



Food and
Nutrition
Service

Park Office
Center

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DATE: January 19, 2016

SUBJECT: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - Review of Major Changes in Program Design and Management Evaluation Systems Final Rule

TO: Regional Directors
SNAP
All Regions

As you know, the final rule, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Review of Major Changes in Program Design and Management Evaluation Systems (Major Changes Rule) was published in the Federal Register on January 19, 2016. State agencies have until March 21, 2016 (60 days from date of publication) to be in compliance with the major changes regulatory provisions at 7 CFR 272.15. Changes to the definitions of project areas that impact the requirements for State Management Evaluations (MEs) are effective October 1, 2016.

This memorandum provides a brief summary describing the rule's provisions and outlines the next steps in its implementation.

More detailed guidance, including Qs & As, and instructions on notifying the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of major changes will be issued by February 10, 2016. Regions should send any questions they would like addressed in the Qs & As by January 29, 2016.

On January 27, 2016, from 3:30pm to 4:30pm Eastern Standard Time (EST), FNS will host a webinar for State agencies to explain and discuss the rule. Please provide the following webinar registration link to key SNAP officials in your States: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TDT7H75>

Definitions

Revised Definition of Project Areas – 7 CFR 271.2 (a)-(c)

The provision revises the definition of large, medium and small project areas for the purposes of selecting sites for MEs.

- Large project area caseload is more than 25,000
- Medium project area caseload is between 5,000 to 25,000
- Small project area caseload is now fewer than 4,999

Major Changes in Program Design

State's Reporting of Major Changes – 7 CFR 272.15(a)

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This provision implements the requirement for States to notify FNS when they decide to make a major change in their operation of SNAP. States must notify FNS when changes have been approved by the appropriate State authority but no less than 120 days prior to beginning implementation of the change or entering into a contract. If the State is unable to meet the 120 day deadline, they must notify FNS as soon as they are aware of the change and explain why they could not meet the deadline.

While this provision does not require FNS to approve the reported change in order for the State to proceed with implementation, States are still required to follow the Advance Planning Document process specified in 7 CFR 277.18 if applicable.

All major change notifications must be submitted electronically to the FNS National Office with an analysis of the expected impact of the change as specified in 7 CFR 272.15(a)(3) (see below). States are encouraged to copy their FNS Regional Office. As mentioned above, the format for notifying FNS of a major change and analyzing its projected impacts will be provided in additional guidance that will be issued by February 10, 2016.

Major Changes – 7 CFR 272.15(a)(2)

The following is a summary of the major changes defined in this provision:

- Closure of any local office that performs major functions for 750 or more SNAP households or five percent of the State's total SNAP monthly caseload, whichever is less, and there is not another office available to serve the affected households within 35 miles.
- Substantial increased reliance on automated systems for the performance of responsibilities previously performed by State merit system personnel (as described in Section 11(e)(6)(B) of The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended) or changes in the way that applicants and participants interact with the State's SNAP agency. This includes the replacement of the State's automated systems used in the certification process, adding functionality to the existing automated systems used in the certification process, or changes in the way applicants and participants interact with SNAP.
- Changes in operations that potentially increase the difficulty of households reporting required information. This could include implementation of a call center or internet web portal for change reporting, a major modification to forms that households use to report changes or the discontinuation of an existing avenue for reporting changes.
- Any reduction or change of the functions or responsibilities currently assigned to SNAP merit system personnel.

- A decrease of more than five percent in the total number of merit system personnel involved in the SNAP certification process in the State from 1 year to the next. In addition, a decrease of more than eight percent in the total number of merit system personnel involved in the SNAP certification process in the State over a 2 year period would be a major change.
- Other major changes identified by FNS.

State Analysis on Impact of Change – 7 CFR 272.15(a)(3)

When States initially report a major change to FNS, the report must be accompanied by a description of the change and an analysis of its anticipated impacts of program performance. The description shall include information related to the change's scheduled implementation, if the change is State-wide, what the change is intended to accomplish, and answers to specific questions outlined in 7 CFR 272.15(a)(3)(i). The analysis must include an evaluation of the impact of the change as it relates to key performance metrics such as payment error, negative error, timeliness and program access/customer service.

FNS Action on State's Reports – 7 CFR 272.15(b)

These provisions require FNS to evaluate the reported change to determine if it is indeed a major change and what additional information, beyond the required reporting elements, will be needed. This will initially be done at the FNS National Office in consultation with the appropriate Regional Offices. These provisions also set forth the ongoing required reporting elements that apply to all major changes. The reports are to be submitted quarterly, with data broken out on a monthly basis.

Performance Reporting System

Sub-Units, Review Process, and Corrective Action Planning Changes–
7 CFR 275.7(a), 275.9(b), and 275.16(b)

These sections are revised to eliminate references to issuance offices and requirements for coupon issuance and insert a reference to the implementation of major changes as a possible deficiency requiring corrective action planning.

Next Steps

FNS will issue more detailed guidance and Qs & As on the Major Changes Rule by February 10, 2016. In addition, FNS is hosting a webinar for State agencies on January 27, 2016, from 3:30pm to 4:30pm EST. To register for the webinar, please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TDT7H75>

Regional Directors
Page 4

State agencies that have questions regarding this memorandum, should contact their respective Regional Office Representative. Regional Office Representatives who have questions regarding this memorandum should contact Mary Rose Conroy, Chief, Program Design Branch at (703) 305-2803.

/s/ Lizbeth Silbermann

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Director
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