

## Attachment F.1 Combined Interview Protocol

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service in better identifying and understanding how States define and measure customer service for SNAP applicants and participants. This is a voluntary collection and FNS will use the information to better understand current efforts to strengthen customer service practices in SNAP. 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 1.0 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.

### Introduction

Thank you so much for participating in this important study. My name is [NAME] and I am from a company called Social Policy Research Associates/Mathematica, which is an evaluation, research, and technical assistance firm based in Oakland, California/Princeton, New Jersey. We were hired by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct a study on how States define and measure good customer service for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, also called \_\_\_\_\_ [STATE SPECIFIC NAME FOR SNAP, IF APPLICABLE] in your State. We plan to describe how the States we visit define, implement and refine their customer service approaches. We are not auditors—we are just here to learn about your experiences with customer service in SNAP. We are talking with many people in SNAP agencies and some who work with SNAP applicants or participants as advocates, ombudspersons, or at Community Based Organizations (CBOs) across nine States about this issue.

We will summarize our findings in a report, but any comments you make will be anonymous and we will not be sharing information you provide with others, including your supervisors or any other State staff. Participation is voluntary so you may skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering and there are no right or wrong answers. We will be taking notes throughout our conversation so that we can remember the information you provide when we are writing our report. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

### Background

First, I'd like to get a little background.

- What is your official title?
- How long have you been with [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] and what is your current role here?
- Have you held any other positions here in the past? Please describe.

## Overview of Agency and Local Context

[Note to site visitor: Much of this will be collected through background research, but if necessary, these probes can be used to confirm what you found or to set the context for the visit.]

To supplement the background research we have done on your agency and State/local area, we wanted to begin by collecting/confirming some information about your SNAP context.

1. [State and local administrative staff] Can you briefly describe/confirm your overall SNAP model and the way that you provide services to customers?
  - a. Do eligibility staff have an assigned caseload or do you use a task-based model? A combination?
    - i. What led the agency to choose this service model?
  - b. Do you use call centers? If yes, is it Statewide or are there multiple local call centers?
    - i. Who staffs the call centers (merit and/or vendor/private staff)?  
[For those that use vendor/private staff]: How do you monitor customer service by the vendor/private staff?
    - ii. Does the call center provide specialized lines or options for certain groups (for example, older adults)?
    - iii. What functions does the call center play?
  - c. What SNAP application methods (in-person, online, submitted by CBOs, etc.) are most commonly used?
    - i. Does this vary at all by participant type (for example, by age, disability status, geographic location, housing status, language spoken, race, or ethnicity)? If so, how? For example, if there is no broadband internet access in certain areas, are applicants from those areas more likely to visit a center?
  - d. To what extent are services for applicants and participants in-person versus virtual? Please explain how options might vary for the initial interview versus ongoing communication (for example, receipt of notices or recertification interviews).
    - i. Can applicants and participants choose their communication method? If yes, does this choice vary at all by what stage of the process they are in (applying versus ongoing benefit receipt)? What about by participant demographics?
  - e. Do SNAP eligibility workers also connect participants to other benefits (for example, TANF and/or Medicaid)?
2. [All respondents as needed, but site visitor should research this ahead of the visit] In what languages is your SNAP application available in printed copies? What about online?
  - a. Are all notices also available in these same languages?
  - b. What language capabilities does your call center and/or office have?

3. [All respondents as needed, but site visitor should research this ahead of the visit] How do SNAP participants access their EBT card (i.e., through the mail, given to them in person, etc.). Are there policies for those who do not have a fixed address or who cannot get to the office?
  - a. What is the process for replacing EBT cards when they are lost or stolen?
  - b. Do you have any other EBT policies/procedures that you think are unique or show strong customer service?
4. [All respondents] In your opinion, is there any agency history of customer service challenges or successes that may have received attention from and/or left an impression on the local community? If so, please describe.
5. [Local administrators and supervisors] Have the numbers of SNAP applicants and participants in your State/local area/office gone up or down in recent years? What about the number of State/local area/office staff, especially eligibility workers?
  - a. [For frontline staff] Do you feel like your office/virtual caseload is busy/large? How has it changed over time?
6. [For local administrators and supervisors] How many eligibility workers and other frontline staff are there at this location? Can you describe them a little?
  - a. Average tenure?
  - b. Typical experience with SNAP, benefits programs, and/or customer service?
  - c. Languages spoken and/or other skills?
  - d. How similarly do they represent the demographics of the population you serve?
  - e. Are they union positions or could they be eligible for a union?
  - f. How much staff turnover are you experiencing? Do people stay in their job for a while or are you constantly having to hire?
  - g. Are any of the staff who interact with applicants and participants contracted positions (as opposed to state/county employees)?

## **Customer Service Definition, Policies, and Measurement**

### **Customer Service Policies and Strategies**

7. [State administrators] Does the State government in general, and/or your agency in particular, have a definition or policy around customer service in effect now? If yes, what prompted the State/agency to adopt it? [If respondent is unsure of what “customer service” is, or asks how we define it – use the definition from FNS for this study: “the assistance, information, services, accessibility measures, technological interactions (e.g., mobile webpage interfaces), and personal interactions that SNAP applicants and participants have in the course of applying for and using SNAP.” However, reassure the respondent that we understand States may vary in how they define customer service. We ask for their definition in part to capture this variation. They should think about their version of customer service when answering questions.]

- a. What is the definition?
  - b. How has it changed over time?
8. [Local level administrators] Does your agency have internal organizational policies, standards, and practices that are focused on customer service?
  - a. If yes, please describe.
    - i. To what extent do you feel these policies, standards, and practices are followed? What accounts for any differences between the policies and standards and how they are implemented?
  - b. If no, how are customer service concerns (e.g., complaints from advocates or customers, desire to improve wait times or other aspects of SNAP process for customers) usually addressed?
9. [State administrators] How would you describe your agency's values around customer service?
10. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] How does the State SNAP agency specifically define good and/or bad customer service?
  - a. Are there specific customer service definitions or standards for certain subpopulations (e.g., elderly people, people with disabilities, those with limited-English proficiency, unhoused individuals, those who live in rural areas, those who do not have access to broadband internet or cell phone service, farmworkers, etc.)? [If the respondent is unclear, please offer the following to clarify] For example, this could be that applicants 60 and older are given access to one-on-one application support when those 59 and younger must apply online, or that unsheltered individuals can receive their EBT card when they apply in person if they have no address to have it sent to later, etc.]
11. [State administrators] What was the process for developing your current customer service policy or standards?
  - a. Who led the initiative (for example, the State SNAP Director, the Governor, an advocacy group, etc.)?
  - b. Who else was involved (customers, advocates, community-based organizations that serve SNAP participants, customer service experts, frontline staff, etc.)?
    - i. How were they engaged? To what extent did their participation lead to meaningful changes?
  - c. Did the State leverage any grants or funding to develop your customer service initiative(s)?
  - d. What data were used to inform the policy/standards?
12. [State administrators] Were there any SNAP process improvement efforts (e.g., online application, call centers, phone interviews, customer centered design improvements) associated with customer service policy implementation? Please explain.

13. [State administrators] Do you sense that you have buy-in from multiple levels of SNAP operations staff, such as State and local administrators, local supervisors, and frontline staff?
- If there is variation among different levels, why do you think this is true?
  - What specific steps have you taken to achieve buy-in?
  - Why have those efforts succeeded or failed?

### **Measurement of Customer Service**

14. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] Can you provide examples of “touchpoints” where customer service is measured, or standards are implemented (e.g., call center interactions, State website or online application, eligibility interviews, office visits)?
15. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] What specific metrics are used to measure customer service at these touchpoints or in other ways? [For each, ask how the data is collected, who or what department manages it, and who within the agency has access to the results and/or receives reports about them.]
- Wait times?
    - For receiving benefits after submitting an application?
    - For being on hold when trying to reach SNAP staff? (If so, please define being “on hold” - Initial wait time for call to be answered? Subsequent wait time to be transferred to the correct person? Both?)
    - For getting an appointment for an interview or other assistance as needed?
    - [If applicable] For spending time in an in-person waiting room, for those that choose to do an in-person interview or meetings?
    - For processing reported changes that affect the benefit amount?
  - Percentage or number of applicants who no show to their initial interview? Who withdraw their application? Who finish an application online but never submit it?
  - Call specific challenges, such as:
    - Rate of call abandonment?
    - Rate of dropped calls due to technical issues?
    - Rate of calls unable to be completed/answered due to busy call center conditions?
    - Other call related challenges?
  - Error rates, such as:
    - Active Error Rates
    - CAPER Rates
  - Timelessness rates, such as:
    - Days to process an application to decision?
    - Other measures of timeliness?
  - Number or content of customer complaints?

- g. Other?
16. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] How, if at all, do you measure how access to SNAP may vary by subgroups, such as by race, age (older adults), language spoken, geography (rural versus urban area), access to broadband internet and/or cell phone service, disability status, housing status, being a farmworker, etc.]
    - a. How have you addressed any differences in access that this tracking identified?
    - b. May we have a copy of a report (with de-identified data only) that shows this information?
      - i. Who typically has access to this information (Eligibility workers? Advocates? The public? Other?)
  17. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] Thinking about the specific metrics we just covered, tell me more about how this data is used.
    - a. How does this data factor into your agency's definition of good and/or bad customer service?
    - b. How does the State/local area use the results of this data?
    - c. Which of these measures is most useful to improving customer service?
    - d. How often is this data reviewed? Does it vary by measure? If so, why?
    - e. With whom is this data shared? Is it shared across the program and across levels? What about with the public or advocates? What response, if any, does the data typically get?
    - f. Do you think there are any additional ways to use the data, or people with whom to share it, that could improve customer service? If so, please explain.
    - g. What additional measures, if any, do you think would be useful to collect?
  18. [State administrators] Has customer or staff feedback or response resulted in process changes or modernization efforts? Can you give specific examples?
  19. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] How, if at all, do customer service measures, standards, and practices factor into employee performance assessments?
  20. [State administrators and local supervisors/managers] How, if at all, do customer service measures, standards, and expectations factor into assessments about how the agency/leadership is performing?
  21. Overall, how well do you think the State/county agency is able to measure or evaluate customer service?
  22. What has been a lesson learned about defining customer service standards and measuring customer service?
    - a. What ideas, if any, do you have to make this challenge easier to manage?
  23. What is most challenging about measuring customer service or establishing standards for customer service?
  24. [All respondents] What would you want FNS to know about providing and measuring good customer service to SNAP customers?

## **Customer Service Experiences of SNAP Participants Who May Experience Bias or Discrimination**

[Explain to respondent that we are interested in hearing about how the agency thinks about serving individuals who may experience bias or discrimination in the community/at large and/or due to systemic issues in the United States, not that we are suggesting that they or their agency is discriminating against any group of applicants or participants.]

25. [All respondents] How does the agency think about ensuring applicants and participants who may face bias or discrimination (for example, immigrants, those with a disability, or the elderly) feel comfortable applying for and participating in SNAP? Groups to think about could include older adults, English Language Learners, those with low levels of literacy, individuals who experience racism, individuals with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, migrant farmworker communities, etc.
- a. [Note to site visitor: If you know from background research or prior interviews how the agency refers to equity related trainings, please mirror the language they use.] Training for staff to help them support individuals who experience bias or discrimination, such as anti-bias, anti-racist, anti-discrimination, or diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings?
  - b. Having staff that speak multiple languages, translating all documents (including notices) into other languages, etc.?
  - c. Having specialized units of eligibility workers that focus on older adults or other specific groups?
  - d. Offering various methods of communication or assistance with online tools as needed?
  - e. Other?
26. [All respondents] [If not previously discussed] How, if at all, does the agency measure how those who experience bias or discrimination in the community may have a different experience applying for or using SNAP than those who face less bias or discrimination?
- a. [All respondents] Have you seen any reports or been given any information related to the analysis of this data? How, if at all, has the agency taken steps to respond to the results?
27. [All respondents] Does the agency assess whether eligibility workers or other staff reflect the communities they serve, including by language, socioeconomic background, race/ethnicity, disability status, etc.? What is done with this information?
28. [All respondents] Thinking about individuals who experience bias or discrimination, what ideas, if any, do you have for providing them with better customer service?

# Culture, Incentives, and Employee Wellness

## Customer Service Positions and Employee Customer Service Responsibilities

29. [State administrators] Who is responsible for monitoring and implementing the State's customer service strategy?
  - a. What do their responsibilities entail?
  - b. Are there customer service offices or staff positions at the local level?
30. [Local level administrators] Does your agency have an office or staff position dedicated to customer service or customer experience? [If this is confusing to the respondent, note that there may not be someone with this responsibility and/or that it may be shared across people/teams instead. But you can probe to ask if there is someone who manages any specific customer service initiatives or strategies that you have identified to this point or someone who thinks about topics like office hours, languages needed for materials, the set-up of the waiting room, etc.]
  - a. If yes, when was this office or position established?
    - i. What do their responsibilities include?
    - ii. Do they undergo specific training (e.g., anti-bias training, trauma-informed care training, rapid cycle quality improvement or other process-based training)?
    - iii. How is their performance assessed?
  - b. If no, who typically handles customer relations within your agency? What other responsibilities do they have?
    - i. Would it be helpful to have a dedicated staff person for this?
    - ii. What would it take to have a dedicated staff person for this?
31. [All respondents] Does the agency have service standards that clearly tell staff what is expected of them in their interactions with clients?
  - a. If yes, please describe.
  - b. Who is responsible for setting these service standards?
  - c. Is staff understanding of these service standards measured? If so, how?
32. [All SNAP staff] Are employees involved in designing customer experience strategies or in identifying customer service measurement?
  - a. If no, why not?
  - b. If yes, what does this process look like? How are they included in these discussions? Do they receive any additional compensation or recognition for their participation?
    - i. Can you give a few examples of customer experience solutions developed by staff?
33. [All SNAP staff] Are SNAP participants/customers involved in designing customer experience strategies or in identifying customer service measurement?
  - a. If no, why not?



- b. If yes, what does this process look like? How are they included in these discussions? Do they receive any compensation for their time and expertise?
34. [All respondents] How much autonomy or latitude do staff have to correct problems related to customer service as they occur?
35. [For local level administrators and case management supervisors] How, if at all, is customer service aptitude considered in hiring and/or promotion decisions?
- a. Are staff ever disciplined for failure to provide appropriate customer service? If so, please explain.

### **Employee Satisfaction**

36. [All respondents] How is employee satisfaction assessed, if at all? (For example, staff turnover measures, employee feedback mechanisms, agency- or staff-wide meetings)
- a. Based on these measures, how satisfied are employees? How does this vary by employee type? Has it changed at all over time? For eligibility workers, is it different based on whether an employee work in a call center or sees participants in-person? What about based on an employee's ability to work remotely?
  - b. What are employees' biggest concerns or requests for improvement?
  - c. What steps, if any, have been taken by the agency or leadership to improve employee satisfaction?
  - d. What is challenging about improving employee satisfaction?
  - e. What barriers do you perceive to making changes/improvements that employees request?
37. [All respondents] Do measures of employee satisfaction factor into performance reviews or assessments of the agency or its leadership?
- a. How? What measures are used?
38. [All respondents] How, if it all, do you feel employee satisfaction may factor into the provision of customer service?

### **Employee Wellness and Incentives**

[Explain to respondent that we are asking about employee wellness and incentives because in the framework our study uses, employee satisfaction is a key factor in customer service. "Empowering employees to deliver exceptional experiences" is linked to their sense of worth at work (from The Customer Experience Cookbook, U.S. Digital Service & U.S. Veteran's Affairs, 2020).]

39. [Local level staff] What do you see as the common health and safety issues, including mental and emotional health related, impacting staff at your agency? What role has the COVID-19 pandemic played in this?
- a. Have these issues been communicated to management / leadership?
  - b. Has your agency taken steps to address these issues?
    - i. If yes, please explain. How helpful have the steps been?

- ii. If not, why not? Have there been any consequences to not being able to address them?
40. [Local level administrators] Does your agency have objectives for staff wellness? If yes, please describe.
- a. How, if at all, do you feel employee wellness may factor into the provision of customer service?
41. [Local level administrators and supervisors] How are those objectives evaluated/measured?
42. [Local level administrators and supervisors] How does your agency support staff wellness?
- a. What wellness supports does your agency provide to its staff? Probe for: *remote work/telecommuting options, scheduling flexibility, controlling environment, options for family care or other types of leave, ease of scheduling/taking PTO, other work supports.*
  - b. Are supports contingent on employee performance or seniority?
  - c. What role, if any, do employee unions play in the supports offered for employee wellness?
43. [Local level administrators and supervisors] Are staff compensated, rewarded, or recognized for delivering excellent customer service? Probe for: “employee of the month” or other types of recognition at staff meetings or in newsletters, incentive pay or gifts (i.e., “merit pay”), etc.
- a. If yes, what does this look like? How are employees recognized for their work? Who determines the form of compensation?
44. [Frontline staff] To what extent do you feel burnout is a challenge in your position? How easy/difficult is it to balance the various aspects of your job? How, if at all, has management tried to address it?
- a. Do you think this varies at all by whether staff spend more time interacting with participants virtually (for example, on the phone or through video conferencing) versus in-person? What about based on staff’s ability to work remotely?
45. [Frontline staff] To what extent do you feel your wellness at work is taken into account by management?
- a. How does this impact your work performance, if at all?
  - b. How, if at all, does it factor into the provision of customer service?
  - c. What suggestions do you have, if any, for work supports that could improve your performance or ability to serve customers?

## **Funding Customer Service Strategies**

46. [State administrators] Do you have a line item in your SNAP or agency budget (or funding specifically allocated) for customer service or a customer service initiative? For example, this could include funding earmarked to upgrade the online application, to

enhance the mobile webpage interface, or to increase the hours that an office is open. [If background research or earlier parts of the interview identified a specific customer service related strategy or initiative, please bring that up here.]

- a. If yes, how did dedicating funding to customer service or a related initiative come about? Was there any pushback related to allocating this funding?
  - b. If no, why not? Do you think it would be helpful? What barriers do you think may exist to getting dedicated funding or earmarking funding for a customer service related initiative?
47. [State administrators] To what extent has funding your customer service approach/strategy been a concern or topic of consideration? Describe any tradeoffs between funding customer service strategies versus funding other elements of the program.
- a. Have you felt that cost/resources have limited your ability to provide or evaluate customer service in the way that you want? If yes, please explain.
48. [State administrators] [If State has dedicated customer service funding] Does the funding for customer service strategies include budget for evaluation of the effort? Why or why not?
49. [State administrators] How do you think about the costs associated with your customer service strategy? With evaluating your customer service strategy?
- a. Staff time?
  - b. Training?
  - c. Incentives?
  - d. Software programming, such as for chatbots?
  - e. Additional materials, such as new websites or customer portals, mailers, customer feedback collection, etc.?
  - f. Translation services?
  - g. Other?
50. [State administrators] Do you believe that your customer service standards ultimately increase or reduce overall program costs? Please explain.
- a. Do you collect or monitor any data on how customer service standards affect program costs?
51. [State administrators] Has [State/organization] invested additional resources in improving or measuring customer service in the last three years? Describe.
- a. Where do these additional resources come from (moving SNAP administrative funding from another line item to customer service, from State dollars, from government or philanthropic grants, etc.)?
  - b. If not, does [State/organization] anticipate investing additional resources? Describe.
    - i. What is the timeline for doing so?

52. [State administrators] How do you determine where to spend any funds you have allocated for SNAP customer service –which strategy to focus on, what type of resource to fund, what geographic area or population is supported?
- How do you factor equity into these decisions?
53. [State administrators] What role, if any, does FNS/FNS policy play in how much funding you allocate to customer service or what customer service strategies you choose to fund? How you choose to measure/evaluate customer service?
54. [For advocates] Do you feel that the State has invested the appropriate amount of resources to provide adequate customer service? Exceptional customer service?
- If not, for what services or in what area do you think the state should spend more?
  - Do you feel the State’s investment of resources for SNAP customer service is equitable? Does it target the participants/applicants or geographic areas that need it most?
  - Does the State/local area communicate about how and why they choose to allocate funds as they do?
55. [For frontline staff] Do you feel that you have access to adequate resources to support customer service in SNAP? Why or why not?
- What is missing due to funding limitations?
  - What type of funding would be most useful to support customer service in SNAP in the future (flexible funding, funding earmarked for a specific purpose, additional staffing, etc.)?

## **Growing Customer Service Capabilities**

### **Training on Customer Service**

56. [State or local level administrators] How do administrators or managers introduce the concept of SNAP customer service and the agency’s customer service strategies to staff? What level of emphasis is the topic given?
- Messaging passed down to staff through memos, newsletters, etc.?
  - Formal training given on a set schedule to all staff?
  - As part of onboarding for new staff?
  - Informal conversation?
  - Staff meetings?
  - Other?
57. [Local level administrators or supervisors] What kind of training is provided about customer service/customer service strategies?
- What are the topic(s) of customer service related training? Are they focused exclusively on customer service, or are they part of larger trainings on SNAP?
    - To what extent is equity or bias covered in the training(s)? Can you explain how the trainers define or refer to equity and/or bias?

- ii. Does the training cover gender-affirming and inclusive language (i.e., proper recognition and usage of pronouns, etc.)?
    - iii. Does the training cover providing services to individuals with disabilities and/or ensuring the accessibility of agency space and documents?
    - iv. Does the training cover implicit bias and how it might be relevant to your work?
  - b. Who provides the training(s)?
  - c. How long are these training(s), and how frequently are they provided?
  - d. How are the trainings delivered?
    - i. In person?
    - ii. Online? If online, is it in a format where participation occurs and/or questions can be asked?
  - e. Are the trainings mandatory or optional?
  - f. Are the trainings intended only for new staff as part of onboarding, or are they offered periodically for everyone?
  - g. How does the training vary by staff role, if at all?
    - iii. For administrators?
    - iv. For supervisors of frontline staff?
    - v. For frontline staff?
  - c. What is the overall goal of customer service training for each level of staff?
  - h. How is the effectiveness of the training assessed?
  - i. What feedback on the training has been received?
- 58. [For frontline staff] To what extent do you feel customer service is emphasized by your managers and/or the agency? Given their competing priorities, how important do you feel it is to them?
- 59. [For frontline staff] What type of training have you received on customer service and/or customer service strategies?
  - a. Did you feel this training was relevant/possible to implement on the ground? Why or why not?
- 60. [For frontline staff] Do you have examples of times when you or a colleague would have liked to offer better customer service, but felt constrained by available resources, time, or management's priorities?
  - a. What additional resources (time, training, tools) do you feel would improve your ability to provide strong customer service?
    - i. How receptive is management of requests for such resources?

### **Customer Service Surveys and Other Ways of Collecting Customer Feedback**

- 61. [Local level staff] Do you have customer experience surveys for SNAP recipients and/or applicants?

- a. In what format are these surveys (print, online, text/SMS-based, etc.)? In what languages are they available? [Site visitor: Get a copy of this survey if available]
  - b. How frequently do customers fill them out/what sort of response rate is typical?
    - i. Do you assess whether individuals from certain demographic groups (age, race, gender, geography, etc.) are more or less likely to fill out the survey?
62. [Local level administrators] Can you summarize what the results of the survey have been lately?
- a. Who sees the results of these surveys?
63. [Frontline staff] Do you receive any updates or reports from your supervisor or administration about the results of the surveys? If so, have these results impacted how you provide services?
64. [Local level administrators] What analysis is done of the survey results?
- a. Do you do any sort of analysis to assess whether individuals from certain demographic groups (age, race, gender, geography, etc.) are more or less satisfied with the program based on their survey responses?
65. [Local level administrators] What changes, if any, have been made based on data from the surveys?
66. [All SNAP staff] What other methods, if any, are used to solicit customer feedback?
- a. What happens to complaints or positive feedback given spontaneously by customers?
  - b. Which staff members/job titles hear about the other customer feedback that is provided?
  - c. What changes, if any, have been made based on these other methods of customer feedback?

### **Technology Used for Customer Service**

67. [All SNAP staff] How is technology being used to improve customer service? For each, please describe.
- a. Improvement of website/online customer portal?
    - ii. More services available online?
    - iii. More languages supported?
    - iv. Improved design or ease of use?
    - v. More useful data collected for analysis?
  - b. Telephonic interviews or signatures?
  - c. Chatbots to answer questions?
  - d. Improved routing of customers to the appropriate call center staff person?
  - e. Use of data matching in determining eligibility beyond the matches that are already required by FNS?

- f. Improved ability to measure customer service (for example, easier collection of customer feedback or clearer depiction of bottlenecks in the application process)?
  - g. New software that makes frontline workers more effective or efficient?
  - h. Other?
68. [All SNAP staff] To what extent has the new technology worked as intended? Have there been any unforeseen problems? How have you addressed the problems? Do challenges persist?
69. [State or local administrators] Is there an evaluation or quality assurance process in place to ensure that any new customer service strategies or technological improvements are operating as planned? What about to see if they are actually improving customer service as defined by the State agency?
- a. What do you do if your assessment shows that improvement is necessary?

## **Partnerships and Questions for Partners**

70. [State or local level administrators] What organizations, groups, external experts, and/or constituents do you consider to be partners or to hold important perspectives related to SNAP customer service?
- a. Advocacy groups?
  - b. Organizations that serve SNAP recipients or applicants?
  - c. Customer service or SNAP related communities of practice?
  - d. Customer service experts from business, academia, or other government agencies?
  - e. Participant groups?
  - f. Others?
71. [State or local level administrators] What role(s) do these partners play with regards to SNAP customer service efforts?
- a. To what extent are partnerships formalized (through contracts, MOUs, etc.) versus being more informal or ad-hoc?
72. [State or local level administrators] How does/did your organization consider equity when building partnerships related to customer service?
- a. Do you have a policy or procedures for considering how partners reflect the communities you serve?
73. [State or local level administrators] In what ways have you engaged your partners in your customer service efforts?
- a. Hiring of consultants/external experts to craft a customer service plan or strategy?
  - b. Feedback gathering sessions/surveys, etc. to support customer service plans?
  - c. Selecting measures related to assessing customer service efforts?
  - d. Meetings to share plans, progress, or challenges related to customer service?
  - e. Asking partners to share information with participants or applicants about customer service strategies?

- f. Sharing data related to customer service?
  - g. Interviews or other engagement with participants, advocates, or others to gauge customer service progress?
  - h. Other?
74. [State or local level administrators] What role do partners play with regards to measuring customer service?
- a. Do or did any partners help the State decide how to measure or evaluate customer service initiatives?
    - i. If yes, what role do they play in this effort?
    - ii. What metrics did partner(s) identify as important to measure? How, if at all, is this different from what the State agency identified on its own?
  - b. Do any partners collect data related to customer service? If so, what data is collected? Why does the partner (versus the State) collect this data?  
[If a partner collects data] What is helpful about having a partner collect this data? Are there any related challenges?
75. [State or local level administrators] How and how often do you communicate with the partners involved in customer service efforts? What information do you typically share?
76. [State or local level administrators] What data related to customer service is shared with partners? Do you share the specific measures you use to evaluate the success of your customer service strategies?
- a. How did you decide what data points to share with partners (or publicly)?
  - b. In what method/format is the data shared?
77. [State or local level administrators] How have your relationships with partnerships changed, if at all, since you engaged them in your customer service efforts?
- a. Can you share an example of how a partner changed or influenced your customer service strategy?
  - b. What new relationships, if any, have formed and for what purpose?
78. [State or local level administrators] What is challenging about engaging partners in customer service efforts? What has worked well?

### **Questions for Advocates/Ombudspersons**

79. [Advocate/Ombudsperson] How, if at all, does the State/local agency collect your feedback or otherwise engage you around SNAP customer service efforts?
- a. Can you describe how your relationship/partnership came about?
  - b. Do you typically engage with the agency regularly or in an ad-hoc manner?
  - c. Has this level of engagement shifted over time?
  - d. Do you feel your feedback or involvement is integrated in a meaningful way? Can you give an example?
80. [Advocate/Ombudsperson] From your perspective, what other organizations, experts, or other partners does the State/local agency engage in matters relating to customer service?



- a. How well do you feel the State/local agency’s partners reflect the diversity and needs of the communities served?
    - i. What voices/perspectives, if any, do you feel are missing?
- 81. [Advocate/Ombudsperson] To what extent, if any, were you (or other community organizations or external experts that you know of) involved in developing measures, expectations, or standards for customer service?
  - a. Do you feel that this level of involvement was appropriate? Why or why not?
  - b. Do you feel the selected measures or standards effectively assess how well SNAP customer service is provided for those you serve or represent?
    - ii. What about for the needs of the various communities served by the State/local agency? For example, does the State track demographics (race, languages spoken, age, geographic location, housing status, disability status, etc.) to consider equity?
- 82. [Advocate/Ombudsperson] What data around SNAP customer service are available to you?
  - a. How do you access the data (is it publicly available, sent to you specifically, other)?
  - b. How usable/easy to understand is the data for you?
  - c. How usable/easy to understand do you believe the data is for other partners? The public?
  - d. To what extent does the data provide information about the equity of customer service measures, such as how it is experienced across race/ethnicity, age, language spoken, disability status, and geographic location of participants or applicants?
  - e. How, if at all, has this data affected how you conduct your work?
- 83. [Advocate] Does your organization collect data or measure SNAP customer service on your own/beyond what the State SNAP agency does?
  - a. If yes, what data do you collect/what customer service related metrics do you measure?
    - i. Why did your organization decide to collect and analyze this information?
    - ii. Do you include demographic measures, such as race, age, geographic location, or housing status, to measure equitable access or service?
    - iii. What has this effort told you about SNAP customer service?
    - iv. Do you share your findings with the State agency? The public? What has been the State agency’s response, if any?
  - b. If no, is there data related to customer service you would like to collect? What is the barrier to doing this work?
- 84. [Advocate/Ombudsperson] Do you feel that your involvement or the involvement of any of the other partners we have discussed has resulted in changes to the level of customer service you’ve seen experienced by SNAP participants or applicants?

85. [Advocate/Ombudsperson and frontline staff] From your perspective, are there some community members who are not being served as well as others? Can you explain how? For example, is this related to the application process, accessibility of materials for those who have disabilities or speak other languages, options for interacting with staff, etc.?
- a. If yes, do you feel the State/local agency is making a concerted effort to partner with organizations or people how can specifically address this issue?
86. [Ombudsperson] How well do you feel the State agency is providing customer service based on their definition of good/bad customer service?
87. [Ombudsperson] How do you measure or assess customer service in your role as Ombudsperson? What metrics do you use most? Are there others you think should be collected?
88. [Ombudsperson] What systemic concerns related to customer service, if any, have you brought to agency leadership? What about those related to equity?
- a. What data or situations led you to have these concerns?
  - b. How, if at all, has agency leadership responded?

## Closing Questions

89. [All respondents] Overall, how well do you think customers (both applicants and participants) are being served by SNAP in State/local area?
- a. How, if at all, do you think this varies by individual demographics (age, race/ethnicity, disability status, geographic location, language spoken, etc.) of the customer?
90. [All respondents] What do you feel is most successful about your customer service strategies?
- a. What customer service strategies would you recommend to other States or local areas? Why?
91. [All respondents] Is there anything we didn't cover that you would like to add?
92. [For the State Administrator visit "host"]: After we analyze the data from across our visits, we may want to conduct one follow up interview over the phone. Would it be possible for us to contact you for follow up if needed?
93. [For the State Administrator visit "host"]: We would also like to have you (or whoever is appropriate) review our State profile before we provide the final draft to FNS. Can you let us know who to contact about this?

*Thank you for your time*