

Appendix K. E&T Provider Interview Protocol

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Assessment of Mandatory E&T Programs

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Assessment of Mandatory E&T Programs: E&T Provider Interview Protocol

My name is [name], and I'm a researcher at [Insight Policy Research/Mathematica Policy Research, working with Insight]. As you may know, Insight is conducting the Assessment of Mandatory E&T Programs study for the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This study examines how mandatory State SNAP E&T programs are administered and how the programs help SNAP participants move toward economic self-sufficiency. We are interested in better understanding the rates of participation, sanction, and employment among mandatory participants. We also want to explore reasons why mandatory E&T participants are most often sanctioned and when sanctions happen, such as at initial referral, intake and assessment, or service referral. This study also seeks to understand what data are available on how well mandatory programs help SNAP participants gain skills, certificates and credentials, and stable employment.

My colleagues and I are currently visiting providers here and in five other States to collect information from a wide range of stakeholders involved in providing SNAP E&T to mandatory participants. I want to start by thanking you for taking time to speak with us today. Your perspective and insights on these issues will be very helpful to the study.

I want to let you know that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and your responses will be kept private, except as otherwise required by law. We will not share the information you provide with anyone outside the study team, including your supervisor and State-level staff. You may refuse to answer any question, and you may stop the interview at any time. There will be no penalties if you refuse to participate in part or at all.

We will take notes over the course of the interview and would like to record the conversation so we can remember the information we collect. We will use this information in our reports to FNS, describing the range of responses expressed by staff. The reports might list the names of organizations that contributed information, but we will not quote you or anyone by name or title. However, because of the relatively small number of organizations participating in the study, there is a possibility a response could be correctly attributed to you.

I expect our conversation will take about 60 minutes. First, do you have any questions for me about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

Do I have your permission to record our conversation? [Confirm permission before recording starts.]

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 60 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. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Office of Policy Support, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014, Alexandria, VA 22302, ATTN: PRA (0584-xxxx). Do not return the completed form to this address.*

[Unless marked otherwise, the questions should be asked of both provider directors/supervisors and frontline staff. Questions for the directors/supervisors only are marked with an asterisk (“”); questions for frontline staff only are marked with an inverted V (“^”).]*

Unless we specify otherwise, all of the questions we ask are referring to your work with mandatory SNAP E&T participants. When you are working with a participant, do you know if they are a mandatory or voluntary participant? *[If yes, ask how. If no, note this for how you interpret the answers to the questions.]*

A. Background

I'd like to start with a few questions about your roles and responsibilities.

1. What is your official job title or position?
2. What are your primary responsibilities?
3. How long have you worked at *[agency/organization]*? How long in this position?

B. Target Population and Local Area*

Now I would like to talk about what types of clients your *[agency/organization]* serves and get some background on your local area.

Target Population

1. Are your services targeted to certain populations (e.g., homeless, youth, veterans, at a certain education level, interested in a certain industry)?
2. What geographic area does your program serve?
3. What human services program clients do you serve (e.g., referrals from TANF, SNAP E&T, WIOA)?
4. How long have you been serving SNAP E&T program participants?

Local Area

5. Do you know how many other employment and training providers in the area provide comprehensive services (e.g., assessment, job search and training, support services) to clients? *[If necessary, clarify that we are not interested only in providers that serve E&T participants.]*
 - a. Do the services they provide overlap with yours?
 - b. Do you refer the clients you serve to any of these other organization to provide additional E&T services you are not able to provide (co-enrollment)?
 - c. Do you ever refer clients to these other organizations for their primary services because your organization is not a good fit for the SNAP E&T participants? How frequently?
6. What other kinds of supports are there in the area (e.g., transportation, food banks, clothing closets, housing assistance)?

7. What are the services most in need by the people in this local area?
 - a. How would you describe the local economy? What jobs are most in demand in this area (low-, middle-, and/or high-skill jobs)? What industries are on the decline?

C. Organization, Staffing, and Communication*

Next I would like to talk about how *[agency/organization]* is organized and staffed and how you communicate with other organizations about SNAP participants.

1. Do you have a formal contract to serve SNAP E&T participants?
 - a. Is the contract directly with the SNAP agency, or do you contract with another organization to serve SNAP recipients? Describe.
 - b. Does your contract specify how many SNAP E&T participants you will serve per month/year? If so, describe.
 - c. What are the primary service requirements under your contract?
 - d. Have you had any challenges with this contract, working with SNAP, or serving SNAP E&T participants? What aspects could be improved?
 - e. Are there any lessons you have learned about establishing and maintaining collaborations with the SNAP agency? *[If they are contracting with the SNAP agency]*
2. How do you determine what services to offer at your organization (e.g., best practices, local labor data/demand, assessment of skills needed by participants, dictated by the funding organization)?
 - a. Are there contractual/regulatory constraints on the services you provide to SNAP E&T participants? Describe.
3. What types of staff work with SNAP E&T participants?
 - a. Do staff serve all clients or do you have dedicated staff for clients from each type of program?
 - b. Have your staff received any training about SNAP E&T procedures and requirements from other organizations/agencies? If so, describe who provided the training, the frequency, materials provided, format, and content of the training. Is it ongoing?
4. In general, do you primarily receive new clients to your agency/organization through referrals or walk-ins?
 - a. Do you know if a client is referred from a certain program? How? Does the referral process/frequency differ by agency?
 - b. Does SNAP E&T primarily use referrals?
 - c. How do you receive SNAP E&T referrals? Describe the process. How frequently do you receive them? Provided through MIS or outside of systems?
5. How much contact do you have with the SNAP agency? For what reasons and with whom?
 - a. Do you have a primary point of contact or do you interact with multiple individuals?
 - b. How frequently are you in contact with the SNAP agency about E&T in general or individual participants in particular?

- c. Have there been any challenges with communication? If so, how could it be improved?
6. Does your organization currently have sufficient resources and capacity to serve all of the mandatory E&T clients that are referred?
- a. Do you have capacity to serve more clients? How many?
 - b. What additional resources would your organization need to serve these clients?

D. Client Flow[^]

I would like you to describe the client flow through the program from referral to completing services, or dropping out of the program.

- 1. To start, how do people enter this program generally?
 - a. Is it different for SNAP E&T participants? *[Explore referral questions from section C with frontline staff, as needed.]*
 - b. What other information does the SNAP office provide about SNAP E&T participants?

Intake Process

- 2. Please describe the **intake process**. *[Probe for the following.]*
 - a. Generally, do SNAP E&T participants come directly from the SNAP office to you, or are they referred from another agency? Do you know how many steps there are prior to coming to your organization?
 - b. About how much time passes from the when the participant is enrolled in SNAP and when you receive a referral? *[Or if no referral, when the participant shows up here?]*
 - c. Is there an orientation? Is orientation in a group setting or one-on-one? Who conducts the orientation? What information is given about mandatory SNAP E&T?
 - d. Is there an intake interview? What information is collected? Who conducts this interview? Is a caseworker/career advisor assigned before or after this interview? How are they assigned?
 - e. Do you conduct an assessment of every client? Including SNAP E&T participants? Describe the assessment and the tests included (how long is the assessment, in what format is it conducted, what organization conducts it). How are results used?
 - f. During assessment, do you ever identify SNAP E&T participants that you feel are not ready to participate in your program because they have excessive barriers (like a disability) or do not meet your program requirements (for example, have a certain level of education or can pass a drug test)? If so, what are the most common reasons for this? What do you do in these instances? How often would you say this happens?
- 3. Do your staff conduct any outreach to encourage mandatory SNAP E&T participants to participate/comply? If so, what type of outreach?
 - a. Does the SNAP agency provide any guidance or materials to use for conducting outreach?

Training/Employment Services

- 4. What **training and employment services** are offered at this organization (e.g., education, vocational training, work experience, job readiness training, follow-up services)?

- a. What services are offered to SNAP E&T participants? *[Probe for how these services are determined.]*
 - b. Do all services offered to SNAP participants meet their mandatory participation requirement? If not, which do not?
5. How long is each service available to a client? How long on average does the service take to complete?
- a. Is this different for SNAP E&T participants?
 - b. Overall, how long are participants in services, on average?
6. May clients receive multiple services?
- a. Are they generally offered different services concurrently or sequentially? *[Probe for whether there is a structure order of activities or are there several options for moving from one activity to another]*
 - b. How common is it for mandatory E&T participants to receive multiple services? Which services?

Supportive Services

7. What **supportive services** are available at your organization? *[Probe for types, amount, and duration.]*
- a. What is the process for approving supportive services? Is it the same for SNAP E&T participants; do you need to contact the SNAP agency for approval before providing supports?
 - b. If the SNAP agency does not approve a support or it is not covered by SNAP, what do you do?
 - c. Which supports are provided to SNAP E&T participants most frequently (about what percentage, if known)?
 - d. What supports are provided least frequently to SNAP E&T participants? Why?
 - e. What types of referrals do you provide for support services (to other organizations or programs)?
 - f. To your knowledge, do SNAP E&T participants receive other support services from the SNAP agency (such as transportation or childcare assistance)?
 - g. Do you find that the supports typically cover the client's expenses? If not, what is needed?
 - h. Are SNAP participants ever unable to participate because they need a support service that is not covered by SNAP? How often would you say this happens?
 - i. What happens in that case? Do you notify the SNAP agency for further assistance?

Case Management

8. Please describe the **case management** provided to clients. *[Probe for the following.]*
 - a. Who provides it?
 - b. Typically, how much time is spent with clients in an average month? Is the time different for SNAP E&T? Is there a minimum level of contact required?
 - c. What is the typical format of meetings (in person, telephone, email, text)? Who generally initiates contact?
 - d. Do you use any case management tools or models as part of your services (e.g., team-based case management across programs, clinically certified staff assessments, case monitoring)?
 - e. How responsive are clients to case management (do they attend meetings/respond in a timely manner/seem to find contact useful)?
 - f. Do SNAP E&T participants need more/less/same level of contact as other clients?
9. How are clients **assigned to a specific service**? *[Probe for the following.]*
 - a. Is the assigned service based on the results of an assessment/test? At the discretion of the caseworker? At the discretion of the client? What criteria are used for each type of service?
 - b. Are clients aware of all the services available, or are they told only about those deemed most appropriate for them based on an assessment or their intake interview?
 - c. Generally, how much input does the client have in selecting services to participate in? Does this input vary for SNAP E&T?

Participation

10. In which E&T services do SNAP E&T participants most frequently participate? Why?
 - a. Which services do they participate in least frequently? What are the reasons for this?
 - b. Are some services in higher demand but have limited space?
 - c. *[If a mismatch between what is offered and what is received]:* Are there reasons SNAP E&T participants tend to not participate in [X, Y, Z] services? *[Probe for: Is this about their preferences, their skills/abilities, or are limited slots available?]* Are most participants encouraged to enter into these services, or do they tend to apply to a limited group of people?

Client Outcomes

11. Where are the most frequent **dropoff points** for SNAP E&T participants (e.g., never show for first meeting, do not return after assessment, do not show for assigned services)?
 - a. Is this pattern similar for other clients?
 - b. What are the reasons participants tend to drop off at these points?
12. How frequently do SNAP E&T participants complete the training and find employment? *[Probe for percentage. If respondent does not know, probe for his or her best estimate. Ask if he or she can provide these data after the interview.]*
 - a. What types of employment are generally found? How does the type of employment found vary by type of service, if at all?

- b. Are these rates and types of employment similar for other clients you serve?
 - c. Can these jobs help make participants self-sufficient, or do they still need SNAP and other types of assistance to supplement income? If not, why not?
13. What is the process for when a SNAP E&T participant **fails to comply** with requirements or never shows up for services?
- a. How much guidance do you receive from the SNAP agency about the process for identifying and reporting noncompliance?
 - b. How long do you give a participant before considering the individual noncompliant? Are a certain number of contacts required?
 - c. Do you reach out to the participant to try to reengage? Describe that process.
 - d. After assessments, how frequently do you determine that SNAP E&T participants should qualify for an exemption or good cause not to participate in services? What is the process in these circumstances?

E. Perceptions About SNAP E&T Participants

Now let's talk about your thoughts on the types of challenges SNAP E&T participants have, how they are different from your other clients, and how well they understand what is required of them.

1. What differences, if any, do you notice between SNAP E&T participants and the other clients you serve?
2. What kinds of barriers do SNAP E&T participants face starting or participating in services?
 - a. Which of these barriers most interfere with participation (which are most significant)? Are the barriers different for those having difficulty complying initially versus those who have been in the program but struggle to complete it?
 - b. Are these factors different from those you see in other clients you serve? If so, describe the differences.
 - c. Can you address any of these barriers through your program? If so, how?
3. Do the barriers participants face differ by the type of activity? Do you think the services offered to SNAP E&T participants are appropriate for their needs, barriers/abilities, and interests? Why?
4. Do you believe the mandatory nature of the program affects participants' engagement? Or the way you offer services?
5. In your experience with SNAP E&T participants, how well do they understand their E&T requirements?
 - a. Do they tend to know why they were told to come to your organization?
 - b. Do they understand the documents the SNAP office provides to them regarding their work requirements? Do they ever ask you to help explain letters they receive from SNAP? What do they have difficulty understanding?
 - c. Do they realize they could lose SNAP benefits if they do not comply?
6. Do SNAP E&T participants generally seem interested in participating?

7. For those SNAP E&T participants who complete the program/services, do you believe they are prepared to compete for in-demand jobs in your community?
 - a. How successful have they been in obtaining and retaining these types of jobs?

F. Data Tracking and Reporting

Next, I would like to discuss the kinds of data you track, the systems you use, and the reports you develop for managing your work.

1. What percentage of your SNAP E&T referrals ultimately participate in services?
 - a. Do you track the number of participants who appear initially versus those who do not appear after referral?
 - b. At what point do those who start services tend to stop participating? What do you think leads to dropoff at this point? [*Probe for additional dropoff points.*]
2. *How many mandatory SNAP E&T participants are you currently serving?
 - a. Is that number generally how many you serve in an average month?
 - b. Approximately how many unique participants do you serve each year?
 - c. Do you have sufficient resources to serve all the SNAP participants referred to you?
 - d. Are you currently able to support more E&T participants than specified in your contract? If so, how many more?
3. How long do SNAP E&T participants generally participate in services?
 - a. Is this more, less, about the same as the other clients you serve?
4. ^What types of data do you track for each client (beyond what is required by SNAP)?
For instance, do you track metrics on—
 - a. Services started/completed?
 - b. Skill gains/acquiring degrees or training certifications?
 - c. Job placement, retention, advancement? Over what period?
 - d. Earnings and types of employers?
 - e. Characteristics of clients?
5. What types of systems do you use to track data on your SNAP E&T participants? Are those data systems linked to the SNAP agency? How do you transfer/receive information to/from the SNAP agency?
6. What type of reporting are you providing to SNAP [*or other contracting organization*] for each participant? How? How frequently?
 - a. Did you need to create new systems/processes to track SNAP participants? Mandatory versus voluntary?
 - b. Does the SNAP agency conduct any monitoring/oversight of the program? Describe this process and frequency.

7. How do you notify the SNAP agency about noncompliance?
 - a. How frequently do you report on noncompliance?
8. ^Do you require clients to provide you with any documentation of their participation or work efforts? If so, describe what is tracked for different services.
 - a. Is any of this documentation provided to the SNAP agency?
9. *Do you use the data collected for any internal purposes?
 - a. Why kind of reports do you produce? How are they used?
 - b. Are there other types of data that would be helpful for your monitoring/program management? Describe. What are the limitations to obtaining these data?

G. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Finally, I would like to learn more about any challenges you have had in working with the SNAP E&T program and any lessons learned you can share with others.

1. What is most challenging about serving mandatory SNAP E&T participants?
 - a. Can you think of ways to improve this situation?
 - b. Has the SNAP agency been helpful in resolving any of these issues?
2. What if anything would you change about the way you serve SNAP E&T participants? Why?
3. What lessons have you learned in serving the mandatory SNAP E&T population? What advice would you give to other providers who may be considering serving this population?

H. Wrap-Up

Thank you for answering all our questions.

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?
2. Is there anything we did not ask about that you think is important for us to know?

That completes our questions for you. Thank you very much for speaking with us.