ATTACHMENT D: CASE STUDY STATE SELECTION MEMO

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Introduction

Based on the research conducted by the SPR study team and input from FNS Central office and Regional Staff, the study team recommends nine States and five alternates to be invited to participate in the *Understanding States' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Customer Service Strategies.* The selection of study States required input from multiple sources. The study team conducted a literature review, which provided important data, but sometimes key metrics available in the literature were outdated. In addition, State and County administration of SNAP has been subject to many changing contextual factors during the COVID pandemic, such as local office closures and work from home policies, staff turnover, and changing policies authorized under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of March 2020 that simplified program application and participation—some of which have been expiring in early 2023. As a result, the study team augmented learnings from our initial research with feedback from all seven of the FNS Regional Offices and two national organizations – Code for America and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Criteria for State Selection

To produce study results applicable to the broadest range of States, the study team sought to include States with diverse approaches to supporting and monitoring customer service in SNAP. Because client experience is affected greatly by how States administer the program, the study team also considered a State's overall program approach (e.g., States where the program is run at the county level and States where it is run at the State level).

To select case study States that included this needed diversity, the study team began with a review of customer service strategies, then developed a State Selection Index that catalogs important features of State SNAP administration, focusing on aspects likely to influence customers' experience such as States' SNAP indicators of program performance and evidence of approaches to customer service while also considering other characteristics such as SNAP administration structure and FNS Region. In the following sections, we describe the various categories of the selection index, and then the memo continues with a summary of findings for States.

State SNAP Indicators of Program Performance

In this first category, the study team identified metrics that may indicate the quality of service customers receive. The indicators for quality of service include a reduction in the overall payment error rate (from FY17-FY19), improved application processing timeliness (from FY18-FY19), participation rates, and case and procedural error rates (CAPER) below the national average for FY19.[1] Appendix A of this memo, provides a summary of the full index, including feedback received from FNS Regional Staff and national partner organizations. Although this

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[1] The information collected is pre-pandemic.

information is not a comprehensive look at *all* indicators of program performance, it is publicly available information that provides valuable insight into the States investing in service quality.

Evidence of Approaches to Customer Service

In this second category of selection criteria, the study team conducted a review of extant information from State agency and other websites, as well as publicly available documents on customer service approaches and monitoring strategies, to identify evidence of how States approach customer service. Our initial review includes the presence of a variety of practices encompassed by the following categories:

1) Improving Application Accessibility: practices which make the application process more accessible to more customers.
2) Modernizing SNAP Local Offices: physical or process modifications that make SNAP offices more welcoming or effective.
3) Upholding Call Standards: practices that allow agencies to provide high quality phone services.
4) Customer Service Surveys: the collection of customer input about services.
5) Customer Service Staff Training and Standards: how an agency supports its employees in providing good customer service.
6) Refining Customer Communications: modifications on how customers communicate with the agency and how the agency communicates with customers.

The tables below illustrate the types of practices included for the aforementioned categories. The practices below are not a comprehensive review of all the customer service practices for each state but rather are examples of unique processes and standards implemented by the States.

Table 1: Improving Application Accessibility Practices by State

Improving Application Accessibility	
Practice or Standard	**Definition**
Mobile Friendly Website	Website functionality on a mobile device
Simplified Applications for SSI Recipients	Combined application program (CAP)
Elderly Simplified Application Program (ESAP)	Simplified application program for older adults

Table 2: Modernizing SNAP Local Offices Practices by State

Modernizing SNAP Local Offices

Practice or Standard	Definition
Self-Check In	This includes the ability for customers to check into offices by phone or through self-service kiosks.
Specialized Office Staffing	Implementation of staff such as "triage specialists" or experienced eligibility technicians at front desk.
Physical Office Adjustments	Alterations to local office spaces that make them more welcoming and/or convenient; as well as the addition of office locations to improve access (e.g., for rural customers).
Office Processes	Includes extended office hours, limitations to wait times, or implementation of assessments used to suggest programs to customers at check-in.

Table 3: Upholding Call Standards Practices by State

Upholding Call Standards	
Practice or Standard	**Definition**
Regular Monitoring	Monthly, weekly, daily monitoring of wait times, time to answer, and call volume.
Streamlined Documentation	The use of a CRM database to allow for "personalized service" for customers.
Community Input	Creating avenues through which customers and other groups can provide input into call center standards.
Staffing	Providing adequate staffing at call centers busiest hours and days, providing training to call center representatives, offering extended call center hours.
Call Wait Times	How long a customer will wait to speak to a representative.

Table 4: Customer Service Surveys by State

Customer Service Surveys	
Practice or Standard	**Definition**

Customer Service Surveys	Customer service surveys that allow customers to provide feedback on their customer experience. Surveys ranged from one-time to recurring monthly, quarterly, and yearly.

Table 5: Customer Service Staff Training and Standards Practices by State

Customer Service Staff Training and Standards	
Practice or Standard	**Definition**
Customer Service Trainings/ Refresher Trainings	Training provided to staff at hire or regularly that emphasizes customer experience and satisfaction.
Agency Standards	Includes limiting caseload size and providing timely customer service.

Table 6: Refining Customer Communications Practices by State

Refining Customer Communications	
Practice or Standard	**Definition**
Virtual Tools	The state leverages the use of online tools such as chat to communicate with customers.
Community Assistors	Community locations that help explain eligibility, submit documents, or support program application.
Dedicated Customer Service Units	Such as customer help desks or consolidated Customer Service Centers.
Extended Hours for Customer Communication	24/7 recipient hotline
Telephonic Signature	Customers are able to verify documentation over the phone/verbally
On-Demand Interviews	Customers are able to request an interview when needed

Other Considerations

After a review of the criteria outlined above was considered, the study team worked to balance State selection around factors such as administration type (State vs. County), geographic location and the demographic makeup of the population. Population demographics is an area of interest because the project aims to describe if and how States integrate equity into their customer service

approach. To ensure that the research reflected the reality of State administration currently, the study team sought feedback from FNS Regional Staff's knowledge of the current status of SNAP administration in each State.

Initial Findings

In order to identify a list of States for recommendation, the study team scored the presence of State SNAP indicators of performance and the practices found in the literature review of approaches to customer service across all States. The score for each indicator and practice was weighted equally and scores for all individual metrics were summed to produce a total score. Based on this index, 16 States were identified for possible selection based on the presence of customer service practices: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Washington.

Revised Findings

Based on discussions with each of the seven Regional Offices and two national organizations, the study team incorporated feedback into the State index. Utilizing the scoring methodology developed for the preliminary identification of States for possible selection, the study team incorporated a weighted score for States identified by Regional Office Staff, which resulted in a narrower set of 14 possible States for selection, balanced by Region (Table 7).

Table 7: State Selection for Case Study (with Region)

Primary Selections		Alternate Selections
Alabama (SER)	South Dakota (MPR)	Connecticut (NER)
California*(WR)	Utah (SWR)	Missouri (MPR)
Illinois (MWR)	Washington (WR)	North Carolina* (SER)
Massachusetts (NER)	Wisconsin (MWR)	Oklahoma (SWR)
Pennsylvania (MAR)		Virginia* (MAR)

* County-administered States

Based on prior experience working on similar projects, we anticipate the possibility that some States may opt to not participate in the study. For this reason, we have selected five alternate States in addition to nine primary study States. We will select alternates that best match the State(s) that opted out with respect to the key selection criteria, including Region.

Next Steps

This index supports our preliminary plan for selecting case study States, by stratifying States across multiple features of customer service design. Because of the changing landscape as public health emergency SNAP policies sunset, the study team, in collaboration with the COR, plan to

check-in with Regional Office staff in early 2024 regarding the States selected for site visits, making adjustments as needed. In approximately April 2024, communication will commence with selected states for the recruitment process, using OMB approved materials.

Appendix A: State Selection Index Table

State	County-Administered	Improving Application Accessibility	Modernizing SNAP Local Office Standards and Features	Upholding Call Standards	Surveys	Customer Service Staff Training and Standards	Refining Customer Communications	High Participation Rate	Low Participation Rate	Reduced Error Payment Rate	Improved Timeliness	CAPER Rate Below Average FY19	Recommended by FNS Regional Offices	Recommended by Partners	Top 16 States from State Index	Final Total
Alabama (AL)		3	1	2	0	1	2			1	1		3			14
Alaska (AK)		0	0	0	1	0	1						1			3
Arizona (AZ)		2	0	2	1	1	2			1	1	1			1	11
Arkansas (AR)		1	0	0	1	0	1		-1	1		1			1	4
California (CA)	1	1	2	0	1	1	2		-1	1			3	1	1	11
Colorado (CO)	1	1	1	0	0	0	1					1				4
Connecticut (CT)		1	0	0	0	2	1	1					3			8
Delaware (DE)		0	1	0	0	0	0	1				1				3
(DC)		0	0	0	0	0	0	1			1					2
Florida (FL)		2	0	2	1	0	1					1			1	7
Georgia (GA)		1	0	0	0	1	0									2
Hawaii (HI)		0	0	0	0	0	1									1
Idaho (ID)		0	1	1	0	0	0			1	1	1	3			8
Illinois (IL)		1	1	0	1	2	2	1			1		3		1	12
Indiana (IN)		0	0	1	0	1	1		-1	1	1					4
Iowa (IA)		0	0	0	0	2	1					1				4
Kansas (KS)		0	0	0	0	0	0		-1		1	1				1
Kentucky (KY)		1	1	0	0	0	2		-1	1	1					5
Louisiana (LA)		1	0	0	0	1	2				1	1	3		1	9
Maine (ME)		1	0	0	0	0	1									2
Maryland (MD)		3	1	1	1	2	1					1			1	10
(MA)		3	0	2	1	2	1	1					3	1	1	14
Michigan (MI)		1	0	0	0	2	1						3	1		8
Minnesota (MN)	1	0	0	0	1	2	0							1		4
Mississippi (MS)		3	0	0	0	1	1		-1							4
Missouri (MO)		1	0	0	1	0	1					1	3			7
Montana (MT)		1	0	0	0	0	0					1				2
Nebraska (NE)		0	0	1	0	1	0					1	3			6
Nevada (NV)		1	0	0	0	1	0	1			1					4
(NH)		1	0	0	0	0	0					1				2
New Jersey (NJ)	1	1	1	0	0	1	1								1	4
New Mexico (NM)		1	1	0	0	0	1	1				1			1	5
New York (NY)		3	1	1	0	0	0				1				1	6
North Carolina (NC)	1	1	2	0	0	0	1						3			7
North Dakota (ND)	1	0	0	0	1	1	0		-1	1		1				3
Ohio (OH)	1	0	0	0	1	2	0					1				4
Oklahoma (OK)		1	0	0	0	0	1				1	1	3	1		8
Oregon (OR)		1	0	0	0	0	0	1				1		1		4
Pennsylvania (PA)		3	0	2	1	0	2	1				1	3	1	1	14
Rhode Island (RI)		1	2	0	0	0	0	1				1			1	5
South Carolina (SC)		2	0	0	0	0	0		-1			1				2
South Dakota (SD)		1	0	0	1	1	0					1	3		1	7
Tennessee (TN)		1	0	0	0	1	0					1				3
Texas (TX)		3	0	0	1	0	0		-1			1				4
Utah (UT)		1	0	1	0	1	0			1	1	1	3		1	9
Vermont (VT)		0	0	0	1	0	0	1			1	1	1			5
Virginia (VA)	1	2	0	0	1	0	0						3			6
Washington (WA)		2	1	1	0	0	1	1		1	1	1	3	1	1	13
West Virginia (WV)		0	0	0	0	0	0				1	1				2
Wisconsin (WI)	1	2	0	0	1	1	2	1		1	1	1	3			13
Wyoming (WY)		0	0	0	0	0	0		-1			1				0

*States that appear in gray rows were removed from consideration based on feedback from staff from Regional Offices and national organizations, or in the case of Vermont, because the study team conducted testing of data collection instruments there.

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