

E. Pre-test revisions

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Memo

To: Amanda Wyant and Eric Williams
From: Elizabeth Brown, Rachel Sutton-Heisey, Mary Kalb, and Milena Raketic
Date: 5/19/2023, Revised 7/5/2023, Revised 8/7/2023
Subject: How Have SNAP State Agencies Shifted Operations in the Aftermath of COVID-19? (SNAP COVID): Pretest Findings

In April and May 2023, Mathematica conducted pretests of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) COVID survey instrument and case study discussion guide. This memo describes the pretest activities, summarizes the findings from the pretests, and describes proposed revisions to the survey and case study discussion guide resulting from these findings.

A. Survey pretest

We pretested the survey instrument with three State SNAP agencies: Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Utah. For the pretest we wanted to ensure that we had perspectives from respondents in State-administered and county-administered SNAP programs. Pennsylvania and Utah have State-administered SNAP programs. The goals of the survey pretest with them were to assess the length of time it would take to complete the survey and to determine the extent to which any changes were needed to survey items. To understand how well the survey works for county-administered States, we pretested select survey questions with Minnesota. We selected a little over half of the questions in the survey to ask about during a phone call. The questions selected were ones that needed confirmation if county-administered States could easily answer them or needed a response option to indicate that there is variation in their State. The main goal of this pretest conversation was to understand if the questions in the survey are easy for State-level officials to answer generally about what is happening in their State, or if they would need a response option to indicate that there is variation in the State.

1. Pretest activities

a. Respondent recruitment

We proposed to identify three to four State agencies for the survey pretest that represented a mix of program changes before and after the federal public health emergency. To meet that criterion, we used the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) State waiver tracker to identify States with a variety of COVID-19 waiver usage. In consultation with FNS, we selected the State-administered States of Utah and Pennsylvania and the county-administered State of Minnesota with North Dakota, California, and Ohio as backups for the pretest.

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FNS conducted initial outreach via email to SNAP regional directors to alert them that we would be reaching out to States to invite them to participate in the pretest. We then contacted State agencies via email to confirm their participation. Utah and Pennsylvania agreed to participate. We started reaching out to Minnesota to participate in the pretest in March, but we never received a response. As a result, we started to reach out to the backup county-administered States. After several outreach attempts, North Dakota, California, and Ohio declined to participate, citing limited capacity as they prepared for the expiration of the federal public health emergency on May 11, 2023. We then tried to reach out to Minnesota again and were able to contact them to complete two phone calls to confirm county-administered response options. When reaching out the second time, we reduced the burden of the pretest request for Minnesota.

b. Pretest administration

For Utah and Pennsylvania, we administered the pretest using a two-step process in which State agency staff completed the self-administered survey on hard copies, and then participated in a debriefing call to discuss their experience.¹ We scheduled 60-minute debriefing calls with the two participating State agencies. Before the scheduled debriefing call, we emailed the State SNAP director a paper version of the survey and instructions about how to complete it. To mirror the experience of completing the survey during live data collection, we instructed the SNAP directors to complete the introductory section first and assign other staff to the remaining sections, if desired. We asked that survey respondents time how long it took them to complete each section of the survey and note their start and end times on the hard copy. We also asked that the State agency email a scanned version of their completed survey to us before the debriefing call for our review and that all survey respondents participate in the debriefing call. For Minnesota, we used an abbreviated approach to pretesting the survey instrument in which we offered to do a phone call with them to review questions that may need a county-administered response option.

Project Director Elizabeth Brown, Survey Director Rachel Sutton-Heisey, and an experienced Survey Analyst Mary Kalb each led a call. For the pretests with Utah and Pennsylvania, we used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the discussion regarding respondents' survey experience while another study team member took notes. We started the calls with introductions, a brief explanation of the study, and the goals of the pretest. We then reviewed each section of the survey, asking general questions about respondents' reactions to each section, whether the sequencing of questions was logical, and the level of difficulty of completing the survey. We also asked about specific questions in each survey section on which our quality assurance reviewer had made substantive comments. For example, we asked for reactions and estimates of how long it would take to submit the documents requested in the survey. Instead of asking the States to send their documents as they would during actual data collection, we asked them to describe the documents they would send and how they would send them to us. Both States noted the documents were either publicly

¹ Each of these States had one respondent complete the pretest instrument.

available or could be sent via email.² For the pretest with Minnesota, we also provided a brief explanation of the study and the goals of the pretest, but we further asked the respondent specific questions about whether county-administered response options were necessary for select survey items.

The two pretest States that completed the entire survey before the debriefing phone call required an average of 61 minutes to complete the survey. Table 1 provides specific response times by section, total time, and mean time for each section. It contains the times recorded on the hard copies of the surveys that were returned to us. The Utah respondent recorded on the hard copy that the survey took about two hours to complete. However, during our pretest debriefing, Utah confirmed that the individual section timings were inaccurate because it included time during which they were distracted and started doing tasks unrelated to the survey. The Utah respondent said that they would estimate the actual time to complete the survey to be an hour.

We believe administration times will diminish with a programmed web instrument, due to automated skip logic that will enable respondents to skip certain questions based on their responses. Although we expect the web instrument will be easier to complete, the current survey instrument takes longer than the estimated 35 minutes we originally anticipated. As a result of the length of the survey, we have made suggestions for removing four questions from the survey that pretest respondents found burdensome. We discuss these suggestions in Section A2b. We estimate that these changes as well as the streamlining from the web survey will reduce the length of the survey by 15 minutes, resulting in a likely average administration time of 45 minutes. As such, we recommend increasing the survey burden from 35 minutes to 45 minutes.

For the document request, the Utah and Pennsylvania pretest respondents' burden estimates ranged from 30 to 120 minutes. One pretest respondent noted that the document request items were vague but would not take much time to gather. Another pretest respondent said that providing documents would be very burdensome if we asked for documents beyond the scope of their SNAP Handbook. Another pretest respondent said it would be helpful to have examples of the types of documents we want to collect to narrow the scope of the request. To reduce the burden of this request, we recommend deleting one of the document request items and adding specific examples to the remaining document request items. We discuss these suggestions in Section A2b. We recommend keeping the burden estimate for the document request at 30 minutes.

Table 1. Pretest survey administration times (in minutes)

Respondent	Introduction Section	Section A	Section B	Section C	Section D	Section E	Total
Utah ¹	8	28	36	10	26	13	121 (2 hours, 1 minute recorded)

² The pretest version of the survey included the document request questions, though we were not asking them to submit the documents for the pretest.

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Respondent	Introduction Section	Section A	Section B	Section C	Section D	Section E	Total
							on the survey, 60 minutes reported during the debrief)
Pennsylvania	5	16	22	9	6	4	62 (1 hour, 2 minutes)
<i>MEAN</i>	6.5	22	29	10.5	16	8.5	91.5

¹The Utah respondent reported being interrupted several times while completing the survey and experiencing delays related to the hard-copy administration of the survey. They estimated that if they had completed a web version of the survey in one session, it would have taken about 60 minutes.

2. Pretest findings and instrument revisions

Our discussion on our pretest findings and proposed instrument revisions follows.

a. General findings

Generally, State agencies reacted positively to the survey. They noted that the organization and flow of the instrument was logical and clear. The definitions for the various terms used in the survey were clear to respondents.

b. Recommended deletions to survey items to reduce burden

Questions A9 and C9 asked about the effect of office closures on historically underserved groups and which groups of participants may have experienced greater confusion when there were frequent changes to benefits amounts, respectively. . Pretest respondents said these questions required an unreasonable amount of coordination or time to gather the information necessary to answer them. Further, pretest respondents noted that these questions required more explanation and nuance than could be captured in a survey. As such, we propose eliminating these questions that are (1) difficult for pretest respondents to answer or require an inordinate amount of time for pretest respondents to coordinate a response; and (2) better suited to in-depth discussion in the case study discussion guide (please refer to Table 2 for the list of proposed questions to remove from survey).

Table 2. Proposed questions to remove from survey

Item	Revision
Section A: Staffing	
A9	<p>This question about the effect of office closures on historically underserved groups was burdensome for respondents because it required calculations and a closer examination of data to determine if certain communities were more affected than others. We recommend removing this question because other survey questions (A8, A13, A14, A15, and B8) and questions in the case study discussion guide (C.8.2b) sufficiently answer the following research question:“(Obj. 3. RQ3) What factors related to equity and access were considered when determining changes to policy and operations since the end of the federal public health emergency? In what ways do States perceive how changes improved access and equity and in what ways they may have a negative effect on access and equity?”</p> <p>B8 asks about how the use of telephonic signatures affected access to SNAP services for different groups; A8 asks about what types of offices closed permanently during the public health emergency (e.g., rural, urban, suburban, etc.). A13 and A14 ask about if policies were continued or not continued because the policy improves the access to SNAP for historically underserved populations, A16 asks if the transition from predominantly in-person to remote services improved, reduced or had no effect on access to SNAP services.</p> <p>The case study discussion guide includes a series of questions related to equity and access. C.8.2 asks about how the permanent closures of local SNAP offices affected access to SNAP services. D.7.1 asks about the implications of the use of technology for different populations. E.7.3 asks about populations the SNAP agency has had the most difficulty reaching after the public health emergency and probes about how issues related to equity and access were considered when determining changes to application, certification, recertification, verification, or benefit issuance.</p>
E12	<p>We recommend removing this document request question. This may be too burdensome to respondents and this request would not be very helpful in confirming information in the survey.</p>
C9	<p>One pretest respondent said this question was difficult to answer without looking at their data. Another pretest respondent said that whereas participants generally were confused about the frequent changes to benefit amounts, it was hard to say whether specific groups were affected disproportionately. We recommend removing this question and asking C.8.1b in the case study discussion guide.</p>

c. Recommended revisions to survey items based on pretest feedback

Based on the pretest findings, we recommend additional revisions to the survey instrument to provide greater clarity and to better align the language of the questions to that used by States. We summarize the key changes here; Table 3 provides greater detail.

- We suggest revising the contact information request in the assignment modules to ask for the respondent’s “cell phone number” rather than “additional telephone number.” Our pretest respondents told us that employees typically have work-assigned cell phones.
- Based on feedback from the States about who may be able to answer Section C (Benefits Issuance) questions, we suggest adding to the introduction module that the SNAP field

operations director or the IT director may need to answer this section. The States indicated that there could be a great deal of variety across the country on who may be able to answer this.

- We suggest adding to the introductory language in Sections A–E to clarify that the focus of the survey is on policy and operations, and that Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) is beyond the scope of this survey. One pretest respondent brought up P-EBT during several sections of the pretest debrief discussion. Another respondent mentioned it would be helpful for county-administered States to have the introduction indicate that they should answer generally about what is done in the State. Each section introduction now includes the following language: *“As a reminder, the focus of this survey is on **SNAP** policies and operations. Although other programs, like Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT), have impacted SNAP, the questions in this survey will not focus on P-EBT. [IF County administered: You should answer all questions about what is generally done in your State.]”*

Table 3. Pretest revisions to survey items

Item	Revision
Section A. Staffing	
A1	<p>We added language to clarify that our definition of frontline staff includes all staff who work directly with applicants and participants. We added an example of “customer services agents” to clarify that this definition includes staff who may work directly with participants but do not make eligibility decisions. The revised definition reads as follows: “Frontline staff are all staff who work directly, both verbally and electronically, with SNAP applicants and participants. Case managers are one example, but there are also other frontline staff who work directly with applicants and participants such as customer service representatives.”</p> <p>We also changed the response option, “Yes, we redeployed staff from other State programs” to “Yes, we redeployed staff from other State, county, or city programs.” A pretest respondent mentioned that other county-level program staff were asked to help process SNAP applications, and the way the response option was originally written, they were not sure if this should be counted.</p>
A4	To clarify what we mean by frontline staff, we added “SNAP” in front of frontline workers.
A7	One survey pretest respondent reported no office closures in their State, whereas another case study pretest respondent from the same State reported major office closures. Based on pretest respondent feedback on the case study discussion guide, we realized that it may not have been clear that call centers should be included. We added language to clarify that we are interested in all SNAP office closures, including call centers.
<p>Old numbering: A10.1 – A10.2</p> <p>New numbering: A9.1 – A9.2</p>	We revised the response option, “Utilize non-merit staff to conduct case processing” to read, “Utilize non-merit staff in the eligibility determination process.” One pretest respondent noted that “case processing” was broad enough to include any actions that relate to the application process, such as moving cases from one place to another.
Old numbering: A11 – A12	We combined our definition of “administrative staff” to include “leadership staff,” rather than separating them into distinct categories. One pretest respondent noted that the distinction between “administrative” and “leadership” staff was unclear. Consolidating these categories will provide clarity for respondents and reduce

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Item	Revision
<p>New numbering: A10 – A11</p>	<p>burden for these items.</p>
<p>Old numbering: A13</p> <p>New numbering: A12</p>	<p>We added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States. A pretest respondent mentioned that depending on the location of the county (for example, small town vs. large city), the impact of allowing telework to continue may have small or large effects on real estate.</p>
<p>Old numbering: A14</p> <p>New numbering: A13</p>	<p>We revised two response options to make the tense consistent with other response options. We have revised “SNAP State leadership preferred this policy” to “SNAP State leadership prefer this policy.” We have also revised “Policy improved access to SNAP for historically underserved populations” to “Policy improves access to SNAP for historically underserved populations.”</p> <p>Two pretest respondents noted that one of the original options, “Participants prefer this policy,” was difficult to answer, as participants might not even know if a policy was in place. In response to their feedback, we have removed this response option.</p> <p>Another pretest respondent noted that it was difficult to distinguish between two of the response options: “Policy allows for greater administrative efficiency” and “Policy allows for greater administrative flexibility.” We have removed the latter response option.</p> <p>We added the following response option: “The policy was supported and/or encouraged to continue for political reasons.” A respondent said that there were external political factors at play when considering what policies to continue.</p> <p>We added a response option for county-administered States that says, “County leadership prefers this policy.”</p>
<p>Old numbering: A15</p> <p>New numbering: A14</p>	<p>We removed two response options from this question, “Participants did not prefer this policy” and “The policy reduced administrative flexibility.” The response options for this question are now consistent with newly numbered question A13.</p> <p>We added the following response option: “The policy was not supported and/or encouraged to continue for political reasons.” A respondent said that there were external political factors at play when considering what policies to discontinue.</p> <p>We added a response option for county-administered States that reads, “County leadership does not prefer this policy.”</p>
<p>Old numbering: A16</p> <p>New numbering: A15</p>	<p>We added the following text to the question: “<u>Based on your impression</u>, did the transition from predominately in-person to remote services improve, reduce, or have no effect on access to SNAP services for each of the following types of participants. <u>Your best estimate is fine.</u>” Two pretest respondents noted they did not have data to support their answers to this question, or that it would be burdensome to provide an answer beyond an impression or estimate. We added the response option “Our agency does not have enough information to provide an estimate.”</p> <p>We added an introductory question outside of the grid, “Please select here if your agency did not transition to remote services at all during the public health emergency.” This question routes respondents to the A16, rather than having</p>

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Item	Revision
	<p>respondents select this option for every item.</p> <p>We added a response option for county-administered states: "Changes in access varied by county for these participants." Our pretest respondent from a county-administered State noted there was variance among counties in how office closures affected access for different types of participants.</p>
<p>Old numbering: A17</p> <p>New numbering: A16</p>	<p>We revised the examples provided in this document request question to read, "...for example, information about office closures, telework, remote or hybrid working policies, etc." This question seeks to ask respondents to gather documents related to staffing changes made during the public health emergency, so we revised the examples to be specific to what we want to confirm in the survey.</p>
<p>Section B. Operations</p>	
<p>B2 and B3</p>	<p>Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.</p>
<p>B5</p>	<p>We revised this question so its language aligns with response options in B4. B4 asks respondents if they would like to see the policy adaptations made during the public health emergency (selected in B1.1–B1.2) available as a State option, codified for future emergencies, or both (available as State option and codified for future emergencies). We have added a language fill to this question, in which respondents are asked about the benefits they believe will result from implementing the policy adaptation they preferred in question B4.</p> <p>We removed response option, "Policy allows for greater administrative flexibility." One pretest respondent noted this response option was unclear and captured in the separate response option, "Policy allows for greater administrative efficiency."</p>
<p>B9b</p>	<p>Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we added the phrase "during the public health emergency" to the end of the question to be clear about timing.</p>
<p>B9c</p>	<p>We added the response option, "Post messages to social media platforms to inform students about changes to student exemptions." One pretest respondent advised us to include this option because their State has used this strategy, which is not fully captured in other response options.</p> <p>We have added language to two response options so that they read, "Conduct or <u>support</u> outreach..." One pretest respondent noted that they are not the sole agency conducting outreach in preparation for the transition back to normal operations, so they had to decide whether to select our original response options.</p>
<p>B10.2</p>	<p>We added this text to the question, "Please include any newly implemented or expanded changes you have made even if you would consider it to be a small change." One pretest respondent spoke about how they had a "light touch" on machine reading and was not completely sure if it counted as a "yes" response. We added this text to be clear about how we want changes, even if they are considered small, to be included.</p>
<p>B11</p>	<p>Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.</p>
<p>B12</p>	<p>We added a response option, "There are financial challenges to implementing this change." One pretest respondent recommended we add this response option because often there are financial reasons a State might not be able to implement a long-term change. We also added an option for the State to specify another response in case it is not fully captured in our list.</p>
<p>Section C. Benefits issuance</p>	

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Item	Revision
C2	We revised this question so that it asks, "Approximately how much advance notice did your State need to make changes to eligibility systems to <u>initially</u> issue Emergency Allotments?" One pretest respondent was unsure if we were asking about how much advance notice was needed every month, or when the system first started issuing emergency allotments.
C3 – NEW	We added two new questions that ask, "Did your State need to make changes to the eligibility system each month to issue Emergency Allotments? And if so, approximately how much advance notice did your State need to make changes to eligibility systems to issue Emergency Allotments every month?" One pretest respondent noted that in addition to the advance notice needed to initially issue Emergency Allotments (asked about in C2), the State needed significant notice every month to issue these benefits. We added these questions to make it clear we are also interested in the time it took States to issue emergency allotments from month to month.
<p>Old numbering: C5, C5a</p> <p>New numbering: C6, C6a</p>	We broke C6 into two questions that ask about how State agencies prefer to issue benefits such as Emergency Allotments (C6) or the 15 percent increase to maximum monthly benefits (C6a). One pretest respondent noted that these two benefits changes were very distinct, and that one was more difficult to administer than the other.
<p>Old numbering: C6, C7</p> <p>New numbering: C7, C8</p>	Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.
Section D. Participant case management and communication	
D1.1 – D1.2	<p>We revised D1.2 so that it asks, "Did your State <u>need to</u> establish/accelerate or expand use of the following methods to communicate the availability of SNAP assistance to prospective participants during the public health emergency?" We added "need to" in response to one pretest respondent who was unsure if this question was asking about changes made as a result of the public health emergency.</p> <p>We removed "catalogues" as a response option for these questions. Two pretest respondents did not know what this option referred to.</p> <p>Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we also added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.</p>
D2	Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.
D4	<p>We revised the question, "During the public health emergency, did your SNAP State agency make any of the following changes to its <u>case management structure</u>?" to read, "During the public health emergency, did your SNAP State agency make any of the following changes to its <u>staffing model for determining eligibility and case management</u>?" One pretest respondent said the original language was "strange" and did not capture our interest in eligibility staff.</p> <p>We revised the response option, "Transitioned to a first available worker model" to read, "Transitioned to a first available worker model (as opposed to assigning a dedicated case manager)."</p>

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Item	Revision
	<p>We revised the response option, “Increased responsibility of call center staff” to read, “Transitioned to call centers having more responsibility.” One pretest respondent said that this language clarified that we were interested in an increased role of the call centers beyond eligibility processing.</p> <p>Based on a recommendation of a pretest respondent, we also added a response option to account for potential variation for county-administered States.</p>
D5, D6, and D7	<p>We revised a response option to read, “In-person meetings in the case manager’s office/<u>in a SNAP center</u>.” One pretest respondent recommended we add this language.</p> <p>We also revised “Telephone line” by breaking it into two different options: “Calling a general call center line” and “Calling a direct line of a worker.” A pretest respondent advised that this may be a distinction worth noting in the survey.</p>
Section E. Technology and data systems	
E9	To clarify what we mean by IT staff, we added “SNAP” in front of IT staff.
E11	We revised the language in this question to clarify that respondents need not use external resources to answer this question. One pretest respondent noted that they would have to confirm with their IT staff the exact percentage of the department’s time spent on SNAP versus other programs. This question now asks, “During the public health emergency, <u>about</u> what percentage of the SNAP IT department’s time is spent on supporting SNAP versus other programs? <u>Your best estimate is fine.</u> ”
Document request questions	
A16; B18; B20; B22; and D9	<p>We added the following text to each of the document request questions in the survey, “These should be documents that are readily available for your State to share. If there are a lot of potential documents that could be sent, you may choose the most relevant ones or contact the helpdesk at [STUDYADDRESS]@mathematica-mpr.com for further guidance.”</p> <p>Pretest respondents indicated for the document request that the request could include a lot of different documents. They also indicated that they may need to coordinate with various departments to get documents. To make the request less burdensome, we have added text to each of the document request questions to emphasize that we want readily available documents and that they can send the most relevant ones.</p> <p>We added language to response option 4, asking respondents to explain if they are unable to provide the documents requested in the question.</p>
B18, B20, B22	<p>We reordered the document request items in Section B to align with the order of other survey questions within the section. First, we ask for documentation on procedural instructions and supplementary materials related to operating SNAP during the public health emergency (B18, B20). Then, we ask for documentation related to policies that have been continued, revised, or dropped since the end of the public health emergency.</p> <p>One pretest respondent noted that B20 was broad and potentially burdensome. We narrowed this question to only ask about supplementary materials for implementing policies related to operating SNAP during the public health emergency and provided an example. The new item reads: “Do you have any supplementary materials for implementing policies related to operating SNAP during the public health emergency? For example, an FAQ document for staff.”</p>

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B. Case study discussion guide pretest

We pretested the discussion guide with three State SNAP agency respondents in the State of Utah. Utah operates a Statewide SNAP model, so we conducted the local agency pretest with a State-level respondent who oversees local-level administration. The goals of the discussion guide pretest were to assess the length of time it would take to complete the interviews and to determine any needed changes to the instruments.

1. Pretest activities

a. Respondent recruitment

Intended respondents. Mathematica first contacted South Carolina and did not receive a response. Utah participated in the pretest of the survey instrument and shared with Mathematica that they might be willing to participate in the pretest of the discussion guide. After three unsuccessful outreach attempts with South Carolina, Mathematica contacted Utah to participate in the case study pretest. We recruited State-level staff from the Utah Department of Workforce Services to pretest the discussion guide. The designated State SNAP director referred us to other State staff.

Recruitment process. We developed pretest recruitment materials by adapting those we will use to collect data and began recruiting the pretest respondents in March 2023. An initial email briefly explained the goals of the study and the purpose of the pretest and included details about the types of information we would solicit during the pretest and how the study team would use the feedback. We offered to set up a telephone call to further discuss the pretest process, but the designated SNAP director was already familiar with the general process because of the State's involvement with the pretest of the survey instrument. The designated SNAP director provided us with the names and contact information of the other State staff who would participate in the pretest. We reached out to the additional contacts via email and scheduled three Webex interviews in late April with these individuals.

b. Pretest administration

We conducted three 90-minute pretest discussions. One member of the study team facilitated discussion while a second team member took notes during the calls. Each discussion involved asking the participant questions from each of the seven sections of the Master discussion guide and, using similar probes across respondents, inviting them to provide their thoughts and suggestions on the questions in each section. Generally, we asked respondents for feedback on (1) the clarity of the questions, (2) where there was clarity about the time periods discussed, (3) the flow of the questions, and (4) whether any questions were duplicative or any questions should be added. At the end of each discussion, we asked respondents for feedback on their overall experience during the discussion and lessons learned from their experiences navigating the public health emergency.

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- On April 20, we conducted a discussion with a State training program specialist using the Master discussion guide tailored for a State policy director or State field operations manager.
- On April 24, we conducted a discussion with a State operations manager using the Master discussion guide tailored for a local administrator.
- On April 27, we conducted a discussion with the designated SNAP director using the Master discussion guide tailored for the State SNAP director.

2. **Pretest findings and instrument revisions**

Our discussion on our pretest findings and associated proposed revisions to the discussion guide follows. For each interview, we summarize general findings about the guide and then present specific findings and recommended revisions.

a. General findings

State policy director or State field operations manager. The State field operations manager (training program specialist) found our discussion guide questions clear and relevant to their current thinking about SNAP operations before, during, and after the federal public health emergency. They noted that the discussion topics aligned well with their operational changes made during the public health emergency and comprehensively covered each of the respective subsections. They felt our definitions of the time periods before, during, and after the federal public health emergency worked well but suggested they should be clarified around training policies before and during the public health emergency.

The respondent noted that the discussion of staffing should include mental health support and training considerations because these were important components of the State's response to the public health emergency.

Local administrator. The State operations manager found the discussion guide questions clear and appropriate for someone in their role. They were unable to answer some questions about procedures before the public health emergency because they started their current role during the public health emergency. They noted that the organization and flow of the discussion were easy to follow and described the discussion as a "conversation."

The respondent noted that the discussion of staffing should include mental health support, training, and caseload considerations because these were important components of the State's response to the public health emergency. The respondent remarked that all changes implemented by the State agency came with challenges because they were made during a public health emergency.

State SNAP director. The designated State SNAP director found the discussion guide questions clear and appropriate for someone in their role. They were unable to answer some questions about procedures before the public health emergency because they started their current role during the public health emergency. They noted that the sections were clear generally and that the shifts in time periods before, during, and after the federal public health emergency were easy to follow.

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The respondent noted that the discussion of staffing should include staff turnover because they had heard this was important for many States. In addition, they felt the discussion of Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD) time limits and student eligibility should include inquiries to States about the processes they followed to implement the changes. The respondent remarked that emergency allotments were important to participants and affected the typical flow of SNAP applications in the State.

b. Specific findings and recommended revisions

Table 4 shows proposed revisions to the discussion guide based on pretest findings. Note we do not recommend any revisions to the introductory text or Section B.

Table 4. Pretest revisions to the case study discussion guide

Item	Revision
Section A: Respondent background	
A.4– NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend asking respondents how long they have worked for the State. This change will help the study team focus subsequent questions on respondents who are more likely to be able to answer them based on their experience in their current role and with the State.
Section C: Approaches to staffing	
Staffing structure	
C.1.1d	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director, State training program specialist, and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a probe to this question to ask States about training for new staff. Adding this probe should result in a more thorough response to this question.
C.1.2d	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director, State training program specialist, and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a probe to this question to ask States about training for new staff. Adding this probe should result in a more thorough response to this question.
Recruitment and retention	
C.2.2b	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend including “turnover and a lack of interested and qualified applicants” as examples of recruiting and retention challenges. This will help focus the discussion while enabling respondents to reflect on other challenges that may be unique to their State.
C.2.3c	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a probe to this question to ask States if they are still experiencing challenges after the public health emergency. Adding this probe should result in a more thorough response to this question.
Roles and responsibilities	
C.3.4 – NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State operations manager during their pretest, we recommend adding a question about caseload sizes to this section. This will help the study team capture more information about staffing changes during the public health emergency.
C.3.7– NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a question about staff training to this section. This will help the study team capture more information about staffing adaptations during the public health emergency.

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Item	Revision
C.3.8– NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a question about mental health considerations to this section. This will help the study team capture more complete information about State agency considerations for retaining staff during the public health emergency.
Telework	
C.4.2a.ii	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist during their pretest, we recommend rephrasing this question to ask, “What were the goals of the more flexible policies?” These changes improve the clarity of the question.
Office closures	
C.7.2– NEW	We recommend asking State and local officials about safety procedures offices implemented to provide in-person services during the public health emergency. Pretest respondents spoke about these procedures during the discussion of office closures. Adding this question will help the study team capture more complete information about State agency operations during the public health emergency.
Equity considerations	
C.8.1b	Based on feedback provided by the State operations manager during their pretests of the survey instrument and the discussion guide, we recommend asking State and local officials about how they would use data to examine how the transition to remote services affected various populations of interest.
C.8.2b	We recommend adding a probe to this question to ask State and local officials about the impacts on populations experiencing homelessness. This will help the study team capture more information about State agency equity considerations for various populations during the public health emergency.
C.8.3 – NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist and operations manager during their pretests, we recommend adding a question about the impacts of telework on who could apply and work for the State. This will help the study team capture information about State agency equity considerations for staff during the public health emergency.
Challenges and lessons learned	
C.9.2	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist during their pretest, we recommend rephrasing this question to ask: “ <i>Can you describe any roadblocks or unexpected consequences of the staffing changes your [State SNAP/local] SNAP agency made during or after the public health emergency?</i> ” This change will improve the clarity of the question.
Section D: Approaches to the use of technology	
Equity considerations around the use of technology	
D.7	We recommend adding a question to ask if the respondent would like us to repeat the definition of equity after the first occurrence in C.8. The question is as follows: <i>Before we begin, would you like me to share the definition of equity with you again? [Interviewer note: If respondents did not hear the definition previously, please jump into the definition without asking the above question. If respondents would like to be reminded of the definition, please read the definition again. If they decline, please proceed to question 1.]</i>
Challenges and lessons learned	

Item	Revision
D.9.2	Based on feedback provided by the State training program specialist during their pretest, we recommend rephrasing this question to ask: “ <i>Were there any roadblocks or unexpected consequences of the technology-related changes your [State/local] SNAP agency made during or after the public health emergency?</i> ” This change will improve the clarity of the question.
Section E: Decision-making processes for policy and operational changes	
Changes related to ABAWD time limits and student eligibility	
E.2.3 – NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director during their pretest, we recommend adding a question about the procedures States implemented to apply operational changes for ABAWDs and students. This will help the study team capture more information about changes related to ABAWD time limits and student eligibility.
Use of emergency allotments	
E.3– NEW	Based on feedback provided by the State SNAP director during their pretest, we recommend adding a question about factors that facilitated or impeded the State’s ability to issue allotments during the public health emergency. This will help the study team capture more information about the processes States implemented to issue benefits.
Equity and inclusion considerations	
<p>Old numbering: E5</p> <p>New numbering: E7</p>	<p>We recommend adding a question to ask if the respondent would like us to repeat the definition of equity after the first occurrence in C.8. The question is as follows: <i>Before we begin, would you like me to share the definition of equity with you again?</i> [Interviewer note: <i>If respondents did not hear the definition previously, please jump into the definition without asking the above question. If respondents would like to be reminded of the definition, please read the definition again. If they decline, please proceed to question 1.</i>]</p>
Reflections and lessons learned	
<p>Old numbering: F.9.2</p> <p>New numbering: E.9.2</p>	<p>We recommend adding this question to Section E to align with earlier sections and help the study team capture complete information about lessons learned related to policy and operational changes.</p>
Section F (old): Lessons learned	
F.1	Based on feedback from the State operations manager, we recommend removing this question. This change will reflect the understanding that all changes made during the public health emergency came with challenges.
F.2	Based on feedback from the State operations manager, we recommend removing this question. This change will reflect the understanding that all changes made during the public health emergency came with challenges.
F.4	We recommend removing this question because we found pretest respondents covered this topic in the lessons learned questions in each section of the guide and did not have more to add here. This change will help streamline the guide.
F.5	We recommend removing this question because we found pretest respondents covered this topic in the lessons learned questions in each section of the guide and did not have more to add here. This change will help streamline the guide.
F.8	We recommend removing this question because we found pretest respondents covered this topic in the lessons learned questions in each section of the guide and did not have more to add here. This change will help streamline the guide.
F.9	We recommend removing this question because we found pretest respondents covered this topic in the lessons learned questions in each section of the guide and did not have more to add here. This change will help streamline the guide.

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Item	Revision
Section F (new): Wrap-up	
Old numbering: F.3, F.6, and F.7 New numbering: F.2, F.3, and F.4	We recommend moving questions F.3, F.6, and F.7 from old Section F Lessons Learned to the new Section F Wrap Up to help streamline the discussion guide.