Attachment B. Research Objectives and Approach to Data Collection

A. Research Objectives

This study will address 4 study objectives:

Study Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Identify areas in the administration of work requirements in SNAP and in SNAP E&T program administration and access where equity issues could occur.
- **Objective 2:** Identify and describe the data that could be used to assess access and outcomes in the areas identified in Objective 1.
- **Objective 3:** Describe how State agencies address equity in administering work requirements in their SNAP and SNAP E&T programs.
- **Objective 4:** Develop recommendations on how FNS should assess and measure equity in the administration of work requirements in SNAP and in SNAP E&T program administration and access.

B. Data Collection Purpose and Process

To achieve these study objectives, the study team will gather data from all 53 SNAP State agencies through (1) a web-based survey to collect information from SNAP State agencies and (2) by requesting documents for review and data abstraction of information related to the administration of SNAP work requirements and E&T programs. The study team will also conduct Key informant interviews (KIIs) in 6 States with SNAP State agency staff, local SNAP office staff, E&T providers, and other potential interested parties,[1] such as State Departments of Labor or Tribal organizations.

A description of the purpose of each of the 3 data collection components, along with a description of the data collection process, follows:

1. Web-based Survey

We will develop a web-based survey to capture how State agencies administer SNAP work requirements and their SNAP E&T programs in sufficient detail to summarize practices across States. The survey will also help us identify how States address equity in administering their SNAP work requirements and SNAP E&T programs. The target survey length is 75 minutes or less, with additional time for up to 3 State agency staff to coordinate in providing information (see Attachment Q for additional information on total estimated burden). To reduce burden on State agencies and ensure high rates of participation, we will apply the following strategies:

- Include cues designed to help each State Director identify other individuals (e.g., Director of Information Data Systems, Eligibility Staff Supervisor) who would be in the best position to provide the information needed to address questions in each module.
- Limit survey questions to information not available through documented sources.

- Use primarily closed-ended questions to address study objectives and include text boxes to enable respondents to elaborate on their answers if they choose to do so.
- Employ the following user-friendly survey programming capabilities to reduce burden:
  - Allow States to save their progress and resume the survey at their convenience.
  - Enable simultaneous access by multiple users.
  - Include a dashboard to help respondents easily select the module they are to complete and return to or review survey questions.
  - Allow respondents to upload requested documents.

2. Internal State Document Review and Data Abstraction

SNAP State Directors will receive an email with a URL to a secure website and instructions for uploading documents. The instructions will include a list of the documents we anticipate the States will be able to provide. These documents include any analyses or reports related to equity that States have produced, equity training documentation, provider agreements, documentation for data systems used to collect participant data, and interview scripts. The email will also include a study-specific help desk email address and phone number in the event of technical difficulties.

To minimize burden, we will ask States only for documents we cannot obtain from other sources. For example, we will obtain State SNAP E&T Plans and FNS-538 data directly from FNS. As States upload requested documents, we will record relevant information in a Microsoft Excel database, showing States' administration of work requirements, data available, efforts to assess equity in their programs, and other information relevant to their SNAP and SNAP E&T programs.

3. Key Informant Interviews

We will conduct interviews with up to 4 types of respondents in 6 State. The 4 types of respondents and the content of the information sought during each interview is detailed in the following sections. We will begin scheduling interviews once each State has completed its survey. By having each State first complete the survey, interviewers will be able to review the State's survey responses and internal documentation and clarify any vague or incomplete information in the interviews.

Interviews with SNAP State agency staff

The first semi-structured interview we plan to conduct in each State will be a small group discussion with SNAP agency staff. This discussion will include, at a minimum, the SNAP Director, SNAP E&T Director, and analysts or other staff familiar with the SNAP data and data systems. This discussion with State staff will provide critical information on State-level decision making related to waivers and other State options, types of E&T components offered, location of E&T services, provider selection, and hiring practices. This discussion will also delve into the extent to which State staff are currently centering equity in their decision-making regarding work requirements and E&T.

We will ask State staff questions about the types of data they currently gather that can be used to assess equity, the types of data they think should be gathered to facilitate accurate measures, and data challenges. Lastly, we will ask State staff to share any challenges or considerations for measuring equity in work requirements and E&T. Interviewers will also request any additional documents mentioned during the discussion that were not received in advance of the interview, such as internal key performance measures or data dictionaries. The group interview will last approximately 90 minutes.

Interviews with SNAP local office staff

After the State-level interviews, the study team will interview staff at 2 local SNAP offices. We will work with the State to select local offices with different characteristics to get a thorough understanding of how local offices administer work requirements and E&T programs. Ideally, we will select 1 urban and 1 rural office. Previous research has shown that participants in rural areas may face additional challenges to engaging in E&T.[1] However, if the State offers E&T only in urban counties, we will work with the State to identify other criteria for selecting local offices. If a State selected to participate in the KII portion of the study does not have a local office structure (e.g., the State uses a call center approach), we will work with the SNAP Director to identify relevant staff.

Each 60-minute interview will be a small group discussion with up to 3 individuals at various levels, including supervisors and frontline staff. The discussion will focus on understanding how staff (1) determine who is subject to work requirements, (2) refer participants to E&T services, and (3) track participation in E&T. We will also ask staff about the types of data collected and how they are collected, how participants are assigned to a caseworker, and the extent to which hiring and staffing decisions are made locally. Lastly, we will ask local office staff to share any challenges or considerations for measuring equity in work requirements and E&T. Interviewers will also request any additional documents mentioned during the discussion that were not received in advance of the interview, such as internal reporting or training documents.

Interviews with E&T providers

The study team will conduct 4 interviews with E&T provider staff. We will work with the SNAP State agency to identify 4 E&T providers across the State. Providers will be selected to ensure a variety of provider types across the 6 States (e.g., community-based organizations, community colleges, American Job Centers). We will also seek to recruit providers across a range of other characteristics (e.g., location, programs and population served, E&T components offered). To the extent possible, we will work with State staff to select at least 2 providers in the same geographic area as the 2 local SNAP offices; this strategy will enable the study team to better understand local demographic and employment dynamics.

Each 60-minute interview will be a small group discussion with up to 3 individuals at different levels (e.g., managers, caseworkers). The discussion will focus on providers' role in addressing and measuring equity in E&T services. In particular, we will discuss the types of data providers currently capture, what data they do and do not share with the State, and how these data could be used to develop measures of equity. We will also learn to what extent the providers center equity in their work and the services they offer to both directed SNAP E&T participants and reverse referrals, including how they factor equity into outreach, recruitment, assessment, and enrollment decisions; participant reimbursements; caseworker assignments; and hiring practices. If the providers also serve recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, participants of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs, or participants of other workforce programs, we will inquire how staff measure and/or address equity concerns for these

[1] Rowe, G., Brown, E., & Estes, B. (2017). SNAP employment and training (E&T) characteristics study: Final report. Mathematica Policy Research. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. https://www.mathematica.org/publications/snap-employment-and-training-e-t-characteristics-study-final-report

populations. We will close the discussion by asking staff to share any challenges or considerations for measuring equity in E&T.

Interviews with other interested parties

Some SNAP State agencies work closely with other government agencies or nongovernmental organizations to operate SNAP E&T. For example, in some States, the Department of Labor plays a large role in E&T program operations. Other States may collaborate closely with a community college consortium or other groups to develop their E&T programs. In such circumstances, these staff may have important insights on equity in SNAP E&T. During the recruitment process, the study team will work with State staff to determine whether we should interview any other interested parties for the study. We anticipate we may not conduct this interview in every State.

Discussions with these staff will vary depending on the organization's role in E&T program operations. At a minimum, the discussion will focus on understanding the agency's or organization's role in advancing equity in E&T. When relevant, we will also discuss data and data needs, process for determining E&T components offered, hiring practices, and provider selection. Each interview will last up to 60 minutes.

Conducting the interviews

Prior to the start of the KII data collection, the study team will tailor the interview protocols based on information we learn about the State. For example, the interviewer may probe further on any open-ended survey responses or use information from the survey to better frame the question to the State's specific circumstances. The State team will also review all submitted documentation to develop an understanding of the State's systems and processes. In selecting interview participants, we will consider each person's tenure in their current position, history with the State, and their involvement with the SNAP E&T program and program data based on their day-to-day role.

Interviews will be conducted virtually via a videoconferencing platform (e.g., Teams, Zoom). If the respondent agrees, each interview will be recorded. Recordings will be professionally transcribed. Study team members will also take detailed notes during the interviews.

Because interviews will be conducted virtually, they do not need to be completed on consecutive days. However, each State interview team will attempt to complete their 8 interviews within a 2-week window. Though the length of the interview data collection period will be partially determined by the survey completion timeline, we anticipate all interviews will be completed within 12 weeks of the close of survey data collection.