

Appendix E.1. In-Depth Interview Protocol in English

Thanks very much for agreeing to speak with us. My name is _____. I am working on a study for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA. USDA funds the Nutrition Assistance Program for Puerto Rico (NAP)/Programa de Asistencia Nutricional (PAN). We are talking with people like you to find out how USDA and the Administration of Socio-Economic Development of the Family (ADSEF) can improve programs and services available to people in Puerto Rico.

Risks and privacy

Some of the interview questions are potentially sensitive, but your answers will be kept private. We will combine all responses and report them as overall findings. These findings may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. No interview respondents can be identified from the information we share.

Participation in the interview will have no effect on any benefits you might receive from ADSEF.

Study costs and compensation

There is no cost to you to participate, apart from the time you spend in this interview. We expect the interview to take about 60 minutes.

As a thank-you for your time today, you will receive \$50 through a cash app or prepaid gift card after the interview.

Your participation can help improve programs designed to promote health and well-being among Puerto Rico residents.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. We hope you will respond, but you may skip a question or discontinue the interview at any time.

If it's okay with you, I would like to record this interview to make sure I do not miss anything.

- ▶ Do you have any questions?
- ▶ Do I have your consent to proceed with our interview?
- ▶ Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

[Interviewer note: If permission to record is not given, proceed with the interview. In this case, it is essential that the interviewer take extensive notes, capturing as much detail as possible.]

Public Burden Statement

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in understanding food security status and economic well-being among Puerto Rico residents. This is a voluntary collection. FNS will use the information as a baseline for future assessments of food security and the Nutrition Assistance Program, particularly in the context of natural disasters. This collection requests personally identifiable information under the Privacy Act of 1974. 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 60 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions 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: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 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

Authority: Section 105 of the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019, P.L. 116-20, authorizes collection of the information on this application.

Purpose: Information is collected primarily for use by the Food and Nutrition Service in the administration of the Nutrition Assistance Program.

Routine Use: Information may be disclosed for any of the routine uses listed in the published System of Record notice titled FNS-8 USDA/FNS Studies and Reports published in the *Federal Register* April 25, 1991, Volume 56, Number 80 (pages 19078-19080).

Disclosure: Furnishing the information on this form is voluntary. There are no penalties for nonresponse.

A. You and Your Household

I'd like to start by getting to know you a little better, so I want to ask a few questions about you and where you live.

1. Please tell me about where you live and who lives with you.
 - a. Probe for parents/grandparents/guardians; brothers and sisters; aunts and uncles; cousins; other people who are considered family; others
 - Among the people you just mentioned, who is under 18? [Probe for approximate ages; for example, infants, toddlers, children under 13, teenagers]
 - Who is 18 or older?
 - Who is close to 60 or older?
 - [If there are children in the household] Who takes care of the children most of the time?
 - Does anyone else in the household need caretaking? Who takes care of that person?
 - b. How would you describe your neighborhood?
 - How easy is it to get around?
 - [If interview is conducted outside the person's home:] Do you live in a city, suburb, or rural area?
 - How would you describe housing in the neighborhood where you live now? [Probe: For example, are there many apartment buildings, mostly single-family homes, or are there other types of housing?]
 - c. Some people feel very connected to their neighborhood and spend time chatting or doing things with their neighbors. Other people prefer to keep to themselves. How about you?
 - [If interviewee interacts with neighbors:] What do you do with your neighbors? [Probe: casual conversation, helping out, sharing meals, celebrating events]

B. Community Food Needs

Next, I want to ask about food needs in your community.

2. Do you think households in your community run low on food or worry about having enough food?

[If YES:]

 - a. How common is that? Who is most likely to be affected? [Probe if necessary: Does it depend on things like where a person lives in the community, or who lives with them? Does it tend to be more common among households with older or younger adults, single parents, multigenerational households?]
 - b. What do you think are the main reasons people might worry about food? [Probe if necessary: For example, is it about having enough money to buy food, not having any money for food, not having a way to get to the store, or stores running out of the foods people want to buy?]
 - c. What could be done to improve the problem (of some households not having enough food)?

C. Meeting Family Food Needs

The next questions are about shopping for food. We are trying to understand food shopping habits.

3. Where do you usually shop for food? [*Probe for type of store, multiple stores*]
 - a. Why do you usually go to [place]?
4. How often do you shop for food?
 - a. Why do you shop that often (or not often)? [*Probe for availability of money to purchase food, transportation, food storage, availability of stores or food in the stores*]
5. Do any other members of your household shop for food?
 - a. [*If YES:*] Where and how often?
6. You mentioned a few places where you go to shop for food. Are there any food stores or markets nearby that you don't shop at?
 - a. [*If YES:*] What are the reasons you don't shop at these places?
7. How do you decide what to buy when shopping for food?
 - a. What strategies do you use to buy groceries for your family? Some people make a food budget or shopping list, check store ads for sales, shop at stores with the lowest price, buy store brands or the lowest cost brand, buy food in bulk, or use coupons or store rewards cards.
8. Do you get food regularly from somewhere else, other than the grocery store? For example, do you grow any food at home, hunt or fish, go to farmer's markets, or belong to a food co-op?
 - a. [*If YES:*] Which sources and how often do you get food from those sources? How important is this for your food budget? Is it important all year round or at certain times of the year?
9. Are there people whom you help with meals and food regularly who do not live in your household?
 - a. [*If YES: Probe for examples of the type of help provided (e.g., meals at respondent's home, groceries, money for food), to whom (relationship), and how frequently.*]
10. Are there people who regularly help you or your household with meals or food?
 - a. [*If YES: Probe for examples of the type of help provided (e.g., meals at respondent's home, groceries, money for food), to whom (relationship), and how frequently.*]
 - b. How important is this help to your food budget?
11. Have there been times recently when you did not have enough food or were worried about how to stretch your food dollars?

[*If YES:*]

 - Is this something you worry about pretty regularly, or does it tend to happen at certain times, like at the end of the month or certain times of the year? Why? Does something else

- happen regularly that causes you to run low on food or worry about it? [*Probe: medical emergencies, large bills, helping family members with their needs, changes in job status*]
- What things did you do to make your grocery budget go further? [*Probe: Ask family or friends for help, ration food or skip meals, get help from food bank, buy groceries using money set aside for other things, buy food on credit, etc.*]
12. What kinds of things have you heard other people are doing to stretch their food budget?
13. Do you know of places you could go or other kinds of help you could get if you were worried about not having enough money for food? [*Probe: other food support program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, other family member, child support, food pantries*]
- a. Have you gotten any of these kinds of help?
 - i. [*If YES:*] What kind of help and what was the result?
14. What are the most important things that have helped you get by during difficult times?

D. Life Events and Coping With Challenges

Thank you for sharing all that. My next questions are about coping with hardships, like hurricanes, earthquakes, drought, or other natural disasters. Please think about the most recent disaster you experienced while living in Puerto Rico. Because I will be asking you several questions about that event, it should be something that you remember well. It might be helpful to think of an event that occurred over this past year.

[*Note to interviewer: Verify that the event occurred while the interviewee was in Puerto Rico. If the interviewee was not living in Puerto Rico when the last disaster occurred, ask them to focus on an event that affected Puerto Rico while they were living there.*]

15. What is the event you are thinking about?
- What do you remember about [the event]? [*Interviewer note: Refer to the event in the respondent's own words, e.g., Hurricane XYZ*] [*Interviewer: Gather information about what happened, when and where it happened, about how many households or communities were affected, and what kinds of damage it caused.*]
- a. How did it affect you? Your family? Your community?
 - b. How did [the event] affect your daily life, such as going to work or school or going to the store?
 - c. What did you worry about most?
 - Probes: Being out of work? Having enough food? Kids missing school? Property damage? Personal safety?
 - d. What are some ways you managed to get through that difficult time? We are interested in all kinds of coping strategies, such as applying for financial assistance or getting support from family and friends.

- e. As far as you know, what types of government programs (such as NAP) or emergency relief programs were available at that time?
 - Overall, how helpful do you think those programs were in meeting people's needs?
 - Did you receive any emergency relief? If yes, in what ways was that assistance helpful to you? *[If interviewee reports receiving assistance but says it was not helpful in any way, probe for unintended consequences:]* In what ways, if any, did the assistance make things worse?

Sometimes people look to their neighbors and community for support after events like the one you described.

16. Overall, when you think about how you got through the challenges of [that event], what role, if any, did your neighborhood and community play?
 - a. What kinds of help, if any, did neighbors offer or ask for?
 - How common was it for neighbors to ask for support or offer support?
 - What about you? How did you feel about asking neighbors for help after the event?

Now I'd like to focus more specifically on how [that event] affected your food situation and the food situation of your community.

17. How did [the event] affect your access to food or ability to buy food?
[Probe: How did it change—]
 - a. Your food budget? *[Probe after each question: Was this change temporary or permanent?]*
 - b. Availability of foods for purchase? Or your ability to access foods?
 - c. Food prices?
 - d. Shopping habits?
 - e. Menu, meals, type of foods you were preparing and eating?
 - f. Ability to store and prepare food (gas, electricity)? Did you have food stored that you were not able to use?
18. What were some of the things you did to be able to feed your family?
 - a. *[For families with children:]* If schools were closed, did your food budget change while the children were not attending school? If so, how?

Next, we want to ask about COVID-19.

[Note to interviewer: Verify that the interviewee was in Puerto Rico during the pandemic.]

19. How, if at all, did COVID-19 affect your family's access to food or ability to buy food?
20. What are some ways you managed to get through that difficult time? We are interested in all kinds of coping strategies.

21. *[For families with children:]* If schools were closed, did your food budget change while the children were not attending school? If so, how?
22. As far as you know, what types of government programs (such as NAP) or emergency relief programs were available at that time?
 - a. Overall, how helpful do you think those programs were in meeting people's needs?
 - b. Did you receive any emergency relief? If yes, in what ways was that assistance helpful to you? *[If interviewee reports receiving assistance but says it was not helpful in any way, probe for unintended consequences:]* In what ways, if any, did the assistance make things worse?
23. What are the most important things that have helped you recover from hardships like [event described] or the COVID-19 pandemic?

You told our study staff previously you **[are/are not]** enrolled in NAP, Puerto Rico's food assistance program. Is this still correct?

[If enrolled, proceed to section E.]

[If not enrolled, proceed to section F.]

E. NAP Participation (for NAP Participants Only)

[Interviewer note: This section is only for NAP participants and people who confirmed NAP participation].

I'd like to talk about your participation in NAP.

24. Including you, who else is covered by your NAP benefits?
25. How long have you participated in NAP?
26. About how many weeks does your NAP benefit or food money typically last?
27. What affected your decision to enroll in NAP?
28. How easy or difficult was the decision to enroll? Why?
29. Please tell me about any times you stopped participating in NAP and later reenrolled.
 - a. Why did you stop participating?
 - b. What caused you to reenroll?
 - c. Was it easy or difficult to reenroll? Why?
30. In what ways has NAP been most helpful to you?
 - a. How could NAP better meet your needs?

31. What are some reasons people might choose not to apply for NAP, even if they are worried about having enough money to buy the kinds of foods they like to eat or having enough food to go around? [Probe: NAP rules, others need it more, application process]

F. Questions About NAP (for Nonparticipants Only)

[Interviewer note: For NAP participants, skip to section G.]

32. Have you or your family ever been enrolled in NAP?
- [If yes] Around what time in your life were you enrolled in NAP? [Interviewer: Mark on life grid]
 - [If yes] Tell me about what prompted you to enroll in NAP. Why did you discontinue?
33. Have you ever considered enrolling/reenrolling your family in NAP? Why or why not? [Probe if no: Under what circumstances would you consider enrolling?]
34. What are some reasons people might choose not to apply for NAP, even if they are worried about having enough money to buy the kinds of foods they like to eat or having enough food to go around? [Probe: NAP rules, others need it more, application process]
35. What would make it easier for people to participate? [Probe: Application process/help applying, NAP rules, family support]

G. Wrap-Up

Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to share with us about the topics we've discussed today?

36. Is there anything we did not ask about that you think is important for us to know?

Thank you so much for your time today. We understand how important it is to take time out of your busy schedule to talk about such important issues, so I want to thank you on behalf of our study team for your participation. Before I leave, I will make sure you have a copy of our frequently asked questions and \$50 through a cash app or prepaid gift card as a token of our appreciation for your help today. If you have any questions about today's interview, you may contact the person on this sheet of frequently asked questions.