Enhancing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Certification: SNAP Modernization Efforts
Final Report - Volumes I & II
Gretchen Rowe, Carolyn T. O'Brien, Sam Hall, Nancy M. Pindus, Lauren Eyster, Robin Koralek, Alexandra Stanczyk

Abstract
The Urban Institute conducted a comprehensive study of state efforts to modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Although modernization may be defined in many ways, this study adopted a broad definition of modernization described within four categories—policy changes, organizational changes, technological innovations, and partnering arrangements. The study included three data collection activities: initial site visits to four states; a national survey of all states, including a sample of local offices and partner organizations; and intensive case studies in 14 states. The states selected to participate in the case studies included Colorado, D.C., Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. The main focus of this report is on findings from the intensive case studies conducted between February and June 2009.

The text below is an excerpt from the complete document. Read Volume I and Volume II in PDF format.

Executive Summary
The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct a comprehensive study of state efforts to modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The goals of this descriptive study were to develop a comprehensive, national inventory of efforts of states to modernize certification and recertification processes in SNAP, to identify successful modernization efforts and promising practices that can potentially be replicated, and to share information to help avoid implementation pitfalls and failures among states currently planning similar kinds of modernization initiatives. This study explores factors that led to implementation of modernization activities and shifts in business practices and systematically describes these changes and their effects on both client and staff experiences, although it is not possible to attribute outcomes to specific changes. It also identifies cross-cutting themes and patterns across modernization efforts.

Although states and policymakers may define modernization in many ways, this study adopted a broad, comprehensive definition of modernization—including technological innovations as well as policy and organizational changes and partnering arrangements that affect the way SNAP is delivered to clients. Modernization is described here within four very broad categories—policy changes, organizational changes and reengineering of administrative functions, technological innovations, and partnering arrangements—as follows:

• Policy Changes
  Includes state options, such as simplified reporting requirements, expanded vehicle exemption criteria, expanded categorical eligibility, and use of FNS policy waivers for combined application programs (CAPs) and face-to-face interviews at application or recertification

• Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions
  Includes changes such as restructuring the up-front client management process in local offices, shifting to a task-based system for managing caseloads, simplifying the application and certification process to improve access, and changing staffing configurations, as well as contracting some organizational functions to commercial business partners

• Technological Innovations
  • Call Centers
Refers to centralized locations where clients may call to obtain information about their case, to conduct interviews, or to submit changes to their case
- Online Application and Benefit Tools
  Allows clients to complete an application electronically through a secure web site, including signing and submitting the application, prescreening for benefits, applying for multiple programs, checking benefit status, or submitting changes to their case
- Technology to Advance Paperless Systems
  Refers to electronic case files and document imaging technology as well as data-sharing technology—which allows the electronic exchange of client data and documentation with one or more agencies—and electronic caseworker manuals and office correspondence
- New Management Information Systems (MISs) and Workflow Management Systems
  Includes major updates to MISs or creating new systems, often moving from mainframe systems to web-based systems that allow for worker entry interfaces and workflow monitoring
- Partnering Arrangements
  Includes unpaid (or not fully compensated) partnering arrangements with community organizations, other government agencies, and businesses to provide additional access points and application assistance

To document key features and outcomes associated with SNAP modernization, this study included three data collection activities: initial site visits to four states (Phase One)\(^2\); a national survey or inventory of all states,\(^3\) including a sample of local offices and partner organizations (Phase Two); and intensive case studies in 14 states (Phase Three). Information gathered during Phase One was updated using data from the national inventory in Phase Two. This information was analyzed using several criteria—including type of SNAP administration, region, type and stage of modernization, and use of partners—to select states for Phase Three of the study. The states selected to participate in the case studies included the four states from Phase One—Utah, Washington, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin—and Colorado, D.C., Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

While the focus of the final report is on findings from Phase Three of the study—the case studies conducted in 14 states between February and June 2009—it presents a synthesis of information from all three data collection and analysis phases, where appropriate. This summary provides key background information and highlights of that report.

*(End of excerpt. Read Volume I and Volume II in PDF format.)*

**Other Publications by the Authors**
- Gretchen Rowe
- Carolyn T. O’Brien
- Sam Hall
- Nancy M. Pindus
- Lauren Eyster
- Robin Koralek
- Alexandra Stanczyk

Usage and reprints: Most publications may be downloaded free of charge from the web site and may be used and copies made for research, academic, policy or other non-commercial purposes. Proper attribution is required. Posting UI research papers on other websites is permitted subject to prior approval from the Urban Institute—contact publicaffairs@urban.org.

If you are unable to access or print the PDF document please contact us or call the Publications Office at (202) 261-5687.

**Disclaimer:** The nonpartisan Urban Institute publishes studies, reports, and books on timely topics worthy of public consideration. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Copyright of the written materials contained within the Urban Institute website is owned or controlled by the Urban Institute.

Source: The Urban Institute, © 2012 | http://www.urban.org