



Food and
Nutrition
Service

DATE: March 13, 2019
SUBJECT: SNAP - Issues with Application Materials Submission Instructions

Park Office
Center

TO: Regional Directors
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
All Regions

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On October 6, 2017, we issued a memo regarding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applicants and households who are sending certification materials to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) instead of the appropriate SNAP State agency for processing. At the time, SNAP State agencies were reminded to review the clarity of their applications and certification material submission instructions to identify areas where they can be made more user-friendly. However, USDA continues to receive large volumes of misdirected SNAP applications.

USDA is increasingly concerned about the customer-service and processing impact this has on clients. SNAP State agencies are given flexibility in how they operate SNAP, including how certification materials such as applications, notices, and verification requests are designed, in order to best serve households in their States. Clear and accessible instructions as to where applications and certification materials should be submitted will encourage applicants and households to submit their materials to the correct location, resulting in a more efficient and effective certification process overall. Once again, USDA asks each SNAP State agency to review its applications and certification materials to ensure they are customer-friendly.

The Nondiscrimination Statement (NDS) must be included on SNAP application materials. The NDS includes the address of USDA Office of Civil Rights. Since many States have placed the NDS at the end of certification materials, the last address, and sometimes the only address, an applicant or household sees is that of USDA's Office of Civil Rights, rather than that of the SNAP State agency. Again, instructions as to where applications and certification materials should be sent need to be clear and accessible on these forms to avoid this confusion on behalf of applicants and recipients.

As a reminder, below are some best practices State agencies should consider:

- Describe multiple ways to submit certification materials: mailing address, online, in-person, telephone;
- Provide submission instructions in multiple locations including after the last question/signature box on certification materials;
- Use visual cues to mark the submission instructions prominently on the application (e.g. use of bold/colored font, icons, shaded boxes or bullets, and appropriate spacing);
- Include a pre-addressed envelope;

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

- Avoid using URLs as the only way to access a county/local office mailing address;
- Include an attachment with county/local office mailing addresses; or
- Review certification materials with applicants and clients to gather feedback for improvements; and
- Ensure applications and certification materials and their instructions are in formats accessible to individuals with disabilities and in frequently encountered languages for persons with limited English proficiency.

USDA will monitor the volume of applications and certification materials received to see if more aggressive steps are needed. We know you share our priority to improve customer service and ensure SNAP is administered efficiently, effectively and with the utmost integrity.

Please distribute this guidance to your State agencies and advise them to contact their respective FNS Regional Offices (RO) points of contact with any questions and for technical assistance. ROs should contact Laura Griffin at (703) 305-2944 or Laura.Griffin@usda.gov with any questions concerning this memorandum.

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