of elderly clients (younger, older, living alone, etc.)? Why or why not?

4. From your perspective, how has staff's accuracy in determining eligibility and benefit levels for the elderly changed over time?

    - What are the main reasons you think these changes have occurred?
    - Have you found that clients who are not interviewed at recertification (under waiver) are taking all of the deductions for which they are eligible?
    - What role, if any, do you think the different application and re-certification procedures for elderly clients have played?
    - Have changes been more or less pronounced for certain types of elderly clients (younger, older, living alone, etc.)? Why or why not?

5. How likely are newly eligible elderly participants to remain on SNAP for an extended period of time?

    - What are the most common reasons why newly eligible participants leave SNAP after short durations of benefit receipt? Do the general reasons differ from the reasons given by the elderly?
    - What role, if any, do you think the different application and re-certification procedures for elderly clients have played in elderly participants moving on and off the caseload?
    - Has movement on and off the caseload been more or less pronounced for certain types of elderly clients (younger, older, living alone, etc.)? Why or why not?

6. From your perspective, how satisfied are elderly applicants with the application process?

    - What do they find works most seamlessly?
    - What do they find most challenging?

7. From your perspective, how satisfied are elderly participants with the re-certification process?

- What do they find works most seamlessly?
- What do they find most challenging?

8. What other changes have there been in recent years in the State or local environment—such as the availability of food programs or other assistance for the elderly or the economy—that have facilitated or impeded access to SNAP among the elderly? [*For each response, ask whether and how it has facilitated or impeded access to SNAP for the elderly and others.*]

9. What other changes have there been in recent years in State or local programs and policy—such as changes to SNAP rules generally, the program's organizational structure, or changes to other programs such as Medicaid—that have facilitated or impeded access to SNAP among the elderly or others? [*For each response, ask whether and how it has facilitated or impeded access to SNAP for the elderly and others.*]

- How, if at all, has interaction between SNAP and Medicaid and the way people can apply for each changed since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA)?
- Has there been any restructuring or re-organization of SNAP staff and business processes or work flow?

Elderly Awareness of SNAP Interventions and Policies [for SNAP staff only]

1. How well do you think elderly SNAP participants understand the policies that affect their eligibility?

- What components do they understand more or less and why?
- Are they aware of the standard medical deduction and the potential benefits of this policy?
- What kind of efforts, if any, does the SNAP agency make to increase their understanding?

2. From your perspective, how aware are elderly people in your community of the availability of SNAP?

- How do the elderly learn about SNAP in your community?
- What kinds of activities, if any, does the SNAP agency engage in to increase awareness of SNAP?

3. From your perspective, how well do elderly applicants understand the application and eligibility determination process?

- What components do they understand more or less and why?
- What kind of efforts, if any, does the SNAP agency make to increase their understanding?

4. Is your agency/office connected to or aware of any efforts to improve elderly access to benefits more widely? [such as through partnerships with other agencies/organizations]

    - What agencies or organizations are involved?
    - What activities are taking place?
    - Who is the target audience and how are they reached?
    - What messages about SNAP are being disseminated?

Lessons Learned and Best Practices [for SNAP staff only]

1. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in serving elderly applicants and participants in SNAP?

2. In your opinion, what are the most effective methods of increasing access to and participation in SNAP among the elderly?

3. What, if anything, has not been effective in increasing access to SNAP among the elderly?

4. What barriers to accessing SNAP still exist among the elderly?

    - Is there a segment of the elderly population not being reached? [Probe about non-English speaking populations if relevant.]
    - What would be needed to reach them?

Perceived Outcomes and Lessons Learned [for partner agency staff only]

1. In your opinion, what effect has [the intervention] had on access to benefits among the elderly?

2. Have there been any surprising or unintended consequences of [the intervention]?

3. What barriers to accessing benefits still exist among the elderly?
    - Is there a segment of the elderly population not being reached? [Probe about non-English speaking populations if relevant.]
    - What would be needed to reach them?