

## **Cognitive Testing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Messaging for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents, Submitted Under Generic Clearance for Questionnaire Pretesting**

**Request:** The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research. We plan to conduct up to 30 cognitive interviews to test messaging for a subset of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients that are subject to eligibility time limits based on their status as Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs). SNAP recipients who are between the ages of 18 and 49, have no dependents, and are not disabled can only get SNAP benefits for three months in three years if they do not meet special work requirements.<sup>1</sup> We plan to evaluate messaging that communicates ABAWD work requirements, eligibility criteria, and sanctions as to whether it is clear and easy to understand.

**Purpose:** SNAP is a federal program but is administered by the states; thus, state agencies craft their own messaging related to ABAWD time limits and work requirements. The ABAWD eligibility time limits are federally mandated, and some states have additional work requirements for SNAP recipients. The two types of work requirements create complexity in messaging and communications for SNAP recipients. Our goal is to test whether current messaging is clear and easy to understand, to provide recommendations for addressing any issues we might find, and to develop best practices for communicating with SNAP recipients who are subject to ABAWD time limits. Staff from the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) are working closely with staff from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to develop recommendations for messaging that is broadly applicable across states.

We have conducted two previous rounds of testing of ABAWD messages, and this request is for the third and final round. We plan to conduct cognitive interviews in two states: Minnesota and Wisconsin. We will conduct up to 15 cognitive interviews in each state (for a maximum of 30 interviews) to test messaging currently in use in each state. This research will determine whether the messages in use in each state are clear and easy to understand and will inform guidance applicable to messaging for ABAWDs across states.

**Population of Interest:** SNAP recipients who are potentially subject to ABAWD eligibility time limits, recent or current SNAP applicants, and individuals who would likely qualify for food assistance and meet ABAWD eligibility criteria if they applied.

**Timeline:** Between March and July 2023, staff from CBSM will conduct cognitive interviews in Minnesota and Wisconsin with up to 30 participants total.

**Language:** Interviews will be conducted in English.

**Sample:** We will focus on recruiting respondents who are eligible to receive SNAP benefits and who potentially meet the ABAWD eligibility criteria. We will also sample for diversity based on level of education, race, and gender.

**Recruitment:** Respondents will be recruited with the help of local SNAP offices and charitable assistance organizations. CBSM will provide SNAP offices and assistance organizations in each site with flyers and advertisements that can be sent electronically to recipient listservs, posted on local websites, or physically posted in public areas of service offices. These materials will include a URL and a toll-free telephone number that potential participants can use if they wish to participate (See Enclosure 1 –

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ABAWD>

Recruitment Materials). Participants will be screened via online questionnaire or phone interview and scheduled for a cognitive interview if they qualify (See Enclosure 2 – Additional Screening Questions).

**Locations of interviews:** This round of interviews will be conducted in and around the cities of St. Cloud, Minnesota and Green Bay, Wisconsin, in state agency offices where SNAP participants apply for benefits. We chose St. Cloud and Green Bay because of the density and diversity of SNAP recipients in these areas.

**Protocol:** The protocol is designed to test messaging to ABAWDs in use in Minnesota and Wisconsin to communicate issues related to ABAWD time limits. Participants will be trained to think-aloud and to give their immediate reactions to what they are reading. Researchers will remind participants to think aloud as they are reading the materials and ask scripted and spontaneous probes designed to gauge comprehension and interpretation of the materials being tested.

We plan to test five documents from each state. The documents all include descriptions of eligibility criteria for the ABAWD time limits or are designed to notify SNAP recipients about their eligibility for continuing to receive food assistance. The test materials were provided by the Minnesota and Wisconsin SNAP liaisons and chosen for testing with input from FNS staff. The materials we plan to test in each state are listed below.

Minnesota:

- Letter 1 – Notice of Decision
- Letter 2 – Work Rules Notice
- Letter 3 – First Sanction Notice
- Letter 4 – Multi-Person Sanction Notice
- Letter 5 – Closing Notice

Wisconsin:

- Letter 1 – About Your Benefits
- Letter 2 – Time Limited
- Letter 3 – Work Requirements Flyer
- Letter 4 – FSET Initial Appointment
- Letter 5 – FSET Appointment Final Notice

Enclosures 3 and 4 contain the interview protocols and testing materials for Minnesota and Wisconsin, respectively.

**Informed Consent:** We will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be accessed only by employees involved in the research project. The consent form will also indicate that the respondent agrees that the interview can be audio-taped to facilitate analysis of the results. Participants who do not consent to be audio-taped will still be allowed to participate. A copy of the consent form is attached (see Enclosure 5 – Consent Form).

**Incentive:** Participants will receive a \$50 incentive for in-person participation and \$40 for remote interviews.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> We do not currently plan on remote interviews but if conditions change, we will consider remote interviewing.

**Length of Interview:** We estimate that each of the 30 in-person cognitive interviews will take approximately 60 minutes. This results in a burden of 30 hours.

The pre-approved generic screening questionnaire will take approximately ten minutes per person, and the additional screening questions specific to this research will take two minutes per person (see Enclosure 2). We estimate that we will screen up to three people for each successful recruit for each of the 30 interviews. Therefore, we estimate a total of 90 people screened for a total of about 3 hours (90 people at 2 minutes each).

The total estimated participant burden for this request is 33 hours or less.

Category	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Screening	90	2 minutes	3 hours
Cognitive Interviews	30	60 minutes	30 hours
<b>Total</b>			33 hours

The following documents are included as attachments:

- Enclosure 1: Recruitment Materials
- Enclosure 2: Additional Screening Questions
- Enclosure 3: Minnesota Protocol and Testing Materials
- Enclosure 4: Wisconsin Protocol and Testing Materials
- Enclosure 5: Consent Form

The contact person for questions regarding this request is:

Alfred "Dave" Tuttle  
Center for Behavioral Science Methods  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, D.C. 20233  
(301) 763-7809  
alfred.d.tuttle@census.gov