

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Who is conducting this study?

This study is being conducted by Mathematic Policy Research with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

2. What is this study about?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical source of support for many low-income individuals and families. Participation in the program has grown dramatically since the onset of the 2008 recession. In January 2010, 39.4 million people—more than one in eight Americans—received SNAP benefits.

In response to record case loads and tight budgets, states have begun to modernize their approach to administering SNAP. FNS commissioned this study to examine the experiences of states with advanced modernization initiatives, focusing on program efficiency, access, and integrity. By describing six states' experiences with modernization and identifying the potential impacts on program outcomes, this study will inform the plans of other states attempting to increase access and efficiency.

3. What do you mean by “modernization”?

For the purposes of this study, modernization refers to changes to SNAP or other social service programs designed to achieve program goals more efficiently and, where possible, more effectively. These changes incorporate technology, administrative restructuring, community partnering, and policy simplification in an effort to reduce operating costs while maintaining or increasing program access.

4. How were states selected for this study?

States were selected for the study using a multi-stage process. First, Mathematica created an index that tracked the number and type of modernization initiatives in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Next, using a natural break in the ranking this matrix produced, Mathematica identified 14 states that had undertaken numerous modernization initiatives. Mathematica applied a second-stage analysis to these states, identifying nine states with the broadest geographical scope and longest duration of initiatives. FNS selected the six of these that resulted in the best mix of states for the study.

5. How will data be collected for this study?

This study will present detailed, comprehensive case studies of each of the six states. Data collection strategies include interviews with state and local SNAP staff, community partners, and vendors; focus groups with SNAP participants and eligible nonparticipants; collection of extant program data and performance measures, such as application timeliness or error rates; and collection of other available materials such policy manuals, training materials, and staff and client satisfaction surveys.

6. What will the final product of this study be?

The study team will produce a final report documenting the results of the study. The report will present the highlights of the six study states' modernization activities and implementation experiences in the text and support them with detailed state profiles, including a summary table of each state's activities and a graphic illustrating the implementation time line, in appendices. The report will include a cross-state analysis of SNAP outcomes and modernization experiences, discussing themes that were consistent across the states and describing similarities and differences in successes and challenges. The report will close with conclusions for FNS and state policymakers.

7. Will anyone find out about what I say in this study?

The results of the study will be synthesized in a final report. The information will be discussed by state and modernization activity, as well as other themes that emerge over the course of the study. We will not identify names of respondents.

8. Why am I being asked to participate?

In order to meet this study's objectives the majority of the data will be collected through interviews of state SNAP staff; regional or county SNAP staff; local SNAP office staff, including staff of call centers and other specialized units; members of community-based organizations partnered with state SNAP agencies; and staff of vendors contracted to assist with the administration of SNAP.

State, regional, and local agency interviews will focus on state and local modernization efforts, including how they were planned and implemented, what effects they had, what challenges arose, and how modernization experiences varied by location and job function. Interviews with private vendors and community-based partners will focus on topics that are specific to the modernization activities in which they are partnering with the states.

Without your participation, we would not get a clear picture of the modernization efforts in your area, and would lose valuable information that can help other states, including those in the study, develop and refine modernization initiatives in the future.

9. What kinds of questions will you ask?

The goal of the interviews is to identify the experience of modernization, including what works, what doesn't work, and why. Interviews will last 60 minutes on average, and will include closed- and open-ended questions. Information to be collected from state and local SNAP staff will include: (1) what

the key modernization changes were, including how they were selected, tested, and implemented; (2) how modernization changes affected roles and responsibilities, both within state and local offices, and between them and community partners; (3) how changes affected client interaction and program performance; (4) how staff, partners, and clients reacted to the changes; and (5) what key successes and challenges each state experienced and what lessons these hold for other states. Interviews of vendors and community partners will be similar but will focus on the modernization activities in which they are partnering with the states

10. Who are the best people in my office to participate in the interviews?

In order to achieve the study’s objectives the project team will interview staff at all levels of the state—from state-level policymakers to district- or county-level administrators to local office directors to front-line eligibility workers. We will work with state, county, and local SNAP administrators to identify which key staff to interview.

11. Which sites will be visited in my state?

We will visit four sites in each state. These will include the state capital, one site in the largest urban area, and at least one in a rural area. We will seek to capture geographic diversity and also any diversity in modernization activities that may exist. In selecting sites we will weigh the opinions of state officials as well as those of other knowledgeable sources, such as (where relevant) the state caseworker unions; a state welfare policy advocates; research staff in the state’s legislature; and/or national organizations that track state SNAP policies, such as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

12. How long will interviews take?

Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

13. What will you do with case record extracts?

Mathematica will use case record extracts from each state to analyze trends in participation, overall and by subgroup, over the time period corresponding with major modernization changes to see if any correlations emerge between reforms and changes in program performance. At the end of the study Mathematica will create public use files and submit them to FNS. The files will include all primary and extant data gathered during the study. Names of individuals participating in interviews or focus groups will not be included. Mathematica will destroy all remaining data files once the public use files are delivered to FNS.

14. Do I need to get permission from FNS to participate in the study?

This project is being funded by FNS. They are aware that we are asking for your participation in this study. If you would like to contact them about this study, you may contact Rosemarie Downer, the Project Officer at FNS, at (703) 305-2129 or rosemarie.downer@fns.usda.gov.

15. Do I have to participate in the study?

Your feedback is appreciated by and informative to FNS but is not required. Mathematica and FNS have made efforts to minimize the burden that collecting this information will place on you and other respondents in an effort to make your participation as easy as possible.

16. Is the state being reimbursed for participating in the study?

Yes, each state is being compensated for the costs of participating in the study.

17. Is there someone I can call to get more information?

Yes, for more information you may contact Scott Cody, the Project Director at Mathematica, at (202) 484-4523 or scody@mathematica-mpr.com, or Rosemarie Downer, the FNS Project Officer at (703) 305-2129 or rosemarie.downer@fns.usda.gov.

18. Does this project have OMB clearance?

Yes, this study obtained OMB clearance on MONTH XX, 201X. The OMB approval number is 0584-0547, and clearance expires on MONTH XX, 201X.

