

Attachment F.3 Parent/Caregiver Focus Group Interview Protocol

Evaluation of 2019-2022 Summer EBT Project

Parent/Caregiver Focus Groups

[Note to site visitors:] All questions should be posed to the group of participants, but not all participants should be expected to answer every question.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. My name is [lead visitor], and this is [second visitor]. We work for Abt Associates, a company hired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Food and Nutrition Service to do research on the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Demonstration Project, also known as Summer EBT. They have asked us to look into how well the project has been implemented and how participating families – like yours – experience Summer EBT.

Today we want to hear from you. We are really grateful that you are here with us today. We would like to ask you some questions, but before we begin, I'd like to go over a few things.

First, we want you to know that whatever you say to us will be private. That means, while we might use the information you provide, your names will never be revealed in any report or any discussion with anyone. Nothing you say here today will ever be connected with your name. There is a small risk of loss of privacy because we are in a group setting; however, we have several procedures in place to reduce this risk. We ask that everyone here today agree not to repeat what others in the group say during the conversation. The recordings and notes will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team except as otherwise required by law. After the evaluation is completed, we will delete the recording.

Second, there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in learning about your ideas, experiences and opinions.

Third, we know you have a lot of other things to do today, so we will try to keep the discussion to about one hour.

As a thank-you for your participation today, we will distribute a \$25 Visa gift card at the end of the discussion.

Last, if you have any questions or comments about this focus group, please refer to the document we gave you upon sign-in. It contains the contact information for where you can send those questions.

Now, I'd like to talk a bit about how we would like the group conversation to go today. First, we'd like to ask you to speak one at a time, in part so we can take accurate notes. We will make sure everyone gets a chance to speak. Second, please be respectful of each other's' opinions and experiences.

I want to be sure I am keeping track of everything you all say. May I record our discussion so that I can listen to it later when I write up my notes? No one outside of our research team will have access to the recording. [IF YES:] Thank you. [IF NO:] That's no problem. I'll take notes as you talk, but I may sometimes need to ask you to slow down or repeat so that I can get all the information. For participants joining virtually, please acknowledge (or withdraw) your consent at this time. Do you have any questions for me about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is conducting this study to obtain information about the experiences of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Project by grantees, retailers, school districts and participants. Participation in this study is voluntary and the information collected will be used to understand how Summer EBT projects are implemented in varying settings. This study does not collect personally identifiable information. Information collected in this study will be kept private to the full extent permitted by law. 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 0584-0524. The time required to provide this information collection is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather and maintain the data needed, and complete and review the collection of information. Send comments

A. INTRO

Ok. I'd like to start with some general questions about Summer EBT. Just to be clear, when we talk about Summer EBT, we're talking about the grant project that provides assistance with purchasing food for children during the summer, when school is out. Available benefits are provided on a specific Summer EBT card or may be provided as extra benefits on your existing SNAP card. **[Interviewer: the site may have a specific name for the project, e.g., Michigan calls their cards, "Bridge" cards.]** Does everyone understand what we're talking about?

A.1 How did you hear about Summer EBT?

Probe for: Child's school, community group, the [SNAP/WIC] agency [Note to interviewer, refer to either Debit Card or Food Package, depending on which model the grantee in that State/Tribal Nation uses.]

A.2 What kinds of information do families receive about Summer EBT? How is it shared?

Probe for: Email, text, flyers from school/grantee/agency

A.3 What do you think is the best way to reach out to potential participants? If you were in charge of Summer EBT, how would you make sure families knew they're eligible?

Probe for:

- a) Preferred mode of communication (phone call, text, email, paper mail, or in-person meeting)*
- b) Best time of day to reach someone with information about Summer EBT*
- c) Best time of year to receive information on Summer EBT*
- d) Best agency/organization to contact potential participants - schools?*

A.4 What is your understanding of how people could become eligible for Summer EBT?

Probe for:

- a) Children could participate in school meals*
- b) Family could participate in SNAP/WIC*
- c) Family or child could participate in other programs.*

A.5 What information would be helpful for parents/caregivers to have, before using the Summer EBT card?

Probe for:

- a) How to use the card*
- b) What the project is about*
- c) Who is eligible*
- d) Who to contact for help*
- e) Which foods to buy with the card (if **Food Package** site)*

- f) *Sizes of foods to buy with the card (if **Food Package** site)*

B. PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Project Perceptions

Now I'd like to ask a few questions about experiences with Summer EBT.

B.1 In general, how important is the Summer EBT for helping your family to access healthy foods?

B.1b If Summer EBT did not exist, how would your family access food/what would they do? What has your family done in the past?

B.2 Besides Summer EBT, what other types of nutrition or food programs does your family/children participate in during the summer months?

Probe for:

- a) *Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) [Describe SFSP if necessary.]*
- b) *Accessible SFSP sites in the community*
- c) *Community use of meals at those sites*
- d) *Food banks where your family receives food/meals*
- e) *Churches where your family and/or children receive meals*
- f) *Summer camps where children receive meals*
- g) *Libraries where families receive meals or food*

[If households also participate in SFSP or another summer meal program, ask B.2b and B.3. Otherwise, skip to B.4]

B.2b What is the best way for children to get summer nutrition assistance?

Probe for:

- a) *Program identified above*
- b) *Summer EBT*
- c) *Other program or other way*

B.3 Why do you think families participate in other food or nutrition programs?

Probe for:

- a) *SFSP program is closer and easier*
- b) *Children go to the site for activities*
- c) *Children go the site for camp or childcare*
- d) *Children go to the site because their friends go*

e) *Community members are more familiar with them*

Ok, now I'd like to get back to experiences with Summer EBT.

B.4 What do people in the community think about Summer EBT?

Probe for:

- a) *Using benefits to buy healthy foods for children*
- b) *Using benefits to buy other types of foods*

B.5 How easy is it for families to participate in Summer EBT?

B.6 If you were in charge of Summer EBT, what would you change about it?

Support for Participants

B.7 What kinds of educational materials did you receive about nutrition, as a result of participating in Summer EBT?

Probe for:

- a) *Referral to a website with nutrition education.*
- b) *Handouts that accompanied benefit cards.*
- c) *Newsletters*
- d) *Recipes for healthy meals*

B.8 What types of information would be most helpful for participants?

B.9 What type of training is available for families on how to use benefit cards to buy foods through Summer EBT?

Probe for:

- a) *Who/which program offered training*
- b) *When training offered*
- c) *What was involved in training*
- d) *In-person training available*
- e) *Home visits from agency representatives or other trainers*
- f) *Online training, including YouTube videos*

B.10 Which trainings did you participate in?

B.11 If you did not participate in any training, why not?

B.12 What was helpful about the trainings? Were there any challenges to participating in the trainings?

B.13 What type of customer support or assistance is offered by the project if people have problems using their Summer EBT card? Which ones were most useful?

Probe for:

- a) *What does it look like?*
- b) *Customer service hotline*

B.15 If you did not use the customer support or assistance, please describe why you didn't use it.

B.16 Is there other support from Summer EBT that would be useful for participating families?

Probe for:

- a) *Reminders to use benefits*
- b) *Mobile Apps*
- c) *Explanation of benefits*
- d) *Assistance with how to use the card*
- e) *Assistance with finding food items in package (if **Food Package** site)*

B. 17 What is the best way to get reminders about using benefits?

Probe for:

- a) *Text*
- b) *Email*
- c) *Phone*

Benefit Use

B.18 What kinds of difficulties did your family have in getting your benefits or benefit card?

Probe for:

- a) *School sent information to the wrong address*
- b) *Never saw the fliers*
- c) *School/grantee/agency had the wrong number of children in their household*
- d) *Information or benefits were sent to the wrong parent*
- e) *Card did not work*
- f) *Received no information on how to use the card*

B.19 Does your family use all your Summer EBT benefits? *If no, then share:* Our analyses have found that **some families** do not use the benefit cards at all. What prevents your family from using the benefit card? Why do you think some families don't use their benefits?

- a) *Amounts of benefits*
- b) *Lack of access to retailers*
- c) *Stigma*
- d) *Difficulty of use*
- e) *Lack of foods available at retailer (if **Food Package** site)*

B.20 Our analyses show **some families** use their benefit card at the beginning of the summer rather than at the end. Why do you think that is?

B.21 We know **some families** do not use all the money on their benefit cards every month. What do you think might be reasons for that?

Probe for:

- a) *Amounts of benefits*
- b) *Lack of access to retailers*
- c) *Stigma*
- d) *Difficulty of use*
- e) *Lack of foods available at retailer (if **Food Package** site)*

B.22 What would make it easier for families like yours to spend all of the money on the card?

Probe for:

- a) *Quality of customer service support from grantee/agency/retailer*
- b) *Reminders from retailers/grocery stores*
- c) *Information on which foods to buy with the card from grantee/retailer (if **Food Package** site)*
- d) *Information on sizes of foods to buy with the card from grantee/retailer (if **Food Package** site)*

*(For **Food Package** sites only)*

B.23 What foods does your family buy the most of with your benefit card?

B.24 What foods does your family not usually buy each month with the benefit card? Why?

Probe for:

- a) *Lack of available foods at retailer*
- b) *Child does not like the foods*
- c) *Lack of understanding of size of foods available*

- d) *Run out of benefits*
 - e) *Reminders from retailers/grocery stores*
- B.25 Are there other foods you would like to see instead of those offered in the food package? What are those?
- B.26 Many Summer EBT families do not spend all of the money they have for fresh fruits and vegetables. Why is that?
Probe for:
- a) *Lack of available foods at retailer*
 - b) *Poor quality of foods*
 - c) *Child/family does not like the foods*
 - d) *Only offered fresh and go bad too quickly*
 - e) *Not familiar with the foods, don't know how to cook/prepare them*

Project Recommendations

- B.27 If you were in charge of Summer EBT and could change one thing to improve Summer EBT, what would it be?
- B.28 When you think about participating in Summer EBT, what are some things that might affect your decision to have your child participate again next summer?
- B.29. Would you recommend Summer EBT to other families who are thinking of participating? Why or why not?

CLOSING

- C.1 Is there anything you think is important for FNS to know about your family or families like yours who use the Summer EBT card this summer? , or potential families, in the [State/Tribal Nation]'s [Summer EBT Name] that we did not ask about?

Thank you for your time and helpful feedback. Are there any questions for me before we finish?

END OF INTERVIEW