

# **Appendix D. Study Overview and Frequently Asked Questions**

OMB No. 0584-[NEW]

*Assessment of Mandatory E&T Programs*

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# Assessment of Mandatory Employment and Training Programs

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has funded the Assessment of Mandatory Employment and Training (E&T) Programs study to examine program features and administrative practices of mandatory SNAP E&T programs and assess how those features and practices may affect E&T participation, sanctions, and outcomes for mandatory participants. Little is currently known about how specific E&T processes and services affect a participant's likelihood of participating or being sanctioned, or how well the programs help participants gain skills, achieve stable employment, and move toward economic self-sufficiency. To address this knowledge gap, FNS has identified three objectives for this study:

1. Describe the process for screening and notifying participants and enrolling them in mandatory E&T programs.
2. Determine the main reasons why mandatory E&T participants are sanctioned, with particular attention to program dropoff points that result in sanctions (e.g., what specific practices affect a participant's E&T participation and likelihood of being sanctioned, including key leakage points in the process).
3. Assess how well mandatory programs help SNAP E&T participants gain skills, certificates, and credentials; gain stable, well-paying employment; and move toward economic self-sufficiency.

FNS is directing this study with the assistance of an independent research contractor, Insight Policy Research (Insight), and its subcontractor, Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica). To address this study's research objectives, the evaluation team will conduct the following data collection activities:

1. **Document Review**, including State E&T plans and activity reports, staff training materials, State and local policy manuals and memos, notices of adverse action (NOAAs), handbooks, desk guides, and reported outcome measures
2. **Administrative data analysis**, including information from SNAP case records and (if available) E&T providers to conduct a descriptive analysis of mandatory E&T participants and to assess the E&T services, sanctions, case closures, other outcome measures
3. **Site visits to six States** with mandatory E&T programs. Each site visit will include interviews with staff at (1) the State SNAP agency, (2) two local SNAP offices, and (3) three E&T service providers. The interviews will yield the following:
  - a. **State SNAP agencies** will provide high-level information on States' mandatory programs, policies, resources, and the E&T outcome measures.
  - b. **Local SNAP offices** will provide detailed understanding of the mandatory E&T process and staff's perspectives on the effects of E&T on participation and sanctions. During the visit, the site team will interview staff; facilitate a process-mapping exercise (i.e., a group discussion to develop a flow chart of participants' experiences through the E&T process); collect any documentation, NOAAs, or other materials that may be useful for understanding the E&T process; and, if possible, observe day-to-day interactions with mandatory E&T clients.

- c. **SNAP E&T providers** will offer insight into client flow through the SNAP E&T process and available services. The site team will conduct interviews with staff and, if possible, observations of E&T participants receiving services and their interactions with staff.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who is conducting the study?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is directing this study with the assistance of an independent research contractor, Insight Policy Research (Insight), and its subcontractor, Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica).

### Why am I being asked to participate?

Six States are being invited to participate in the study. FNS selected States that represent a mix of mandatory SNAP E&T programs with respect to size of the program, its structure and policies, and geographic location.

### What kind of administrative data will be collected?

Insight will collect administrative data from SNAP case records from study States and, where possible, from E&T providers to complement the information obtained during the site visits.

- ▶ Insight will request longitudinal **SNAP administrative caseload data**, including one record per month for all individuals who were on SNAP at any time during the 29-month period from October 2016 through February 2019. The data requested will include variables for participants' demographic characteristics, exemption status, E&T services and outcomes, incidence and duration of sanctions, and corresponding SNAP benefit reductions and/or case closures. Insight will work with each State to determine what information is available. Insight will then request a 1-month test file from each State and provide feedback to the State before the State submits its complete file.
- ▶ Insight will also request administrative data on E&T participants **from E&T providers**, if available. Data will include type of E&T services received, duration of those services, and employment and earnings outcomes.

### When will the site visits be conducted and how long will they be?

Site visits to each State will last approximately 3 days and will be conducted in spring 2019. The study team plans to spend a half-day at each of the six sites within a State.

### What are the next steps?

A timeline of the planning and data collection appears in the table below.

#### Study Timeline

Estimated Date	Activity
Late summer 2018	The study team conducts an introductory conference call with each State to discuss the study and answer questions.
Fall 2018	The study team holds consultative discussions with States about the administrative data request for the study.

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## **How will the information my State provides be used?**

The information gathered during the site visits will be used to increase FNS's understanding of how SNAP mandatory E&T program features and administrative practices may affect E&T participation, sanctions, and outcomes for mandatory E&T participants. Study results will be presented in a written report provided to FNS. All interviews will be considered private, and no participants will be cited by name or title.