

Background

States have implemented a variety of modernization initiatives to improve access and delivery of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in order to manage increasing caseloads under budgetary constraints. Modernization initiatives can include the following types of activities: policy simplification, restructuring organizational and administrative functions, partnering with other organizations and implementing new technology. As these efforts have multiplied and expanded, so has the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) interest in how States implement and monitor their efforts. Similarly, States have an interest in seeing how other States are performing.

This exploratory study was conducted to determine the measures States have in place across eight modernization initiatives, including call centers, online systems, document imaging, kiosks, partnering, waiving the face-to-face interview, shortened interviews and online expedited applications. A review of SNAP performance standards and reporting requirements as they pertain to these modernization initiatives was conducted.

The effort resulted in two reports. The first report integrates and summarizes findings across the 45 study States (44 states plus the District of Columbia) on how they monitor and measure performance. It also includes suggestions for performance measures and standards for FNS and States to consider. The second report delves into details on how each of the 45 States measures performance and describes the performance standards in use.

Methods

The study was conducted in two-phases. In the first phase, a broad group of stakeholders were interviewed for their perspectives on performance measurement activities in the States. During the second phase, data were collected from the 45 study States, more than 100 local agencies within those States, and more than 50 community and business partners who work with the States and local agencies.

Findings

States and local offices are collecting a large number of measures. Across the 8 modernization initiatives that were examined, States and local offices reported using 89 different performance measures to assess their activities (Table 1). Measures are most commonly used for technology-related initiatives.

Table 1: Number of States and Number of Measures for the Eight Initiatives

Initiative	Number of States With Initiative	Number of Different Measures for Initiative
Call Center	28	34
Online System	33	27
Document Imaging	24	8
Kiosks	14	1
Partnering	34	3
Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview	40	12
Shortened Interviews	12	2
Online Expedited Applications	20	2
Total		89

Data were collected between August 2010 and April 2011 from the 45 study States

States do not always establish standards for the performance measures they collect. Of the 89 measures collected, States developed

performance standards for 39, and of those, few States assigned benchmarks to gauge and incentives to encourage their success.

The performance measures used by the States were also categorized according to FNS' four modernization goals of Program Access, Accuracy and Integrity, Efficiency, and Customer Service. In general:

- For **Program Access**, States seek to monitor overall access (rather than just for the initiative) and improve program access through efficiencies and correct use of procedures.
- For **Accuracy and Integrity**, States determine staff training needs and ensure that staff uses correct procedures, in addition to tracking overall accuracy.
- For **Efficiency**, States track the initiative usage, seek to improve the customer experience, determine staffing needs and ensure that staff follows procedures.
- For **Customer Service**, States track initiative-specific efficiency and customer experiences, determine staffing needs and ensure that staff follows procedures.

This research suggests that performance measurement is a useful and important tool to integrate into new State modernization initiatives, and specifically that:

- Performance measurement is most effective when built into the initiative during the design phase.
- Establishment of an expected level of performance (standard) for each measure is important to gauge success.
- Strong performance measures and standards align with goals for improving overall program outcomes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), or (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Summary

States and local SNAP offices are collecting a large number of measures. Standards for these measures are less common, and benchmarks and incentives are almost nonexistent. Most measures are used for technology-related initiatives. Measurement in the early stages of implementation can indicate whether an initiative is performing its function as designed. As initiatives mature, measures can be used to study trends and identify potential problems through periodic reviews of reports.

For More Information

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, *Performance Measurement for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Modernization Initiatives: Integrated Report*, by Laura Castner, Amy Wodarek O'Reilly, Kevin Conway, Maura Bardos, Emily Sama-Miller, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. FNS Project Officer: Rosemarie Downer, Alexandria, VA: 2012 (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/ora).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, *Performance Measurement for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Modernization Initiatives: Individual State Findings*, by Kathleen Keefe, Emily Sama-Miller, Laura Castner, Maura Bardos, Elizabeth Clary, Sarah Wissel, and Larry Vittoriano, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. FNS Project Officer: Rosemarie Downer, Alexandria, VA: 2012 (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/ora).