

Appendix E

Discussion Guide: State Agency EBT

Coordinator Key Informants

**Evaluation of Technology Modernization for SNAP Benefit
Redemption through Online Transactions**

Advance Email to State SNAP Agency Representative for Telephone Interviews

Dear [CONTACT NAME],

As you may know, Abt, Altarum, and Novo Dia are working together to evaluate the Online Purchasing Pilot, which is authorized under the Agricultural Act of 2014¹ (The Farm Bill) . Although this study is mandated and required by Congress, participation in this study is voluntary. Be assured that there will be no penalties if you decide not to respond, either to the information collection as a whole or to any particular question. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service is sponsoring this data collection. As part of the evaluation, our team is conducting interviews with key stakeholders involved in the pilot. The purpose of the interviews is to document the implementation of each retailer's online purchasing pilot, including key design and policy decisions related to the SNAP online purchasing experience; the process, challenges, and lessons of implementation; and the level of effort. Since retailers in [NAME OF STATE] are participating in the pilot, we would like to include the perspective of State EBT coordinators.

We would like to schedule phone interviews with [NAME OF STATE AGENCY] staff during [time period] to conduct interviews with staff that have worked with EBT host processors for the pilot. At this time, we ask that you identify the appropriate staff to participate in the interviews and let us know what dates and times would be most convenient for you. We are happy to schedule a brief phone call to provide more information about identifying staff to participate.

Once the interview times have been confirmed, we'll be in touch with additional logistics, including a list of interview topics and other materials to help you prepare. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions whatsoever. We look forward to our discussions with you and your team!

Sincerely,

[NAME]

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to take one hour 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. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. 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.

¹ Agricultural Act of 2014, Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 2642. P. 144-147.

**Evaluation of Technology Modernization for SNAP Benefit
Redemption through Online Transactions**

Draft Discussion Guide: State SNAP Agency Staff Key Informants

Introduction

My name is [X], from [Abt/Altarum/Novo Dia Group]. As you may know, Abt, Altarum, and Novo Dia are working together to evaluate the online purchasing pilot, which is authorized under the Agricultural Act of 2014² (The Farm Bill). Although this study is mandated and required by Congress, participation in this study is voluntary. Be assured that there will be no penalties if you decide not to respond, either to the information collection as a whole or to any particular question. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service is sponsoring this data collection. My colleagues and I are collecting information from a wide range of stakeholders involved in the pilots in order to learn about the implementation process, the challenges you encountered, and lessons learned. I want to start by thanking you for taking the time to speak with us today. Your perspective and insights on these issues are very helpful.

I expect our conversation will take approximately one hour.

Before we begin, I would like to assure you that all of your responses will be kept private to the extent provided by law. You may decline to answer any question.

With your permission, we would like to record the conversation to ensure our notes accurately reflect your responses? Recording is voluntary and not required to participate in part or in whole with this data request. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Our report to FNS will not be publicly shared. Representatives from pilot retailers will have an opportunity to review the chapter describing the pilot and identify any information that is proprietary and should not be shared with others. It will describe the range of responses expressed by staff, and may list the names of organizations who 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 that a response could be correctly attributed to you.

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to take one hour 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. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. 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.

² Agricultural Act of 2014, Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 2642. P. 144-147.

First, do you have any questions for me about the SNAP Online Purchasing Evaluation or what we will be discussing today?

Background on Respondent

1. What is your position within the [AGENCY]? What are your day-to-day responsibilities?
2. How long have you worked for [AGENCY]? How long have you worked with SNAP EBT?
3. Describe your role implementing the Online Purchasing Pilot.

Pilot Planning and Development

4. How was your agency involved in planning for the pilot and evaluation?

[Probe:]

- What kinds of staff were involved?
- What parts of the process did you work on?

5. What changes to your *State* systems (other than your EBT system) were needed to implement the Online Purchasing Pilot?

[Probe:]

- Eligibility system (e.g., BatchFile interface, web interface)
- State-maintained data warehouse
- Other

6. We would like to know how much staff time was involved in implementing the Online Purchasing Pilot.

[Interviewer will refer to Table 1 in the Appendix to guide the response to this question.]

[Probe:]

- How many people were involved in pilot planning? In making needed systems changes?
- About how long did it take to plan and make changes for the pilot? (i.e., eligibility system, State-maintained data warehouse, other)

Pilot Operations

7. What is your agency's role in the Online Purchasing Pilot?
8. Have there been any State-initiated and paid contractual changes with the EBT host processor as a result of the pilot?
9. Have you had to issue new EBT cards to accommodate the pilot? Why?

Customer Support

10. Do you provide support for online EBT shoppers? Where? For example, through a helpdesk?

How, if at all, have you changed your helpdesk support?

[Probe:]

- New FAQs specific to online EBT shoppers
- Training for helpdesk service staff
- Changes to State website to address online issues

If not, who do online EBT shoppers contact for support with online issues?

[Probe:]

- Retailer customer service
- EBT host processor
- Other

11. What types of helpdesk requests have you received? *[Ask for data on frequency and types of calls]*

[Probe:]

- Problems using EBT cards for online shopping
- Problems using EBT PIN for online shopping
- Questions about eligible online purchases or identifying online retailer
- Problems with returns, refunds, or incorrect balances

12. How do the requests you receive from online EBT customers differ from those you receive from other EBT users?

[Probe:]

- Frequency/number of questions
- Timing
- Duration
- Types of questions/ability to respond

Security/Integrity

13. Have you received reports or other evidence of fraud or abuse related to the Online Purchasing Pilot?

[Probe:]

- How have these instances of fraud and abuse been detected?
- Are you using the new online-related data in FNS and State reports (i.e., CSV file)? Has the data been useful in identifying unreported home address changes?
- Did the process you have in place work as expected? If not, what changes would you make?
- Have your monitoring systems detected abuse by online retailers or online EBT shoppers?
- What kinds of fraud and abuse have been identified?
- How prevalent has fraud and abuse been among the pilot population?

14. Are online purchases more or less secure than card-present transactions in stores? Why?

15. What do you see as the main risks and system vulnerabilities of online EBT use? How can they be mitigated?

Successes, Challenges, and Solutions

16. Thus far, what have been the greatest successes of the pilot?

[Probe:]

- What factors contributed significantly to these successes?
- What, if anything, could be done differently to improve the operations of the pilot?

17. What have been the biggest challenges of the pilot?

[Probe:]

- Have these challenges been resolved?
- If so, how? If not, why?
- What could other pilot stakeholders (e.g., FNS, First Data, EBT host processors) have done differently to meet their goals more effectively?
- What could you have done differently to meet your goals more effectively?

18. What do you think are the barriers to customer participation?

19. Do you have any additional suggestions for pilot improvement?

20. Thinking ahead, do you have any thoughts or advice about expanding SNAP online purchasing beyond the current pilot sites?

[Probe:]

- Could SNAP online purchasing be expanded to additional online retailers in your State? What would be involved? What would be the level of effort for your organization?
- Do you have any thoughts or advice about expanding to States not currently participating in a pilot?
- Do you have any thoughts or advice about expanding nationally?

[Interviewer will refer to Table 2 in the Appendix to guide the response to this question.]

Appendix

These tables will be sent to respondents via email in advance of the interview. During the interview, the evaluation team will review and clarify the responses.

Dear [Contact Name],

In preparation for our [telephone conversation] on [date], please complete the below. Please try to respond as completely and accurately as possible. Where exact figures are not available, an informed estimate is fine.

These tables will help us understand the amount of time involved in planning and implementing the Online Purchasing Pilot, as well as the level of effort it would take to expand the pilot beyond the current locations.

Please return these tables to me no later than [date]. We will discuss these forms during our [telephone conversation].

If you have any questions, please contact me at [email] or [phone].

Sincerely,

[NAME]

Table 1

Please describe the staff (technical and non-technical) involved in each phase of the pilot, their estimated level of effort (in hours), and the associated cost. If you cannot provide an estimate of hours, how much total time did it take to plan and design the pilot?

Please **do not** include staff time and costs related to supporting the evaluation (e.g., preparing and submitting data files), as these will not be ongoing costs.

Phase	Estimated Level of Effort				Did this take more time than initially budgeted? (yes/no)	Estimated Cost (Dollars)	
	Technical Staff		Non-Technical Staff			Technical Staff	Non-Technical/ Administrative Staff
	Number of Staff	Hours	Number of Staff	Hours			
Pilot Planning							
Pilot Systems Changes							
Support for Ongoing Operations							

Table 2

Please describe the staff (technical and non-technical) that would be involved in expanding SNAP online purchasing, the time it would take (in hours), and the associated cost. If you cannot provide an estimate of hours, how much total time would it take?

Phase	Estimated Level of Effort				Estimated Cost (Dollars)	
	Technical Staff		Non-Technical Staff		Technical Staff	Non-Technical/ Administrative Staff
	Number of Staff	Hours	Number of Staff	Hours		
Planning						
Systems Changes						
Support for Ongoing Operations						

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to take one hour 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. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. 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.