

Attachment Q. Use of Tokens of Appreciation for Former Staff

OMB No. 0584-[NEW]

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

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Use of Tokens of Appreciation for Former Staff

Former State, county, and local employees who worked for the State, county, or local SNAP office during the time of the disaster but have since left their positions will be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview to provide critical information about D-SNAP planning and operations during the selected disaster. Participants who complete an interview for this study will receive a token of appreciation in the form of a \$30 gift card. The tokens of appreciation for interview respondents will help ensure these necessary individuals, who have critical information to share about D-SNAP planning and operations, are able to participate in the study by helping to reduce their burden of participation. Because the perspectives of these staff on the relevant D-SNAPs may be critical to the success of the study, particularly to assess the implementation and operation of D-SNAP for the selected disasters (Objective 1), ensuring their participation will improve data quality and decrease the rate of nonresponse.

A. Evidence Supporting the Use of Tokens of Appreciation

This section provides evidence supporting the use of tokens of appreciation based on independent research.

1. Reducing Nonresponse Bias

Low response rates are problematic because they can lead to increased nonresponse bias (Groves et al., 2006). This is a particularly salient issue for this study. Nonresponse from a key staff person could hamper the analysis in two ways. First, if the study team is unable to learn important details of D-SNAP planning and operations, this could limit the extent to which the team would be able to assess the implementation and operations of D-SNAP for the selected disaster (Objective 1). Second, missing information could bias the determination of best practices for developing annual disaster plans (Objective 4) and for implementing and operating a D-SNAP (Objective 5). Tokens of appreciation can help reduce efforts to recruit study participants and thereby lower the amount of time needed to recruit the necessary respondents without affecting data quality (Dillman, 2000; Singer, 2006). Mercer and colleagues' (2015) meta-analysis estimated surveys that promised a \$10 token of appreciation generated response rates 5 percentage points higher than surveys that offered no such incentive. Tokens of appreciation can also improve sample representativeness and reduce nonresponse bias (Groves et al., 2000; Messer & Dillman, 2011) by encouraging those less interested in research to participate (Groves et al., 2006; Singer & Kulka, 2002).

2. Improving Data Quality

A token of appreciation is essential to ensuring the relevant former staff participate in the study and share their critical perspectives on D-SNAP operations for the selected disaster(s). Response rates for research have declined in recent years (Brick & Williams, 2013; Curtin et al., 2005), and offering tokens of appreciation is an effective method for improving response rates without compromising the quality of the data (Singer & Ye, 2013). The knowledge that respondents will be compensated to complete a survey is expected to increase their likelihood of spending the time to respond. For example, Mercer and colleagues (2015) recently conducted a meta-analysis of the dose-response association between tokens of appreciation and response and found a positive relationship between tokens of appreciation with a

greater monetary value and response rates for household telephone surveys offering tokens of appreciation.

3. Reducing Respondent Burden

Tokens of appreciation reduce respondent burden because they help offset costs associated with participating in the interview (Lavrakas, 2008). For example, a token of appreciation can offset costs such as childcare that may be needed while respondents complete the interview, travel to the interview site if the interview is held in person, cell phone and data usage costs associated with recruitment and scheduling, and/or cell phone and data usage costs for the interview itself if it is conducted by telephone. The token of appreciation is also offered because of the “opportunity cost” associated with participation; respondents may need to forgo other sources of income as a consequence of participating in the interview (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections, Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections, 2019).

B. Past OMB-Approved Studies Using Tokens of Appreciation

The study team proposes providing a \$30 token of appreciation to respondents who complete the 60-minute in-person or telephone interview, an amount based on tokens of appreciation that were approved for similar data collections in recent studies with similar burden.

- ▶ The Evaluation of the Pilot Project for Canned, Frozen, or Dried Fruits and Vegetables in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for FNS (OMB Control Number 0584-0598) offered community members a \$50 token of appreciation to complete a 1-hour telephone interview.
- ▶ The Assessment of the Barriers that Constrain the Adequacy of SNAP Allotments (OMB Control Number 0584-0631) offered SNAP participants a \$75 token of appreciation to complete a 1-hour in-person interview in their homes.
- ▶ The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study (OMB Control Number 0970-0493) offered parents a \$30 token of appreciation to complete a 1-hour interview.
- ▶ The Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low Income Families (OMB Control Number 0970-0537) offered respondents a \$50 token of appreciation to participate in a 90-minute interview.
- ▶ The Evaluation of SNAP Employment and Training Pilots (OMB Control Number 0584-0604) offered participants a \$50 token of appreciation to complete a 90-minute interview.
- ▶ The Family Options Study (OMB Control Number 2528-0259) offered participants a \$50 token of appreciation to complete a 60-minute survey.

The tokens of appreciation for the current study will be offered equally to all former State, county, or local staff who are recruited to participate in an interview. The tokens of appreciation will not be targeted to specific subgroups, nor will they be used to convert refusals. The tokens of appreciation will either be mailed to respondents after they complete the telephone interview or given to respondents at the end of the in-person interview.

C. Conclusion

The planned tokens of appreciation for former State, county, or local staff are designed to promote cooperation and improve data quality by minimizing nonresponse bias. While other strategies for limiting nonresponse will also be used, such as utilizing several outreach attempts, communicating the importance of the study, or asking current State agency staff to facilitate an introduction when possible, tokens of appreciation are critical to ensuring the participation of key former staff. Without the participation of these former staff, the analysis and determination of best practices for D-SNAP planning and operations may be severely hampered, and three of the five objectives of the study may not be sufficiently met.

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