

Rapid cycle evaluation of operational improvements in SNAP E&T:

In-depth participant interview discussion guide

Introduction

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. My name is _____ and I am with a company called [Mathematica]. I'm an independent researcher assisting the U.S. Department of Agriculture on a study to learn more about changes in [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) employment and training (E&T) programs] that aim to help people get and keep jobs, and link them to the services they need to be successful. I'm here today to learn about your background and your experience with that program. I am also interested in learning about some of the things that might make it harder or easier for you to participate in this program or to find employment. This information will help us determine what works in these programs and what could be improved, so your input is valuable to us.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can stop at any time. The information you share with me today will be summarized and put together with information that we will gather from other clients. Nothing you say will be linked to your name in reports. We also won't share what you say with [SNAP Program Name and SNAP E&T Program Name] or any other program. All confidential information will be stored safely and destroyed at the end of the study. Your decision to participate in this interview and what you say will not affect your benefits.

Please remember that we are interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. My hope is that you will feel comfortable talking with me, but, if at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so and we will move on. Our conversation will take about 90 minutes, and at the end we will give you \$50.

I would like to record our conversation, so I don't miss anything. No one will hear the recording except for researchers and the person who transcribes it. Is it okay with you if I record this conversation? If you want me to turn the recorder off for any reason or at any time, just say so. [INTERVIEWER: TURN THE RECORDER ON, specify your name, the respondent's FIRST name, date, and location]

Do you have any questions? If you have any questions in the future, you can contact Mathematica at [NUMBER] or by e-mail at [EMAIL].

Before we begin, I'd like to have your consent documented for our records. Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Public Burden Statement

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service in evaluating operational improvements in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) programs that aim to improve delivery of services and program outcomes. This is a voluntary collection and FNS will use the information to assess the effectiveness of changes made to the SNAP E&T program. This collection does not request any personally identifiable information under the Privacy Act of 1974. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-[xxxx]. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes (1.5 hours) per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, 5th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22306 ATTN: PRA (0584-xxxx). Do not return the completed form to this address.

Privacy Act Statement

Authority: This information is being collected under the authority of Section 9 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, (7 U.S.C. 2018). Disclosure of the information is voluntary.
Purpose: The information is being collected to evaluate operational improvements in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) programs using rapid cycle evaluation.
Routine Use: The information may be shared with SNAP contract researchers and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) SNAP research and administrative staff.
Disclosure: If all or any part of the information is not provided, interviews may not be admissible in data sets.

SNAP E&T RCE: In-depth interview guide

A. Respondent background

I'm first interested in getting some background information about you and your household to get to know you.

1. Tell me about your home and who you're living with right now. Do you have any children living with you? How old are they?
2. Have you lived in the same home for the last two years? If not, how many times have you moved? Has it been easy or hard to find places to live that meet your family's needs? Why/why not?
3. Do you or any members of your household currently receive SNAP? Are the benefits you get just for you? Or do they also cover other people in your household?
4. Tell me about how far you got in school.

Probes:

- *Are you currently in school or a training program?*
- *What type of school or program are you attending (community college, tech school, etc.)?*

B. Employment

I'd like to ask you about your work experience.

5. How many different jobs have you had in the past two years?
6. Are you currently working for pay? How many jobs do you currently have? [If NO skip to Q10]

Employed

7. Tell me about your (main) job.

Probes:

- *Where do you work?*
 - *What are your responsibilities?*
 - *About how long have you had the job? Have you worked at the job regularly over the past X months/years [insert the time period the respondent indicated in the prior question]?*
 - *Do you like the job? Do you think it is the kind of job at which you would like to stay?*
 - *Are you able to move up at this job? Would you like to move up?*
8. [If more than one job] How do you manage more than one job? With more than one job, how many total hours do you work per week?
 9. Are you currently looking for a new job or additional work? Why? [All skip to Q13]

Probes:

- *What has the job search been like for you? Do you have any support looking for a job?*
- *How much time do you spend looking for a job?*

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Looking for Employment among those not employed

10. Have you been looking for a job?

Probes:

- *What has the job search been like for you? Do you have any support looking for a job?*
- *How much time do you spend looking for a job?*
- *Did you experience more than one period of being unemployed or between jobs? For how long were you unemployed?*

11. [If not looking for a job] What are the main reasons you aren't looking for work right now?

12. When was the last time you worked for pay?

All Respondents

Now, I'd like to ask about your experience finding work more generally.

13. Some people have a hard time finding a job. What challenges have you faced when trying to find or keep a job? [*Probes: Did you have a hard time finding a job you're interested in? Having the right qualifications or skills for the job? Finding a job that fits with your family's schedule?*] What was most challenging?

14. Tell me about any issues that have interfered with your daily life or made it difficult for you to work, or be in school or a training program in the last two years? [*Probe for health issues, mental health issues, substance use, incarceration, transportation, childcare, stable housing/having a stable address.*]

15. Have any support services (*such as transportation assistance, childcare or job placement services*) helped you find or keep a job? If so, what services are the most important? Would additional assistance have been helpful? What kinds?

C. Program experiences—Recruitment

Now I'd like to talk to you about your initial contact with [SNAP E&T Program Name].

16. What motivated you to enroll in [SNAP E&T Program Name]? What interested you most about [SNAP E&T Program Name]?

17. Tell me how you got connected with [SNAP E&T Program Name]. [*Probe: How did you hear about it? Probe for outreach materials such as email/text message/marketing*]

18. What do you remember about [outreach material]? What were your initial reactions to [outreach material]?

If received text messages or emails:

19. How clear or unclear was the information you received? How easy or difficult was it to understand your next steps based on the information you received?

20. Was the number of messages received the right amount? Too many/too few?

21. How easy or difficult is it for you to access a cell phone?

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Probes:

- *Do you have your own cell phone, or do you have a shared cell phone?*
- *How often do you run out of minutes on your phone?*
- *Do you have to pay to send or receive text messages? If so, do you typically have to stop sending/accepting texts in an average month?*
- *Do you pay for a data plan on your cell phone? Do you typically run out of data in an average month?*
- *How often do you change your cell phone?*

22. Did seeing [outreach material] influence your decision to enroll in the program? Why or why not?

Probes:

- *[If these messages did influence your decision] What content helped you make your decision?*
- *[If these messages did not influence your decision] What kind of messages, if any, would have encouraged you to join? What content would have helped?*

23. Tell me about your process of enrolling in [SNAP E&T Program Name]. What, if anything, made it easy or hard to enroll?

Probes:

- *What could have helped overcome any barriers?*

24. Are you still participating in [SNAP E&T Program Name]? Why or why not?

25. What suggestions do you have, if any, for how the enrollment process could be better?

D. Program Experiences—Engagement

Now I'd like to talk to you about your experiences with [SNAP E&T Program Name]. Let's take it step by step.

26. Please briefly describe your overall experience with the SNAP E&T program, particularly SNAP E&T program staff, case management, and length of time in the SNAP E&T program.

27. What happened when you when you first met with the SNAP E&T provider staff? What did you talk about or do in your first meeting with provider staff?

28. Tell me about any assessments [use language the program uses] you did when you started the SNAP E&T program.

29. After the assessment [use language the program uses], what activities and/or services were you assigned to? Please describe this process.

Probes:

- *Describe whether you worked on an employment plan [might have to explain what this is and use the name the provider or program uses for it]. How much say did you have in the plan?*

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- *To what extent did you know about all of the program activity options available? Did your case manager direct you to certain activities?*
- *How much guidance or advice did you get from your case manager about choosing training and providers?*
- *How much say did you have in the activities you took part in and where you went to get services? Would you have liked more say in this? Did you ever disagree with any of the choices your case manager suggested? If so, what happened?*

30. Please tell me about your case manager and how often you talk with him or her. Have you had the same case manager throughout your participation in [SNAP E&T Program Name]?

Probes:

- *What are the reasons you talk to your case manager? What kinds of things do you talk about?*
- *How often do you talk with this person? Do you generally contact him or her, or does he or she contact you?*
- *Do you mostly talk on the phone, in person, or through email? Other?*
- *How easy or hard is it to get in touch with your case manager? About how long does it take to get a response from him or her?*
- *[If completed training program] Does your case manager still keep in touch?*
- *Have you found your case manager(s) to be helpful or unhelpful? What kinds of help did they provide? What type of help, if any, did you need that was not provided?*

31. Was the level of case management you received enough to help you with everything you needed to keep you in the program? Would you have liked more or less case management? Why?

32. We would like to know if you are/have been able to access any program services virtually or online.

Probes:

- *What kind of computer access do you have?*
- *What kind of internet access do you have?*
- *How comfortable do you feel using a computer?*
- *What kinds of activities are you able to do on the computer [e.g., email, Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, games, use Zoom/go to virtual meetings on the computer]?*
- *How easy or hard is it for you to access SNAP E&T services virtually or online?*
- *How easy or hard is it for you to participate in virtual/online training programs?*

E. Assessing the program

Now I'd like to talk about how well the program met your needs.

33. Thinking about some of the difficulties you had when you entered the program and where you are now, what role do you think the program played in building your skills? In getting you a job?

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34. We talked about some of the struggles you had with finding and keeping jobs in the past. To what extent did the training program help you resolve some of these issues you had?
35. What additional support services could be/could have been provided to better help you complete the program?
36. What parts of the program are/were best or most helpful for you? In what ways?
37. Do you have any other suggestions for how [SNAP E&T Program Name] could be better?

F. Wrap up and Closing

38. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your program experiences, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about [SNAP E&T Program Name] in [LOCATION].

Before you leave, please make sure you have received your payment. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with us today.