

Attachment E.2. Final State Agency Interview Protocol

OMB No. 0584-[NEW]

Best Practices in Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) Operations and Planning

June 16, 2021

Project Officer: Eric Sean Williams

Office of Policy Support
SNAP Research and Analysis Division
Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314
703.305.2640
eric.williams@fns.usda.gov

Final State Agency Interview Protocol

My name is [name], and I'm a researcher at Insight Policy Research. As you may know, Insight is conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to identify and document Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) best practices. This study will equip FNS and States with data demonstrating how to best plan for and implement D-SNAP programs across different disaster types, administrative contexts, and geographic settings.

My colleagues and I are currently visiting [State] and four other States to collect information from a wide range of stakeholders involved in planning and implementing a D-SNAP program. I want to start by thanking you for taking the time to speak with us today. Your perspective and insights will be very helpful to the study.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and your responses will be kept private, except as otherwise required by law. Be assured that there will be no penalties if you decide not to respond. The information you provide us today will be summarized and combined with information gathered from other people we interview into a report that will be shared with FNS and the public. You will not be named in this report or any other project deliverables; however, the specific disasters and States we are studying will be identified. Data collected from the study will also be shared with USDA research and administrative staff, but your name will not be included in the information shared. You may refuse to answer any question, and you may stop the interview at any time.

Before we continue, can you please read the following Privacy Act Statement?

[Facilitator note: Provide the respondent(s) with a copy of the statement from page 2 of this protocol; all States have agreed to participate.]

I expect our conversation today will take up to 2 hours. Do you have any questions for me about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

[Facilitator note: the wrap-up discussion to take place on day 4 of the site visit is estimated to take 1 additional hour]

Do I have your permission to record the conversation? You may stop the recording at any time.

[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 3 hours 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 the following address: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314, ATTN: PRA (0584-xxxx). Do not return the completed form to this address.

Privacy Act Statement

This information is being collected under the authority of The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended through Pub. L. 113–128, enacted July 22, 2014 [7 U.S.C. 2026], which provides the legislative authority for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP). Section 17 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 provides the authority to FNS to conduct research to help improve the administration and effectiveness of SNAP. Disclosure of the information is voluntary. The information collected from States and interview participants will enable FNS to identify best practices in administering D-SNAP. Under the Privacy Act of 1974 and the System of Record Notice FNS-8 USDA/FNS Studies and Reports, any personally identifiable information collected will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. The information may be shared with SNAP contract researchers and USDA SNAP research and administrative staff with identifying information removed.

Kickoff Discussion: Day 1

[Facilitator note: Repeat disaster-specific questions for multiple disasters or probe for differences between separate disaster implementations/operations.]

A. Background

I'd like to learn about your role and responsibilities at the [State] SNAP office.

1. What is your current job title or position?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. What are your primary responsibilities?
4. What was your role in [selected D-SNAP(s)]?

B. D-SNAP Planning

First, I would like to learn more about your State's D-SNAP preparations.

1. Please describe your State's process for developing your D-SNAP plan.
 - a. How does your State agency determine what types and/or sizes of disasters to plan for?
 - b. How significantly does your D-SNAP plan change from year to year?
 - c. Did you make edits to your plan after [selected D-SNAP(s)]? Please describe these changes.
 - d. Does your D-SNAP plan identify what resources are available if the disaster is larger than anticipated? If so, please describe. *[Probe for: additional staffing or application sites, reserve EBT cards, other resources identified in State plan]*
 - e. I understand FNS requires that D-SNAP plans contain three sections: (1) roles and responsibilities, (2) resource readiness plan, and (3) implementation plan. In addition to the various elements included under these three components, are there any other items you think States should include in their D-SNAP plans?
2. *[If not already answered]* Who is involved in drafting the plan? What other agencies or stakeholders are involved?
 - a. Do you think involvement from other agencies or individuals would be beneficial? If so, who?
 - i. Why doesn't your State currently work with these agencies/stakeholders when developing the D-SNAP plan?
3. I understand FNS developed a D-SNAP guidance handbook and toolkit. Have you used these resources when developing your D-SNAP plan? How? How useful are they?
 - a. What additional guidance or training from FNS would be helpful for you in developing your annual disaster plan?

- b. What guidance or training have you received from FNS in the past?
- 4. Does your State conduct any training in preparation for D-SNAP? Please describe.
 - a. How often does the training occur?
 - b. How do you decide which staff will participate in the training?
- 5. Other than the stakeholders you work with to develop your D-SNAP plan, what other entities do you coordinate with for disaster response? Please describe your relationship with these entities.
 - a. Do you think involvement from other entities would be beneficial? If so, which ones?

C. Needs Assessment and D-SNAP Request

Next, I'd like to focus on the early steps following a disaster: the needs assessment and the D-SNAP request.

- 1. Based on the D-SNAP request for *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*, it appears that your State conducted a needs assessment. Is that correct? If yes, how was the assessment conducted? *[Interviewer note: Tailor this question based on information available in the D-SNAP request.]*
 - a. What information is included in the needs assessment?
 - b. Who is involved at your office? How about at other State agencies or stakeholders?
 - c. How long does it take to complete the assessment? Do you think this is an appropriate amount of time?
 - d. What data does your State use to conduct the needs assessment?
 - i. Where does your State obtain these data?
 - e. What other data, if any, would be helpful in conducting needs assessments? Why?
 - i. What are the barriers to using these data?
 - f. In your opinion, was the needs assessment useful for planning and implementing the D-SNAP? Why or why not?
- 2. *[If the State has had multiple D-SNAPs]* Has the needs assessment process changed from *[selected D-SNAP 1]* to *[selected D-SNAP 2]*? If so, how?
- 3. *[If the State has been hit by different types of disasters]* Does the needs assessment vary depending on the disaster type? If so, how?
- 4. Does your office work with the local utility companies to complete the D-SNAP request?

If yes:

- a. Could you please describe your working relationship?
 - i. What data did utility companies provide to facilitate the D-SNAP request process?
 - ii. How were these data provided?
- b. Were there any challenges in receiving the data from the utility companies?

5. *[Repeat for each D-SNAP]* According to your D-SNAP request and post-disaster report, *[State]* used the following policy flexibilities and waivers: *[fill in from D-SNAP request]*. Why did you decide to use these policy flexibilities and waivers?
 - a. In hindsight, were there any policy flexibilities or waivers that you did not use but would have been beneficial to D-SNAP operations? Why?
6. *[Repeat for each D-SNAP]* Based on our review of *[State]*'s D-SNAP request and post-disaster reporting, *[State]* submitted the D-SNAP request *[X]* days after the disaster hit. What influenced this timeline?
 - a. *[If timeline is different between multiple D-SNAPs]* Why does the timeline differ between *[selected D-SNAP 1]* and *[selected D-SNAP 2]*?
 - b. Do you think it would have been beneficial to wait longer to submit the D-SNAP request or submit it sooner? Why or why not? *[Probe for: length of time between disaster and D-SNAP request; adequacy of timeline for public outreach, needs assessment, or other preliminary activities]*
7. *[Repeat for each D-SNAP]* Did your D-SNAP request identify resources that could be used in case the disaster was larger than anticipated? What were these resources? *[Probe for: additional staffing or application sites]*
8. *[Repeat for each D-SNAP]* How do you estimate the number of individuals expected to be served by the D-SNAP? How do you estimate the total amount of D-SNAP benefits? *[Probe for assistance from other State agencies.]*
 - a. How did the number of individuals served compare to the estimates in your D-SNAP request?
 - i. *[If there is a large difference between estimates and the actual number served]* What accounts for the difference between the two numbers?
 - b. How important is it to accurately estimate D-SNAP need?
 - c. What are the challenges and best practices associated with estimating D-SNAP need?
 - d. Approximately what percentage of those served were current SNAP participants?
9. Do you know how many households affected by the disaster moved out of the State? What would be your best estimate of how many SNAP households left the State? Where did they go?

D.D-SNAP Site Selection and Staffing

Let's turn to site selection and staffing for the *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*. *[Facilitator note: If the State operated multiple D-SNAPs, probe for multiple disasters where relevant.]*

First, let's discuss D-SNAP site selection in general.

1. How did you select the D-SNAP site(s)? *[Probe for: any rubrics or documentation the State used to aid in site selection]*

- a. Did you have backup locations? If so, in what circumstances would you need to use the backup location?
 - b. How did you take into account any lingering damage from the disaster (e.g., road closures) when selecting the site(s)?
2. How did you decide how many D-SNAP sites to have?
 - a. In hindsight, do you think that was the appropriate number of sites? Why or why not?
3. How did you determine how large of a D-SNAP site was required?
 - a. In hindsight, do you think the site was an appropriate size? Why or why not?
4. How did you ensure the sites and staff were compliant with civil rights laws? *[Facilitator note: Collect any checklists, training guides, or other materials the State may have used.]*
 - a. *If needed, probe for: assistance with language services, accommodations for the older individuals or people with disabilities (e.g., building is wheelchair accessible, there is separate seating), adequate power, air conditioning, water, snacks, adequate number of bathrooms (including wheelchair-accessible bathrooms), accessible communications (Braille, TTY, large print, open captioning for televised ads)*
5. How did you ensure connectivity at the sites?
6. How did you ensure adequate crowd control?
7. In general, were there any challenges with your D-SNAP sites?
8. How did you determine how many staff were needed at each D-SNAP site?
9. Who staffed the D-SNAP site(s)?
 - a. Were staff from other State agencies involved? If yes:
 - i. How many were involved?
 - ii. How were staff from other State agencies mobilized?
 - iii. What were the roles of these staff?
 - b. Were non-State agency temporary staff hired? If yes:
 - i. How many were involved?
 - ii. Can you please describe the hiring process for these staff?
 - iii. What were the roles of these staff?
10. When and how were site staff trained? How did this training differ from other training staff receive that is not tied to a particular D-SNAP?

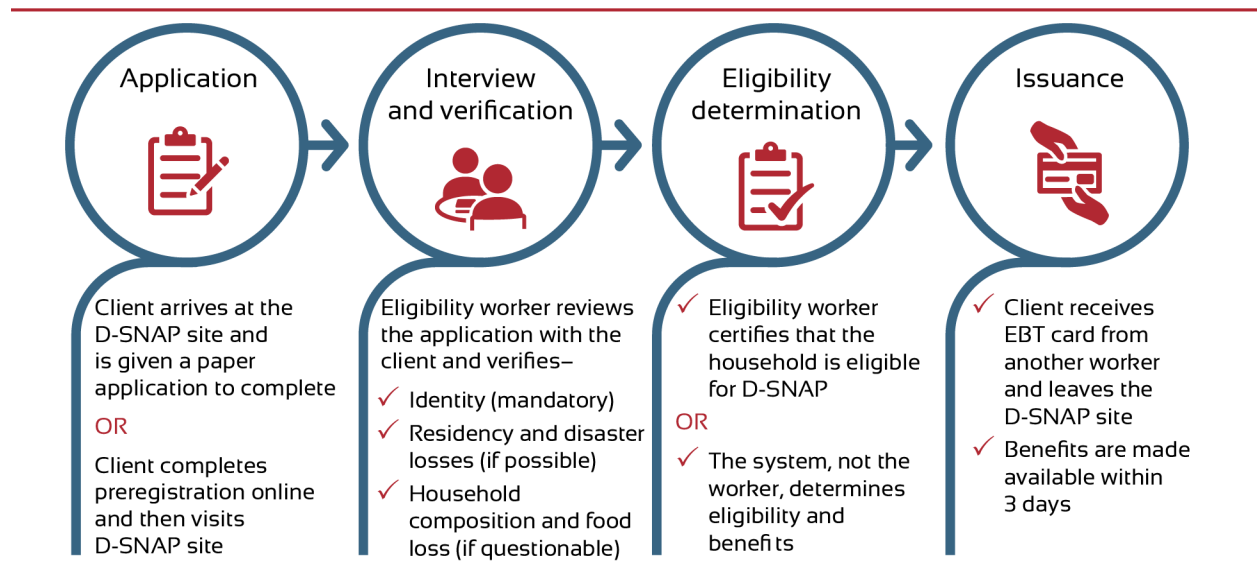
Now I want to turn to a discussion of the specific D-SNAP sites that were selected for inclusion in the site visit.

11. What aspects of the selected site(s) made it a good D-SNAP site location? *[Probe for: close to public transit, accessible for individuals with disabilities, near the disaster site, adequate size for serving applicants]*
12. What were the challenges associated with this D-SNAP site(s)? Please describe. *[Probe for: too small, poor traffic flow, not enough seating, limited parking, poor crowd control]*
13. Would you use this site(s) for a future D-SNAP? Why or why not?
14. What else should we know about this site? *[Request any signage, flow charts, or other diagrams of the site.]*

E. D-SNAP Application Processing

Next, let's discuss the D-SNAP certification and issuance process. For this part of the discussion, we will map the steps on a whiteboard/large poster board to aid the group in visualizing the steps D-SNAP applicants go through when they arrive on site. *[Facilitator note: Map the steps on a whiteboard or large poster. Repeat for multiple disasters. Refer to figure 1 for an example of the D-SNAP certification and issuance process.]*

Figure 1. Example D-SNAP Certification and Issuance Process



a. Arrival and Application

1. When a client arrived at the D-SNAP site, what happened first?

If the State uses paper applications distributed on site:

2. How were applications distributed?
3. Where did clients complete the D-SNAP application?

4. Who was available to assist clients with the application process?
5. How did clients submit their applications? When? Where?
6. After clients submitted their applications, what came next?

If the State uses an online preregistration:

7. How did site staff locate the client's preregistration information?
8. What happened if the client's information could not be found?
9. How often did you encounter issues with online preregistration? Please describe.
10. What additional information did the caseworker request that was not included on the preregistration form?

b. Interview and Verification

11. Who conducted the interview?
12. On average, how long did a client wait for an interview after arriving on site?
13. Can you walk me through how a caseworker reviewed the D-SNAP application with a client?
14. How did staff verify applicant's eligibility? *[Probe for: documents requested, data matches conducted]*
 - a. What documents were used?
 - b. Were any data matches conducted? If so, what were they?
15. How did staff check for duplicate participation?
16. How were staff trained in the different eligibility criteria for D-SNAP as opposed to regular SNAP benefits?
17. To your knowledge, were most clients who came to the site interviewed the same day? Why or why not?

c. Eligibility Determinations

18. Were eligibility workers able to use the State eligibility system to help determine D-SNAP eligibility?
 - a. *[If no]* Why were you unable to use your eligibility system?
 - i. *[If not already answered]* What extra program integrity measures did you have in place to ensure there were no duplicate certifications?
 - b. Were any other systems used to operate D-SNAP?
 - c. What were the challenges or best practices associated with this approach?

19. What was the average wait time between verification and eligibility determination?
20. How often did staff need to delay eligibility determination because of a questionable application?

d. Issuance

21. Once the application was completed, how were benefits issued to D-SNAP clients?
22. Did any sites run out of EBT cards? If yes, what happened then?
23. Were there any challenges associated with card activation? If so, what were they?
24. How were the cards stored at each of the sites we will be visiting?
 - a. Are there any general EBT card storage best practices that are common across all D-SNAP sites? Please describe.
25. For current SNAP participants who received a supplement, was it issued automatically, or was an affidavit required? *[Probe for the process for receiving a supplement]*
26. D-SNAP benefits are issued within 72 hours of application. Was *[State]* able to meet this requirement for all applications, except in cases of delayed issuance for questionable applications?
 - a. If no, what prevented *[State]* from meeting this timeframe? *[Probe for: delays in data entry, lack of EBT cards]*

e. Other

27. Thinking about the entire D-SNAP application process, including site selection and staffing, what would you say were your lessons learned for addressing and avoiding operational challenges?

F. D-SNAP Public Awareness Campaigns

Next, let's discuss how your State informed the public about *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*.

1. How was the public informed about D-SNAP? *[Probe for: TV and radio ads, community-based organization (CBO) engagement, social media use. Ask for hardcopy or electronic promotional materials, if not already received.]*
 - a. What stakeholders did you work with to inform the public? *[Probe for: media outlets, CBOs, emergency management agency]*
 - i. What was the role of each stakeholder during *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*?
2. In your opinion, was the public information campaign successful? Why or why not? *[Probe for: timing of outreach relative to beginning of D-SNAP operations, sufficient reach, use of mediums commonly consumed by D-SNAP eligible clients, partnerships with local media companies]*
 - a. What would you do similarly if another disaster strikes?

- b. What would you do differently?

G. Program Integrity

Now I would like to discuss D-SNAP program integrity measures and challenges.

1. What are the key program integrity challenges that are unique to operating D-SNAP?
 - a. Which of these challenges did you encounter during *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*? How did you address them?
2. What fraud prevention or program integrity methods did your State use? *[Probe for: maps to verify residency in an affected area, income matches, or delaying benefits; separation of certification and issuance duties; checks for duplicate participation]*
 - a. Which of these strategies would you say worked particularly well for ensuring program integrity? Why?
 - b. Would you do anything differently in a future D-SNAP? If so, what?
3. *[If not already answered]* How did you maintain separation between eligibility and card issuance duties during D-SNAP? *[Request any schematics of the site that show a separation between the two]*
4. How did you ensure D-SNAP operated in accordance with the approved request? *[Probe for: staff training, onsite support, guidance from FNS National Office and/or Regional Office]*
5. Please describe your case review process.
 - a. How did you select cases for review? *[Probe for: review of State employee cases]*
 - b. How were cases reviewed? By whom? When?
6. What types of case errors did you commonly encounter?
 - a. What efforts were put into place to minimize these errors for future D-SNAPs?
7. Did *[selected D-SNAP(s)]* result in any fraud cases?
 - a. If so, how did your State handle these cases?
 - b. How did the fraud occur?

H. Closeout and Reporting

Next, let's discuss D-SNAP closeout and reporting.

1. What steps did your staff take to close out D-SNAP?
2. What procedures does your State use for meeting the reporting requirements?
 - a. For *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*, did the procedures you used align with those listed in your annual D-SNAP plan? Why or why not?

3. What challenges did you face in meeting the reporting requirements? How did you address these challenges?

I. Wrap-Up: Day 1

Thank you for answering our questions. As a reminder, we will be conducting another interview with you on [date, time] to discuss D-SNAP challenges, successes, and lessons learned, and to follow up on any outstanding questions that came up during the other portions of our site visit.

In the meantime, I would like to ask you a couple of questions to wrap up today's discussion.

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about D-SNAP plan development, implementation, or operations?
2. Is there anything we should have asked you about these topics but didn't?

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

Wrap-Up Discussion: Day 4

Thank you for meeting with us again today. For the last 2 days, we have met with staff at local SNAP offices, seen the D-SNAP sites and areas affected by the disaster, and interviewed stakeholders such as [insert stakeholders here]. During this portion of our interview, we would like to talk about D-SNAP challenges, successes, and lessons learned. We will also follow up on some questions that came up during the other portions of our site visit. I expect today's conversation will last about 1 hour. Similar to earlier this week, I would like to record our conversation to help us remember the information we collect. Do I have your permission to record the conversation? You may stop the recording at any time.

[Confirm permission before recording starts.]

J. Background: Day 4

[Facilitator note: Ask the following questions of any new staff present during today's interview who were not present or available on day 1, such as staff who are joining the discussion to specifically address civil rights or IT-related follow-up questions.]

I'd like to learn about your role and responsibilities at the [State] SNAP office.

1. What is your current job title or position?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. What are your primary responsibilities?
4. What was your role in [selected D-SNAP(s)]?

K. Challenges, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned

During our first conversation, we touched upon several challenges and lessons learned associated with planning and implementing D-SNAP. Today, I would like to step back and focus on the key challenges you have encountered, and lessons learned in D-SNAP planning and operations, as well as the most significant best practices you would like to share with other States.

1. First, can you please describe how your approach to D-SNAP planning and implementation has evolved over time?
 - a. What has worked particularly well over the years? Why?
 - b. What aspects of D-SNAP planning and operations have you improved on over time?
 - i. What were the problem areas or bottlenecks in past disasters?
 - ii. What strategies have been helpful in addressing these problem areas or bottlenecks? Why?
 - iii. What strategies have you tried that were less than successful? Why do you think these strategies were not successful?

2. What worked particularly well during *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*?
 - a. What do you think helped facilitate this success? *[Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity, advance planning, guidance from FNS]*
 - b. If you could link one aspect of your State's approach to D-SNAP planning and implementation that contributed most to the success of *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*, what would it be? Why?
3. Other than *[list some challenges described during the day 1 interview]*, what challenges has your office encountered in implementing *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*? *[Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity, advance planning]*
 - a. How were they addressed?
 - b. What would you do differently in future D-SNAPs?
 - c. What would you say were the top three challenges associated with implementing *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*?
4. What are the key lessons your State has learned from implementing *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*? *[Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity, advance planning, or other lessons learned abstracted from the post-disaster report]*
 - a. Were any changes made to your annual plan after *[selected D-SNAP(s)]* as a result of your experience? *[Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity]*
5. *[If the State has responded to multiple types of disasters]* How have your response and D-SNAP operations differed by the type of disaster (e.g., a tornado versus a hurricane, flooding versus a winter storm)?
 - a. What are some lessons your State has learned from operating and implementing D-SNAPs for different types of disasters?
6. Thinking about your experiences with D-SNAP, what are the top three best practices related to D-SNAP planning that your State has identified?
 - a. What are the most important best practices related to D-SNAP implementation that you have identified? How about operations? Reporting?
 - b.

L. Wrap-Up: Day 4

Facilitator note: Follow up on new, unclear, or inconsistent information obtained during the local site visit discussions or observations. For example, if during the initial State interview, the State staff indicated the D-SNAP site was compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act, but the site observation did not support this assessment, the site visitors would be able to follow up with State civil rights staff during the wrap-up interview. The team may similarly request to speak with IT staff familiar with the D-SNAP system to probe for details about system-related challenges or the launch of the new D-SNAP system to obtain information about best practices.

[Placeholder for additional State-specific follow-up questions. Fill in further questions as needed.]

1. Question 1
2. Question 2
3. Question 3

Thank you for answering our questions.

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about D-SNAP planning, implementation, operations, or reporting?
2. Is there anything we should have asked you about these topics but didn't?
3. May we follow up with you by email or phone if we have further questions?

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