

Appendix **F1. Participant Focus Group Discussion Guide**

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Rapid cycle evaluation of operational improvements in SNAP E&T: Participant focus group discussion guide

Overview and guidelines for the discussion

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are from Mathematica, an independent research firm, and we are here to learn about your experiences with the [SNAP E&T Program Name]. My name is [NAME] and my colleague is [NAME]. We do not work for the SNAP [name of State program] agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or another governmental agency.

- Before we start, I want to discuss the guidelines for today's discussion. Your participation today is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can leave at any time. At the end of the session, you will receive a \$50 Visa gift card.
- What you say in this room will be considered private. We will summarize what we talk about today and put it together with information that we will gather from other groups like this. Nothing you say will ever be linked to your name. All confidential information will be stored safely and destroyed at the end of the study. Also, nothing you say will affect your eligibility for SNAP, [SNAP E&T Program Name] or any other programs.
- Today we are interested in hearing from you about [SNAP E&T Program Name], the SNAP Employment & Training program that is available to people who participate in SNAP. Your feedback will help us determine what works in these programs and what could be improved. Today's discussion will be specifically about employment and training, and not about food benefits.
- Please respect the privacy of others' comments and do not repeat what is said here to others outside of this room.
- We want to hear different opinions, so if the rest of the group feels one way and you feel differently, please speak up. That information is really important to us because everyone here has probably had different experiences. There are no wrong answers.
- Please talk one at a time in a voice at least as loud as mine.
- You can add to something someone else says but please don't have side conversations with the person next to you.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. We need to hear from all of you, but you don't have to answer every question. We may call on you to participate.
- We have a lot to cover today and may need to cut some conversations short to move on to another topic. Please know that we value every contribution to today's discussion. This will only happen to make sure we get through all the questions we have for you in a short amount of time.
- If you haven't done so already, please turn off your cell phones or set them to silent.
- The session will last about 90 minutes. We don't have a planned break, but please feel free to get up at any time to stretch, use the restroom, or help yourselves to something to eat or drink. We ask that only one person be out of the room at a time for a bathroom break.

- We would like to record our discussion to help us remember what everyone said when we go back to write our report.
- Does anyone have an objection to us recording the discussion?
- Are there any questions before we get started? If you have any questions in the future, you can contact Mathematica at [NUMBER] or by e-mail at [EMAIL].
- First, I'd like to just confirm: Does everyone agree to participate in this discussion group?

Public Burden Statement

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service in evaluating operational improvements in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) programs that aim to improve delivery of services and program outcomes. This is a voluntary collection and FNS will use the information to assess the effectiveness of changes made to the SNAP E&T program. This collection does not request any 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 90 minutes (1.5 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: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, 5th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22306 ATTN: PRA (0584-xxxx). Do not return the completed form to this address.

Privacy Act Statement

Authority: This information is being collected under the authority of Section 9 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, (7 U.S.C. 2018). Disclosure of the information is voluntary.

Purpose: The information is being collected to evaluate operational improvements in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) programs using rapid cycle evaluation.

Routine Use: The information may be shared with SNAP contract researchers and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) SNAP research and administrative staff.

Disclosure: If all or any part of the information is not provided, interviews may not be admissible in data sets.

Participant introductions

To get things started, I'm going to go around the room and ask each of you for your first name and how you first heard about [SNAP E&T Program Name].

1. Please introduce yourself and share how you first heard about [SNAP E&T Program Name].

Motivations and barriers for SNAP E&T participation

First, we'd like to talk more about when you learned about [SNAP E&T Program Name] and why you were or were not interested in participating in it.

1. When you first heard about [SNAP E&T Program Name], what did you learn about the program and the services that are available to you?

- a. What kind of information was provided about the program?

Probes:

- *How clear or unclear was the information you received?*
- *Was it enough information to make a decision to enroll?*
- *What other information may have been useful for you to make the decision to enroll?*

- b. Was it the right time for you to hear about [SNAP E&T Program Name]? For example, if you learned about the program during your interview for SNAP benefits, did you feel ready to think about participating in employment and training services at that time?

Probe:

- *When do you think would be the best time to learn about [SNAP E&T Program Name]? (During interviews for SNAP benefits, a few days after the interview, some other time?)*

- c. If you decided to participate, what convinced you to enroll in the program?

[For recruitment interventions only]

2. Do you recall seeing or receiving a [text message/email/other marketing material] about enrolling in the [SNAP E&T Program Name]?

- a. If you remember seeing [material], was the information helpful in letting you know about the program?

Probes:

- *How did you feel about getting information about [SNAP E&T Program Name] through text or email?*
- *What type of communication do you prefer when receiving these kinds of messages? For example, text, email, or something else.*
- *What did you think about how many messages you received? Was it too many, not enough, or just the right amount?*
- *If you can recall, what did you like about what was said in the messages? What did you dislike about what was said in the messages?*

- *Do you have any suggestions for additional information or changes to the content that would be helpful? Describe.*

3. Did seeing [material] make a difference on your decision to join the program?
 - b. How clear were the next steps you needed to take to enroll in [SNAP E&T Program Name]?
 - c. If these messages did not make a difference on your decision to enroll in the program, what kind of messages would have encouraged you to join?

Probe:

- *What information should be included in messages like these?*

4. What did you hope to gain, if anything, from participating in [SNAP E&T Program Name]?
5. Did anything get in the way of or keep you from enrolling in [SNAP E&T Program Name] when you first received the messages?
 - d. What helped or could have helped you overcome any difficulties you had with enrolling in the program?

[Do not ask Q6-Q12 of those who did not enroll in SNAP E&T]

Now that we have talked about enrolling in the program, let's turn to discussing how you've participated in [SNAP E&T Program Name] since then. Everyone here may have participated in different trainings or activities in the program or may have used different services. Some of you may have attended many types of activities, while others may have only attended one or two activities. We are interested in hearing about everyone's experiences.

6. First, please tell us about what trainings, activities, or services you have participated in as part of [SNAP E&T Program Name]. Examples of these include assistance with job search, creating a resume, training for a specific type of job, and receiving transportation assistance or help with child care.
 - e. Describe whether you have been able to participate in all the services or activities that interested you.
 - f. If you were unable to participate in everything that interested you, which activities have you not been able to join? What stopped you from participating in those activities?
7. Earlier, we heard some of the things that people hoped to gain from [SNAP E&T Program Name]. After joining the program, what would you say motivated you to stay with it?
 - g. Was there anything that you experienced after starting the program that encouraged you to keep participating?
 - h. For people who have not yet completed the program, how confident are you that you will finish?

Probes:

- *How much more time do you expect it will take to complete the program?*
- *What is challenging about completing the program?*

[For engagement interventions only]

8. Do you remember receiving [reminder messages/case management model/assessment] while you participated in [SNAP E&T Program Name]?
- i. What did you think about [adapted program component]?
- Probes:*
- *What did you like?*
 - *What did you dislike?*
9. How did it affect your decision or ability to stay in the program, if at all?
- j. How useful did you find the [adapted program component]?
- k. What, if anything, would you change about [adapted program component] to make it better for you or others?
10. Did any of you end up leaving the program before it ended?
- l. What were your reasons for leaving?
- m. Describe any help you were offered to stay in the program. *[Probe on the reasons for leaving and if staff attempted to help with those issues.]*
- n. What else, if anything, could have helped or convinced you to stay in [SNAP E&T Program Name]?

Now, let's talk about your experiences with finding employment after you participated in [SNAP E&T Program Name].

11. Would you say that finding a job has been easy or difficult for you?
- o. If finding a job has been difficult, what are some of the challenges you have experienced with finding a job?
- p. What could be helpful to you to overcome some of these challenges?
- q. If finding a job was easy, how did participating in the program help you?
- r. What could make it easier to find a job?
12. What has your experience been with keeping a job once you found one?
- s. If you have experienced challenges with keeping a job, what, if anything, could help you overcome those challenges?

Decision not to participate and barriers

[For those who chose not to enroll in E&T only]

Now I'd like to talk about why you chose to not to enroll in [SNAP E&T Program Name].

13. What were your reasons for not participating in the program?

Probes:

- *Did you face any challenges or obstacles that prevented you from participating? Describe.*
- *Were the types or availability of services limited? Describe.*

- *Was the information provided unconvincing? Describe.*

14. What would you change about [SNAP E&T Program Name] to make it more helpful for you?
15. What types of services are most important to you that could lead to you joining a program like [SNAP E&T Program Name]?
16. Would you say that finding a job has been easy or difficult for you?
 - t. If finding a job has been difficult, what are some of the challenges you have experienced with finding a job?
 - u. What could be helpful to you to overcome some of these challenges?
 - v. What could make it easier to find a job?
17. What has your experience been with keeping a job once you found one?
 - a. If you have experienced challenges with keeping a job, what, if anything, could help you overcome those challenges?

Perceptions of the SNAP E&T Program

[For those who chose to participate in E&T only]

Now I'd like to talk about how well the [SNAP E&T Program Name] is meeting your needs, and what changes you think could be made to improve the program for yourself and others.

18. What parts of the program worked best or were most helpful for you? In what ways?
 - w. What skills have you learned that were the most important?
 - x. Did you find classes or hands-on experience more helpful for you? Describe.
19. What would you change about [SNAP E&T Program Name] to make it better for yourself or for others?

Probes:

 - *What skills have you learned that were the least important or have you not used at all?*
 - *What skills do you wish the program could help you build?*

20. Overall, how satisfied have you been with [SNAP E&T Program Name]?

Probe:

- *Would you recommend others join [SNAP E&T Program Name]? Why or why not?*

Conclusion

21. Is there anything else about the program or your experiences that you would like to share that didn't come up already in the discussion?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas with us today. This discussion has been very helpful in learning more about making improvements to the [SNAP E&T Program Name]. Before you leave, please make sure you have received your payment. We appreciate your time.