**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Retail Application Cognitive Testing
Submitted Under Generic Clearance for Internet Nonprobability Panel Pretesting**

Request: 1The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the Generic Clearance for Internet Nonprobability Panel Pretesting (OMB number 0607-0978). 1We will conduct cognitive interviews to evaluate the online applications used by retailers to become authorized vendors in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Purpose: The SNAP program is administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. SNAP provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency. Retailers must submit applications and meet eligibility requirements to become authorized to accept SNAP as a form of payment. FNS has engaged the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) at the Census Bureau to conduct research to evaluate the retail applications used by retailers and make recommendations for improving them. The goals of this research are to reduce errors in submitted applications, reduce burden for applicants, reduce the costs and time of processing applications, and reduce the amount of follow-up with applicants needed to resolve issues.

Population of Interest: Any retailer of food products meant for home consumption in the U.S. is a potential applicant for SNAP authorization. This research will focus on retailers that have recently applied for initial authorization or re-authorization because of the availability of information needed to select and recruit appropriate types of retailers in FNS records. More specifically, this research focuses on retailers with fewer than 10 locations (larger retailers use a different application).

Timeline: One round of up to 45 cognitive interviews will be conducted in October through December 2019.

Language: Interviews will be conducted in English only.

Method: CBSM researchers will conduct one round of cognitive interviews with up to 45 SNAP retail applicants to evaluate two online applications used by retailers for initial authorization and re-authorization, respectively. The purpose of the cognitive interviews is to identify issues that contribute to incorrect reporting, such as item wording, concepts used in the applications, the availability of requested data in applicants' records, etc. These interviews will also evaluate the usability of the web applications, e.g., visual design, functionality, issues related to accessing the applications from applicants' computers, etc. We may make changes to the applications based on results from early interviews which will be evaluated in the remaining interviews.

Interviews will be conducted in-person at applicants' places of business in up to four sites around the country and also in the local Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Non-local sites will be selected that allow access to a mix of urban (small or large cities) and rural areas and/or that contain sufficient numbers of applicants eligible for recruitment.

Sample and Recruitment: Stores will be purposively selected for recruitment from FNS records in order to obtain variety with regard to variables of interest. These variables include:
- Type of application completed (initial or re-authorization);
- Type of retail operation, e.g., grocery store, convenience store, specialty store (produce markets, butchers, etc.), etc.;
- Size as indicated by volume of sales and number of locations.

Interviews will be conducted with store personnel who completed applications in the recent past (within the past year) or who may do so in the future. Such personnel may include store owners, administrative staff, or third-party representatives. Stores will be contacted using applicant contact information provided on applications. Once scheduled, applicants will be sent a confirmation email and may be sent a reminder email in advance of the interview.

Protocol: During the cognitive interviews, applicants will be asked to access and complete a version of the application they previously submitted (the initial application or re-authorization application) using a workplace computer. Applicants will be asked to speak aloud their thoughts as they complete the application to assist researchers in understanding how they interpret items and navigate through the application. Applicants will be asked to access records containing requested information to the extent that this is feasible and acceptable to them; otherwise they will be asked to describe how they would obtain the information and the nature of the records. Researchers will observe the process of completing the application and look for verbal and non-verbal indications of problems, and probe to obtain more detail about the response process. If there are indications of confusion or incorrect interpretations, researchers will solicit language that may be clearer. Paper versions of the applications may be used in the event that applicants may not be able to access the online applications.

Draft cognitive interview protocols, screenshots of the online applications, and the paper versions of the applications are included as attachments (see Enclosures 1-6).

Consent: We will inform participants that their participation is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be accessed only by employees involved in the research project. In addition, we will inform them that their decision whether or not to participate and any information they share during interviews will not affect their authorization. The consent form will also indicate that the respondent agrees that the interview can be audio-recorded to facilitate analysis of the results (see Enclosure 7). Participants who do not consent to be audio-recorded will still be allowed to participate.

Incentive: Incentives will not be used in this research.

Length of Interview: We estimate that each of the up to 45 interviews will take approximately one hour. This results in a burden of 45 hours.

Recruiting and scheduling applicants will take approximately ten minutes per person, and there are no additional screening questions specific to this research. In order to complete 45 interviews, we estimate that we will need to contact up to 200 retailers. This results in a burden of 33.3 hours.

Thus, **the total estimated burden for this research is 78.3 hours.**

Table 1. Total Estimated Burden

Category	No. of Applicants	Participation Time	Burden
Recruiting	200	10 minutes	33.3 hours
Cognitive Interviews	45	60 minutes	45 hours
Totals			78.3 hours

Below is a list of materials to be used in the current study:
        Enclosure 1. FNS-252 cognitive interview protocol
        Enclosure 2. FNS-252R cognitive interview protocol
        Enclosure 3. Screenshots of FNS-252 online initial application
        Enclosure 4. Screenshots of FNS-252R online reauthorization application
        Enclosure 5. Paper version of FNS-252
        Enclosure 6. Paper version of FNS-252R
        Enclosure 7. Consent form

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and the design of this research is listed below:

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