

Food Stamp Program State Outreach Plan Guidance

The Food Stamp Act of 1977 provides that State agencies which administer the Food Stamp Program, the opportunity to inform low-income households about the availability, eligibility requirements, application procedures and benefits of the Food Stamp Program (FSP), and receive Federal matching funds for such program informational activities. The law prohibits reimbursement for recruitment activities.

To start up a project, a State agency will need to:

- Get FNS approval of its State plan providing specific information on the scope, design, and financing of the projects, including sources of matching funds.
- Work with the FNS regional office to ensure full understanding of operational issues and responsibilities.
- Draw down funds for the project only after being notified of approval by the FNS regional office.

The following is information on allowable and nonallowable expenditures for Food Stamp Program outreach:

Examples of allowable expenditures:

States must follow the cost principles in OMB Circular A-87. Nonprofit organizations must follow the cost principles in OMB Circular A-122. Examples of allowable expenditures as they pertain to Food Stamp Program outreach include:

- Placing food stamp literature in soup kitchens, shelters, churches, and other places;
- Staffing booths at fairs to provide information about the FSP or to answer questions;
- Visiting senior centers to explain FSP rules;
- Visiting homes in impoverished neighborhoods;
- Distributing information at places where low-income persons are known to gather, such as housing developments, WIC clinics, schools in low income areas, English as a second language classes; soup kitchens; community service providers; employers of low wage workers, etc.
- Pre-screening individuals;
- Helping individuals fill out application forms and obtain verification;
- Accompanying applicants to the food stamp office to assist with application process;
- Conducting workshops for members of community organizations serving low income people;

- Reimbursing the mileage for training;
- Placing paid ads in the local newspaper to educate about the FSP and its requirements;
- Producing and distributing educational posters and brochures;
- Producing radio and television spots to be used as public service announcements to educate potential applicants about the FSP;
- Placing media spots on television, radio and print media;
- Designing an outreach program, including the development, publication and distribution of materials to the community;
- Monitoring local agencies' or contractors' outreach performance.

Examples of unallowable costs to the Food Stamp Program:

- Acting as an authorized representative for applying, receiving food stamps at issuance, or food purchasing;
- Intervening with local food stamp offices, at the certification interview or other times, to advocate on behalf of specific applicants or recipients;
- Recruiting of individuals to participate in the FSP. Recruitment activities are those activities designed to persuade an individual who has made an informed choice not to apply for food stamps to change his or her decision and apply.
- The State agency cannot incur costs for the volunteers' actual work since volunteers, by definition, are unpaid. The State agency can plan, manage, facilitate, and oversee volunteers' work and may claim the State's costs. The State agency may reimburse volunteers for their actual expenses necessary to conduct FSP informational activities.

The following outlines specific actions a State must take to develop an outreach plan:

- The State agency must file a budget projection (funding request using the FNS-366A, Budget Projection) and optional State Plan with the FNS Regional office by August 15th for the upcoming Federal fiscal year which begins October 1. Upon the regional office's approval of the State Plan and budget projection, funds are made available.
- States may submit State plan amendments to FNS for approval any time during the year to reflect changes in scope and design of their outreach efforts, including funding changes.
- Funds are put in the State agency's Letter of Credit.
- Thirty days following each quarter, the State agency reports its actual costs to the FNS on an SF-269 form, Financial Status Report. This is the claim form for the reporting of the expenditure of program costs for Federal reimbursement. The State agency reports total expenditures, the State share of the costs, and the Federal share.

The following enumerates fiscal policies pertaining to Food Stamp Program outreach expenditures:

- FNS pays the State agency 50 percent of the State agency's total allowable outreach expenditures for FSP outreach activities. For example, if the State agency has \$100 in costs, it would draw \$50 in State funds and \$50 in Federal funds to cover the State's check or funds transfer.
- The State agency's costs would include expenditure of funds for work it has performed in-house (by State agency employees) and payments to others for work or services performed (e.g., private non-profit organization, for-profit contractor) under a contract or agreement with the State agency.
- FNS pays the State agency, and the State agency in turn pays any contractors it has procured to conduct local outreach activities.
- The State portion of the match must be State cash, with exceptions noted below.
- Allowable match sources the State may use to meet its share of match:

State Cash. The FSP regulations (7 CFR 277.4(c)) provide that the State agency may use cash contributed or donated by other non-Federal public (State and local government) agencies and (State and local government) institutions.
- Allowable match sources with waiver:

--Private third party cash donations. States may request that FNS waive 7 CFR 277.4(c) to allow private cash donations to the State agency to be used for program costs that would be eligible for Federal reimbursement. Waiver requests offering justification should come in with the Outreach Plan. FNS's approval of the waiver includes conditions:

 - 1) The funds must be under the State agency's control. While the funds may be donated for FSP outreach activity, the donated funds may not revert back to the donor.
 - 2) The donations are to be donated without any limitation or restriction imposed by the donor.
 - 3) The donations must not result in endorsement of a particular brand or firm over another, or an advertising tie-in.
 - 4) State law and State accounting procedures must allow for internal accounting procedures to identify and access the donated funds
- Non-allowable match sources.

--Private third party cash donations without a waiver and documentation of agreement to the conditions noted above are not permissible.

--Private third party in-kind, noncash contributions. FNS is prohibited by program regulations from reimbursing a State agency for the value of private, third-party, in-kind (non-cash) donations because they do not constitute an actual expenditure of funds by the State. Examples of in-kind donations are: office space, equipment, and volunteer time.

--Other Federal Funds. Funds paid under another Federal assistance agreement are not allowable unless authorized by the Federal legislation. Indian tribal organizations have Federal funds that are generally matchable. The Outreach Plan must specify whether Federal funds from another Federal Program will be used and from what law (give the citation).

In the Outreach Plan the State agency will need to:

- Discuss how the project and activities are funded and identify projected project costs for the fiscal year. Notate the source of the funds:
 - State funds
 - Private donations with waiver justification
 - Federal funds with citation of law permitting such use.
- Identify the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs or staff years) and position of staff that will be doing outreach. A staff year or FTE is based on 2080 hours per year. Include only paid workers. Indicate if State agency will also be using volunteers for outreach but do not claim a dollar value for the work performed by volunteers.
- Attach or summarize the content of any contract or agreement that identifies how costs are to be paid.
- Summarize the State, Federal, and total cost for each project, identifying costs for major items such as salaries and benefits, contracts, space and utilities, copying or printing costs, supplies, equipment (such as personal computer, printer, and copier) and repair costs, travel costs, training, and administration, etc.
- Include with the State Plan the budget projection (Form FNS-366A, Budget Projection) and any waiver requests to be submitted to FNS (e.g., a waiver request to use private donations).

Attachments:

Attachment A USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices/ FNS Web Site

Attachment B USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Toll Free Information Line

Attachment A

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices and Web

State inquiries about State plans may be made of Food and Nutrition Service regional offices. For further information, contact:

- Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, Mercer Corporate Park, 300 Corporate Blvd., Robbinsville, NJ 08691-1598
- Midwest Regional Office, 77 West Jackson Blvd, 20th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604-3507.
- Mountain Plains Regional Office, 1244 Speer Blvd., Suite 903, Denver, CO 80204-3581.
- Northeast Regional Office, 10 Causeway Street, Room 501, Boston, MA 02222-1069.
- Southeast Regional Office, 61 Forsyth Street SW, Room 8T36, Atlanta, GA 30303-3415.
- Southwest Regional Office, 1100 Commerce Street, Room 5-C-30, Dallas, TX 75242-9980
- Western Regional Office, 550 Kearny Street, Room 400, San Francisco, CA 94108-2518

USDA's FNS Web Site

Fire up your browser and point it to our web site address:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov>

You will find a multitude of free outreach materials available. You may order these in bulk from our online order form. You also may download them for local copying. Also, if you wish to professionally print these materials, and adjust them to reflect your State specific contact information, you may request a CD Rom of the materials starting in November 2002.

Attachment B

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Free Information Line

To provide customer service and enable FSP customers to obtain informational materials, the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA provides a national toll free 800 number: 1-800-2215689. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Who can call the toll free number? Any one can call the toll free number. Customers include potential applicants, community leaders, faith-based groups, students, teachers, other Federal agencies, Congressional staff, etc. Individuals interested in learning more about the eligibility requirements and the nutritional benefits of the FSP are invited to call for informational materials.

If I call the 800 number, what can I expect? You will have the opportunity to:

- request an informational brochure from a "live" telephone operator;
- obtain your State's toll free number;
- have, if service is available in your State, your call automatically transferred to a State number. Again, this feature is not available in all States; or,
- obtain the web site address of the Food and Nutrition Service.

Callers wishing to receive food stamp informational materials will be asked by the operator for their names, mailing addresses, and for information on how they learned about the toll free number.

How long does it take to get the informational materials? Customers calling the toll free number usually receive the information within 2 to 3 days. Trained personnel mail out the informational materials from Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays.