Attachment G.2. Final Local Office Staff Group Interview Protocol

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

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Final Local Office Staff Group 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.]

I expect our conversation 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?

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

[Confirm permission before recording starts.]

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

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.

A. Background

I'd like to learn about your role and responsibilities at the *[local]* 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)]*?

    a. [*If needed for clarification*] Were you [current position] during *[selected D-SNAP(s)]* or other D-SNAP(s)?

        i. [*If they were not in the position*] Please describe your positions during *[selected D-SNAP(s)]* or other D-SNAP(s)?

B. D-SNAP Planning and Needs Assessment

First, I would like to learn more about your office's plans and preparations for D-SNAP.

1. At the time of the D-SNAP, how familiar were you with your State's D-SNAP plan?

    a. What information does *[State]* typically include in the D-SNAP plan?

    b. What types of disasters does *[State]* plan for?

2. What, if any, training do you receive in preparation for D-SNAP?

    a. What types of training do you receive? When? What does the training cover?

    b. How often do these trainings occur?

    c. How do you decide which staff will participate in the training(s)?

    d. How useful do you find the training(s)?

    e. How could the training(s) be improved?

3. What training did you receive in preparation for *[selected D-SNAP(s)]* in particular? When? How?

4. Are you involved in the D-SNAP needs assessment process? If so, please describe any roles you have in providing information for the needs assessment.

C. D-SNAP Site Selection and Staffing

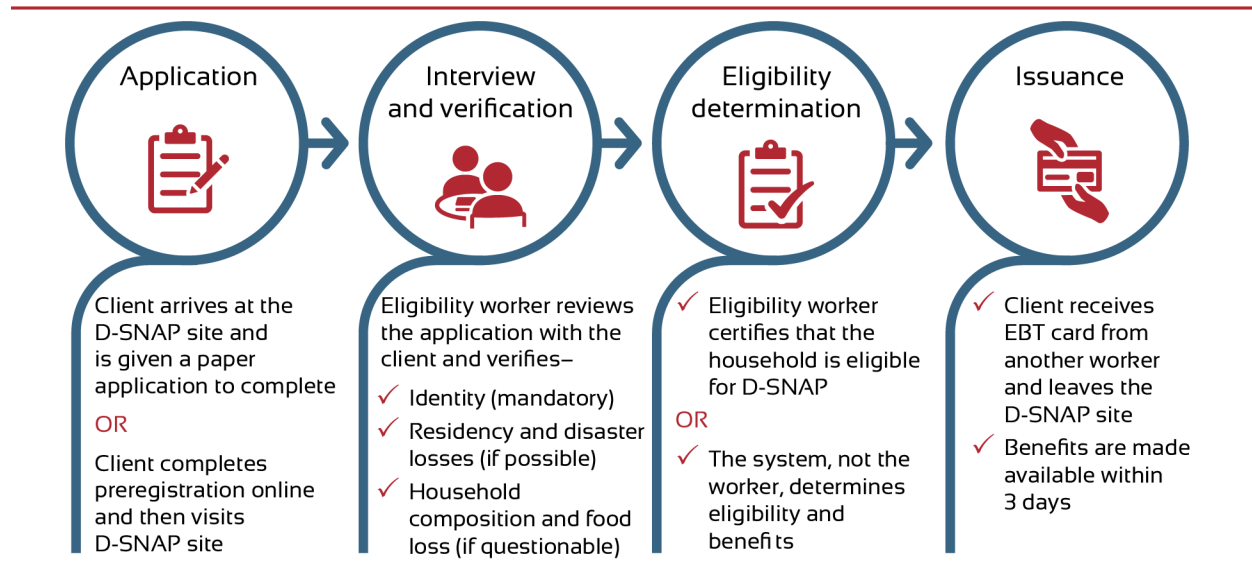Let's turn to site selection and staffing for the *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*.

1. For *[selected D-SNAP(s)]*, at which site(s) did you work?

    a. [*If D-SNAP site was the local office*] What are some advantages and disadvantages of using the local office as the D-SNAP site?

2. Tell me more about the *[site name]* site:

   a. What was the site like? *[Request any signage, flow charts, or other diagrams of the site.]*

   b. How did you ensure there was power and internet connectivity at the site?

      [Probe for: use of generators, internet set-up/capabilities]

   c. How did you ensure crowd control at the site?

   d. Did lingering damage from the disaster (e.g., road closures) affect the site at all? If so, how was the site affected?

   e. Was the site an appropriate size? Why or why not?

   f. Who staffed the D-SNAP site?

      i. Were local office staff personally affected by the disaster? If yes, how did that affect site staffing?

   g. Were staff from other State agencies involved? If yes:

      i. How many were involved?

      ii. How were merit staff and staff from other State agencies mobilized?

      iii. What were the roles of these staff?

   h. Were temporary staff hired? If yes:

      i. How many were hired?

      ii. Please describe the hiring process for these staff.

      iii. What were the roles of these staff?

1. How were special populations (e.g., older individuals, people with disabilities or special needs, individuals needing assistance with language services) reached and served at the site? *[Probe for: wheelchair accessibility, seating, adequate shelter from elements, wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, accessible communication materials, adequate power, air conditioning, water, snacks, adequate number of bathrooms]*

   a. Did you experience any issues or problems with this site related to these accommodations?

2. *[If not already answered]* What were the challenges associated with using this site for D-SNAP? *[Probe for: too small, poor traffic flow, not enough seating, limited parking, poor crowd control]*

3. *[If not already answered]* We have discussed the following challenges associated with the site, *[list some challenges]*. How were those challenges addressed?

4. What aspects of the site 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]*

5. Would you recommend using this site for a future D-SNAP? Why or why not?

D. 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

Application

Client arrives at the D-SNAP site and is given a paper application to complete

OR

Client completes preregistration online and then visits D-SNAP site

Interview and verification

Eligibility worker reviews the application with the client and verifies—

✓ Identity (mandatory)
✓ Residency and disaster losses (if possible)
✓ Household composition and food loss (if questionable)

Eligibility determination

✓ Eligibility worker certifies that the household is eligible for D-SNAP

OR

✓ The system, not the worker, determines eligibility and benefits

Issuance

✓ Client receives EBT card from another worker and leaves the D-SNAP site
✓ Benefits are made available within 3 days

a. Arrival and Application

1. When a client arrives at the D-SNAP site, what happens first?

If the State uses paper applications distributed on site:

2. How were applications distributed?

3. Where did clients complete their D-SNAP applications?

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 application, what came next?

If the State uses online preregistration:

7. How did you 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?

10. What additional information did the caseworker request that was not included on the preregistration form?

b. Interview and Verification

1. Who conducted the interview?

2. On average, how long did a client wait for an interview after arriving on site?

3. Can you walk me through how you review the D-SNAP application with a client?

4. How did you verify applicants' eligibility?

   a. What documents did you use?

   b. Were any data matches conducted?

5. How did you check for duplicate participation?

6. To your knowledge, were most clients who came to the site interviewed the same day? Why or why not?

c. Eligibility Determinations

7. Were eligibility workers able to use the State eligibility system to help determine D-SNAP eligibility?

If no:

   a. Why were you unable to use your eligibility system?

   b. What were the challenges associated with this approach? How were those challenges addressed?

   c. What worked particularly well about this approach?

   d. What extra program integrity measures did you have in place to ensure there were no duplicate certifications?

If yes:

   a. What eligibility system(s) did your State use to conduct D-SNAP?

   b. What were the challenges associated with this approach? How were those challenges addressed?

   c. What worked particularly well about this approach?

8. What was the average wait time between verification and eligibility determination?

9. How frequently did you encounter questionable cases?

10. How did you handle questionable cases?

   a. *[If the eligibility worker handled the case themselves]* How often did you need to delay an eligibility determination because of a questionable application?

d. Issuance

11. Once the application was completed, how were benefits issued to D-SNAP clients?

12. Please describe your role in tracking the site's EBT card inventory, including tracking new cards received, total cards available, and cards issued. *[Probe for: EBT card log, reporting daily usage, including EBT card number on application]*

13. Did the site receive a sufficient number of EBT cards from the State?

    a. *If no:* Did you run out? If so, what happened when you ran out?

14. Were there any challenges associated with card activation? If so, what were they?

15. How were cards stored?

e. Process Reflection

16. Thinking about the entire D-SNAP application process from start to finish, including site selection and staffing, what would you say worked particularly well for this site?

17. What would you say was challenging or problematic with the D-SNAP application process? How, if at all, were these challenges addressed?

E. D-SNAP Public Awareness Campaigns

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

1. Was your office involved in helping to inform the public about D-SNAP? If so, how?

2. What did you hear from participants about how they heard about D-SNAP?

3. In your opinion, was the public information campaign successful? Why or why not?

[Ask E.3.a and E.3.b only if respondents answered yes to E.1]

    a. What would you do similarly if another disaster strikes?

    b. What would you do differently?

F. Program Integrity

Now let's discuss D-SNAP program integrity measures and challenges.

1. What fraud prevention or program integrity methods did your office 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?

2. [*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*]

3. Was your office involved with the postdisaster case review process? If so:

   a. How did you select cases for review?

   b. How were cases reviewed? By whom? When?

4. [*If involved*] What types of case errors did you commonly encounter?

   a. What efforts were put into place to minimize these errors for future D-SNAPs?

G. Closeout and Reporting

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

1. Did you submit any regular reporting during the D-SNAP? *If yes:*

   a. What information did you submit in these reports?

   b. Who else was involved in reporting?

   c. Who were the reports submitted to?

   d. How frequently were the reports submitted?

[*Interviewer instructions: If the answer to G.1 is no, skip to question G.5*]

2. How were the necessary data for reporting tracked before, during, and after D-SNAP?

3. What challenges, if any, did you face in submitting the required reports for [*selected D-SNAP(s)*]?

   a. How were those challenges addressed?

4. What worked particularly well for completing the required reports?

5. Were you involved in D-SNAP closeout? [*If needed: This includes organizing site files and documents, reconciling all issuance records, taking final inventory of EBT cards, taking final inventory of equipment, completing time sheets*]

   a. *If yes:* What steps did your site take to close out D-SNAP? Can you walk me through these steps?

H. Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Finally, I would like to discuss any further successes and challenges, that we have not yet touched upon in our conversation.

1. What would you say worked particularly well during [*selected D-SNAP(s)*]?

   a. What do you think helped facilitate this? [*Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity*]

2. What challenges did your office encounter in implementing [selected D-SNAP(s)]? [Probe for: technology, role of partners, communication protocols, site selection or location, program integrity, site staff working conditions or accommodations]

    a. How were these challenges addressed?

    b. What would you do differently in future D-SNAPs?

3. *[If the State has responded to multiple types of disasters]* How has your response and D-SNAP operations differed by the type of disaster (e.g., a tornado versus a hurricane, flooding versus a winter storm)?

I. Wrap-Up

Thank you for answering our questions. We have a few final questions before we conclude our discussion today.

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about D-SNAP plan development, 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.