

*Identifying Program Components and Practices
That Influence SNAP Application Processing
Timeliness Rates*

THE SNAP TIMELINESS STUDY

*Final Report Appendix D:
Case Studies of Local Office
SNAP Application Processing Procedures
in Five Selected States*

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INTRODUCTION

Between 2007 and 2012, the national SNAP caseload increased 76 percent, to just over 46 million people.¹ Under tremendous pressure from growing caseloads and shrinking budgets, State and local SNAP offices either implemented or accelerated a wide range of SNAP application processing initiatives. Below, we present case studies of local SNAP office application processing procedures between 2012 and 2015 in five selected States—Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, and Washington. Although not considered representative of all local SNAP offices across the country, these case studies serve to highlight common themes and trends in application processing procedures employed during this timeframe.

Methodology

These case studies summarize responses to surveys of local SNAP office managers in five selected States. The five States included a mix of high performing States and States that have improved their APT rates in recent years. The study team administered the surveys online, with a telephone interview option, and conducted follow-up for clarification and non-response. The local office survey instrument is provided in appendix B.

Because application processing procedures vary across local offices, the study team surveyed all local SNAP offices within each of the five States. The study team obtained an overall 88 percent survey response rate from the local SNAP offices. Mississippi and Nevada had a 100 percent response rate, followed by 83 percent in Kentucky, 67 percent in Washington, and 63 percent in Connecticut.

Because the study collected data from all local SNAP offices within these selected States, findings provide representative information on application processing procedures within these States. However, it should be noted that because these selected States are not representative of all States, local office survey findings are not generalizable to the universe of all States. But overall, the richness of detail on local application processing procedures provides insight into how local offices strive to obtain timeliness.

Before presenting the case studies of each State, the following section summarizes the local offices' application processing procedures in the five selected States presented in tables 2.8–2.20 in the final report.

Local Office Application Processing Procedures Summary

The local office survey collected data on application processing procedures used by local offices between 2012 and 2015 in five selected States. While there is considerable variability in application processing procedures among local offices, this section summarizes the identified procedural commonalities and trends that can be linked to improving application timeliness in the States.

¹ Zedlewski, S. R. (2012, July 12). SNAP's Role in the Great Recession and Beyond. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/snaps-role-great-recession-and-beyond>.

Receiving SNAP Applications. Local offices receive SNAP applications in multiple ways, including in-person submission, email, mail, or fax. However, between 2012 and 2015, local offices increasingly used call centers and online application technology as additional means for application submission. (See table 2.11 in the final report.) Once received, most local offices manually entered applications into the automated eligibility system, except for Washington where most local offices reported automatically uploading online applications. (See table 2.12 in the final report.)

Assigning Cases. The most common case assignment model used by local offices was the specialized² model for processing SNAP applications. Most also used the same processing model—specialized or, in rare instances, generalist³—for the processing of both expedited and regular applications. (See table 2.14 in the final report in the final report.)

Scheduling and Conducting Interviews. Most commonly, local offices conducted unscheduled interviews, both face-to-face and by telephone, rather than the more traditional scheduling of interviews. (See table 2.15 and table 2.16 in the final report.)

Gathering Verification. Almost all local offices verified information from documents provided by clients either in person, by email, or via fax. Most of the local offices in three States (Connecticut, Kentucky, and Nevada) allowed clients to upload scanned verification documents. Most local offices either requested data or accessed data in real time from commercial, State, or Federal databases to obtain verification. (See table 2.17 in the final report.)

Processing Applications for SNAP and Other Social Service Programs. Most local office staff process applications for a range of one to three more programs in addition to SNAP. (See table 2.9 in the final report.)

Modernization Initiatives. Local offices in four⁴ selected States reported on modernization initiatives designed to improve application processing timeliness. (See table 2.19 in the final report.) Similar to the findings on modernization initiatives among State agencies, the local offices in four selected States most commonly operated:

- call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations;
- online application systems for clients to access;
- online account management for clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents;
- document imaging; and

² The survey instrument offered three types of specialized models: 1) eligibility workers conduct all aspects of the application process except for receiving and processing client verifications, 2) eligibility workers are trained in and assigned one specific application processing task, and 3) eligibility workers are trained in all application processing tasks but assigned one specialized task depending on the workload or office needs.

³ In the generalist model, an eligibility worker handles all tasks associated with processing an expedited or regular application (i.e. triage, interview, verification collection, eligibility determination).

⁴ Local offices in one State (Washington) were unable to respond to all questions on the local survey.

- electronic case files.

Actions to Prioritize APT. All local offices' management prioritized SNAP APT and most had a schedule of APT monitoring, either annually, quarterly, and/or monthly. Few local offices used penalties or incentives with staff to increase APT. Most reported using resources to support training, technical assistance, and technology upgrades between 2012 and 2015. Most also reported that they supported some form of business process reengineering (BPR). (See table 2.20 in the final report.)

The local office survey included three open-ended questions which requested input on:

1. existing policies, business processes, or modernization features that have a positive or negative effect on APT;
2. additional policies, business processes, or modernization features that could be implemented to improve APT; and
3. barriers to improving APT.

While many responses were pertinent to the unique circumstances existing in the State or local office, there were a number that had a common theme. The following data were coded from the open-ended responses.

Staffing. Local offices cited staffing issues as a barrier to improving APT. Most described the insufficient number of staff to handle the workload as both a longstanding barrier and a result of more recent workflow or business process changes—for example, the implementation of call centers without new staff and the assignment of that workload to the existing eligibility workers. Additional barriers cited included: eligibility worker turnover (particularly in urban areas), the inability to provide meaningful compensation or incentives, hiring freezes, and the caseload growth in other programs (Medicaid).

Policy. Local offices generally described policy as a barrier to timely APT. Frequent policy changes cause confusion for customers and eligibility staff, resulting in delays in application processing. Communication of the policy changes is often insufficient. Because training in policy change is necessary, it usually results in time away from application processing. One local respondent recommended the use of Skype as a successful way of alerting staff to changes in a manner that allows for questions and answers and is less time-consuming than offsite formal training sessions.

Technology. Local offices cited technology, in all its forms, as primarily a support to APT. Most positive responses concerned scanning of applications and the supporting verification(s); online applications, particularly those that are automatically uploaded to the automated eligibility system upon submission; access to online verification sources; electronic case files, e-signatures, automated alerts, messaging, kiosks, customer portals and real-time reports; and with newer web-based systems, access to “dashboards” that alert staff to the critical daily SNAP application processing tasks.

The technology barriers that local offices cited focused on the slow speed and frequent outages of the automated systems, particularly the web-based platforms. Respondents suggested technological

enhancements that could improve APT, such as earlier timing for application processing alerts, more frequent application timeliness status reports, and alerts noting the receipt of scanned verifications.

Work Processes. Local office respondents frequently cited the case management option of “universal caseload” or “casebanking” as both a barrier and a support to improving APT. A universal caseload or “casebanking” refers to a case management option that involves pooling cases so that any available worker can process all or part of any application or case.

Positive aspects include providing the flexibility to use all staff resources in handling workload and improving the ability to manage increases in application volume or staff absences/vacancies. However, a work-sharing model can eliminate individual responsibility and accountability and diminish case-specific familiarity. For example, the worker making the final eligibility determination must take the time to review all case notes and all actions taken previously in the case by others to ensure understanding and accuracy. This can be time-consuming for the worker, as he/she will be responsible for the accuracy and timeliness of the case. It was mentioned by local office staff that those workers who complete some intermediate action on an application have less incentive to complete the task correctly as they will not be responsible for the accuracy of the final determination.

Additionally, under a “casebanking” model, applicants are not sure who to contact when they have questions or concerns. Finally, the respondents observed that as case management is shared with staff in multiple locations, the procedures, processes, and policy interpretations can differ across offices. This results in application processing miscommunications and delays.

Management and Supervision. Local office respondents identified several specific actions that supervisors and managers should take to increase APT. These actions included closer monitoring of application processing data. While weekly and monthly APT summaries may be adequate for measuring trends, daily reviews with the specific eligibility worker on cases requiring immediate action will result in improved APT. Respondents encouraged rewarding and recognizing positive performance and holding staff with subpar APT accountable. Respondents emphasized the need for timely training on policy or process changes. A final suggestion is to establish and enforce clear processes, supported by existing reports, alerts, and dashboards detailing the necessary APT items such as application date and due date.

Case Study of SNAP Application Processing Procedures

CONNECTICUT

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Local SNAP Offices	12	12	12	12
Number of Local SNAP Office Workers, Statewide	<i>nr</i>	<i>nr</i>	876	926
Average Number of SNAP Workers per Local Office	<i>nr</i>	<i>nr</i>	73	77
State APT Rate ⁵	56.71	57.36	80.21	94.35
State APT Status ⁶	Very Untimely	Very Untimely	Very Untimely	Untimely
State or County Administered	State Administered			

Between 2012 and 2015, Connecticut had 12 local SNAP offices. Four of the 12 chose not to participate in the survey. This case study summarizes responses reported by the eight local office respondents.

Assigning SNAP Applications

The majority of Connecticut’s local offices (six of eight) consistently employed a specialized model⁷ for processing expedited and regular SNAP applications between 2012 and 2015. In Connecticut’s specialized model, eligibility workers were trained in all application processing tasks but were assigned one specialized task depending on workload or office needs. Two local offices employed a generalist model⁸ for processing expedited cases in addition to using the specialized approach for regular cases during all four years.

Receiving SNAP Applications

Six local offices used the walk-in/drop-off and mail/fax methods for SNAP application submission between 2012 and 2015. By 2015, five of these local offices also offered online application submission, increasing efficiency over the more traditional means of receiving applications.

⁵ *FY 2012 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2013 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2014 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2015 Application Processing Timeliness*, Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>

⁶ Timely status is an APT rate of 95 percent and above, Untimely status is an APT rate of 90–94.99 percent, and Very Untimely status is an APT rate below 90 percent.

⁷ The survey instrument offered three types of specialized models: 1) eligibility workers conduct all aspects of the application process except for receiving and processing client verifications, 2) eligibility workers are trained in and assigned one specific application processing task, and 3) eligibility workers are trained in all application processing tasks but assigned one specialized task depending on the workload or office needs.

⁸ In the generalist model, an eligibility worker handles all tasks associated with processing an expedited or regular application (i.e. triage, interview, verification collection, eligibility determination).

Entering SNAP Applications into the Eligibility System

Between 2012 and 2015, six of eight local offices and call centers manually entered regular and expedited SNAP applications, both online and paper, into the automated eligibility system. Only three local offices or call centers had the ability to scan and upload paper and online applications over the study period.

Screening SNAP Applications for Expedited Processing

Between 2012 and 2015, six local offices and two call centers screened SNAP applications for expedited eligibility. By 2015, seven call centers screened SNAP applications for expedited processing.

Scheduling SNAP Interviews

By 2015, six local offices primarily used unscheduled interviews for both expedited and regular applications. Two local offices continued to manually schedule interviews.

Conducting SNAP Interviews

By 2015, six local offices conducted face-to-face interviews and four of six conducted telephone interviews for both expedited and regular applications. By 2015, six call centers conducted telephone interviews for expedited applications and one also conducted telephone interviews for regular applications.

Only one local office conducted telephone interactive response interviews at any point during the study period.

Obtaining Verification

Six of eight local offices used the traditional manner of verifying application information, in which the client provided documents in person or by email or fax. By 2015, six local offices also accepted uploaded scanned documents for both expedited and regular applications.

Five local offices were able to directly access commercial, State, or Federal online verification sources, whereas five local offices had to request data from these online verification sources for both expedited and regular applications.

Processing SNAP Applications

Between 2012 and 2015, six of the eight local offices gathered as much information at first contact with the applicant as possible for both expedited and regular applications. Most local offices attempted to finish application processing within hours rather than days.

Processing Multiple Program Applications

Between 2012 and 2015, most local offices processed SNAP and one or two other program applications. Two local offices divided the workload between staff who processed SNAP only and SNAP and other programs. In addition to SNAP, other program applications included: Medical Cash, Family and Adult Medical, Family and Adult Cash, Medicaid, Cash, and Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB).

Modernizing SNAP Application Processing

The areas of responsibility for Connecticut's call centers grew over the four years of the study period. By 2015, the number of call centers increased from six to eight. They handled all complaints, inquiries, scheduling, setting alerts, and processing interim changes. By 2015, all eight call centers also processed eligibility.

By 2015, five local offices had an online screening tool and four offered clients access to an online PDF application that could be completed and then submitted either online, by email, or by mail.

As of 2015, only two local offices had an online application that could be automatically uploaded to the eligibility system. Six local offices manually entered online applications in the eligibility system.

Local office development and use of automated eligibility and case management systems grew over the course of the study period. By 2015, all eight local offices had automated eligibility systems that allowed customers to check benefits, report changes, and upload documents. By 2015, three local offices had case management systems for organizing caseloads by queue, tracking application movement from one process to another, and alerting workers when case actions were due.

Three local offices had integrated eligibility systems that handled online applications, eligibility processing, and data verification. Four of eight local offices had electronic messaging to notify clients of appointments or for client-caseworker communication; and five had online e-authentication capability.

By 2015, eight local offices had document imaging and electronic case files, and six had electronic/telephone signatures.

Prioritizing SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

To prioritize APT, a majority (five of eight) of local offices had managers set APT goals and monitor progress. Five local offices monitor APT monthly and one local office monitors annually. Three local offices held workers accountable for APT goals by including APT goal achievement in performance ratings.

Between 2012 and 2015, five local offices prioritized APT by supporting BPR. Five local offices used staff training and allocated resources for new technology and technical assistance to increase APT.

Improving Efficiency Using Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

Beginning in 2013 and continuing through the remainder of the study period, all eight local offices implemented workflow and process management initiatives.

Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties to Improve APT Rates

Connecticut's local offices did not employ either penalties or incentives during the study period.

Case Study of SNAP Application Processing Procedures

KENTUCKY

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Local SNAP Offices	130	130	130	130
Number of Local SNAP Office Workers, Statewide	2,429	2,833	3,222	3,247
Average Number of SNAP Workers per Local Office	19	22	25	25
State APT Rate ⁹	97.26	98.41	90.21	94.03
State APT Status ¹⁰	Timely	Timely	Untimely	Untimely
State or County Administered	State Administered			

Kentucky had 130 local SNAP offices during the study period and 107 agreed to participate in the local survey. This case study summarizes these 107 local offices’ responses.

Assigning SNAP Applications

During the study period, most of Kentucky’s local offices transitioned from the generalist to the specialized model for SNAP case assignment. From 2012 to 2015, the number of local offices using the specialized model increased from 26 to 58 offices for expedited applications and from 25 to 64 offices for regular SNAP applications. In most offices, the specialized model took one of two forms: either an eligibility worker had one application processing task specialty, or the eligibility worker possessed skills and knowledge of all SNAP application tasks but only used those needed for the daily assignment. Only 8 of the 107 local offices used the specialized model in which an eligibility worker was responsible for most of the SNAP application tasks but another caseworker handled the specific tasks of acquiring and processing verifications.

The Kentucky local offices used the same model for processing expedited and regular applications during the study period.

Receiving SNAP Applications

During the study period, 83 local offices received SNAP applications in person or by mail, email, or fax. While the numbers for these submission methods remained steady, the number of call centers that received both paper and online applications grew from 19 to 74. The number of local offices that accepted online applications increased from 19 to 67.

⁹ FY 2012 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2013 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2014 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2015 Application Processing Timeliness, Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>

¹⁰Timely status is an APT rate of 95 percent and above, Untimely status is an APT rate of 90–94.99 percent, and Very Untimely status is an APT rate below 90 percent.

Entering SNAP Applications into the Eligibility System

The number of local offices that manually entered online applications into an automated eligibility system increased from 32 to 53 during the study period, whereas manual entry of paper applications stayed relatively constant (84–86). Of the 107 local offices, 79 had the ability to scan and upload paper applications. About half that number (42) could upload online applications.

The number of call centers that manually input applications, both online and paper, remained unchanged at approximately 25. Although the number of call centers that input SNAP applications by scanning grew during the study period, the total never exceeded 22 for expedited and 15 for regular applications.

The number of local offices that had the ability to upload an online application to the automated eligibility system grew from 5 to 28 between 2012 and 2015.

Screening SNAP Applications for Expedited Processing

Eighty out of 107 local offices reported having a process for screening SNAP applications for expedited eligibility. By 2015, 58 call centers screened SNAP applications for expedited processing.

Scheduling SNAP Interviews

Local offices' use of unscheduled/on-demand interviews increased each year of the study period to 86 for expedited applications and 84 for regular applications. The use of manually scheduled interviews dropped by an amount nearly equal to the growth in the use of unscheduled/walk-in interviews. The scheduling of interviews for expedited and regular SNAP applications each dropped from 50 to 35.

The use of call centers and online scheduling of interviews was limited in Kentucky. While there was some growth by 2015, only 12 call centers could both schedule interviews for clients and allow clients to schedule the interviews online by themselves.

Conducting SNAP Interviews

Local offices' use of face-to-face interviews dropped steadily over the study period. By 2015, the number of local departments using face-to-face interviews had dropped from 77 to 65 for both expedited and regular applications. This reduction was also seen in the use of telephone interviews. By 2015, the number of local offices using telephone interviews dropped from 54 to 34, as call centers increasingly served this function.

The number of call centers that used telephone interviews tripled over the four years of the study period. Video interviews and telephone interactive response interviews did not play a significant part in the local offices' options for interviewing applicants. The number of local offices using interactive phone interviews peaked at six in 2015.

Obtaining Verification

The number of local offices that received documents provided by the applicant in person, mailed, emailed or faxed ranged from 80 to 84 and did not change over the four years of the study. However, there was a significant change in the number of local offices that could receive scanned documents. That number grew from 10 for expedited and 9 for regular applications to 54 and 57, respectively.

By 2015, over half of the local offices requested verification from commercial, State, or Federal databases as part of the application certification process, in addition to obtaining documentation from clients. The total grew to 64 for expedited and 62 for regular applications. The number of local offices with online access to commercial, State or Federal online verification sources grew to 54 for expedited and 58 for regular applications by 2015.

Processing SNAP Applications

Most local offices instructed staff to gather as much information as possible at first contact over the four years of the study period. However, the number of local offices that instructed their eligibility worker staff to strive to finish application processing within hours rather than days declined from 71 in 2012 to 56 in 2015 for expedited applications and from 62 to 49 for regular applications.

Processing Multiple Program Applications

Case assignment at 23 local offices fell into one of two groups—eligibility workers process SNAP applications only or eligibility workers process SNAP applications and applications for three or more other programs. The second most common assignment was in 17 local offices where all eligibility workers processed SNAP in combination with applications in at least three other programs.

Modernizing SNAP Application Processing

The responsibilities assigned to Kentucky's call centers increased considerably during the four years of the study period. The number of call centers that provided information and responded to inquiries grew from 16 to 74. The number of call centers that took on more casework activities (scheduling and conducting interviews, processing interim changes and determining eligibility) increased from 16 to 78.

The number of local offices that had online customer eligibility screening tools increased from 16 to 41 during the study period. Local offices offering clients an online PDF application that could be completed and submitted either online or by mail or fax nearly doubled. By 2015, 47 local offices reported using online applications that were integrated in the automated eligibility system. Over half (53) of 107 local offices had an online application that, once completed, still needed to be entered into the eligibility system manually by the local office staff.

The study period also saw enhancements to online case management that allowed clients to perform a variety of routine tasks such as checking benefit account information, communicating with a caseworker, and reporting changes. By 2015, 47 local offices reported an automated eligibility system that organized caseloads by queue, tracked when applications were routed from one process to another, and alerted workers when case actions were due.

Just under one-half of the local offices had access to online data sources that could verify client income and other eligibility requirements. As of 2015, two thirds of the local offices had document imaging and electronic case files.

Prioritizing SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

Forty-five of 107 local offices set APT as a priority in 2015. By 2015, 34 local offices monitored APT weekly or monthly. Of 107, 27 local offices responded that they held staff accountable for APT and

one in four supported BPR initiatives. As of 2015, the number of local offices that supported BPR (29), provided staff application processing skills training (49), or resources for new technology (31) had all grown by 10 during the study period.

Improving Efficiency Using Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

The number of local offices that supported application workflow analysis or process management remained relatively constant (20–26) during the study period.

Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties to Improve APT Rates

One local office offered staff incentives related to APT (and did so for only 2012), while an average of nine enforced penalties and had done so throughout the four-year study period.

Case Study of SNAP Application Processing Procedures

MISSISSIPPI

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Local SNAP Offices	82	82	82	82
Number of Local SNAP Office Workers, Statewide	600	600	600	600
Average Number of SNAP Workers per Local Office	7	7	7	7
State APT Rate ¹¹	93.88	95.13	94.88	92.50
State APT Status ¹²	Untimely	Timely	Untimely	Untimely
State or County Administered	State Administered			

Mississippi had 82 local SNAP offices at the time of the survey and all but one agreed to participate. This case study summarizes responses reported by these 81 local offices.

Assigning SNAP Applications

Mississippi’s local offices used an assortment of application assignment models during the study period. There were 16 that used the generalist model throughout the study period. Another 18 local offices combined the generalist model with the specialized model in which eligibility workers have generalist skills and training but are assigned a specific application processing task.

Receiving SNAP Applications

Forty-one of the local offices used the drop-off, mail, email, or fax methods for receiving SNAP applications during the study period. By 2015, 16 local offices offered an online application. For nine of the 16 local offices with online application submission capability, it was the only means of application submission.

Entering SNAP Applications into the Eligibility System

Nineteen local offices manually entered online applications into the automated eligibility system. By 2015, this number tripled from 6 to 19 over the course of the study period. Most local offices (41) manually entered paper applications.

Twenty-four local offices had the ability to scan and upload online applications, and that number doubled from 2012 to 2015. Forty-two scanned and uploaded paper applications and this number remained constant over the four years.

¹¹ *FY 2012 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2013 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2014 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2015 Application Processing Timeliness*, Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>

¹² Timely status is an APT rate of 95 percent and above, Untimely status is an APT rate of 90–94.99 percent, and Very Untimely status is an APT rate below 90 percent.

Call centers had a limited role in manually entering or scanning and uploading SNAP applications. There were just two local offices with the ability to upload online applications to the automated system and neither of these existed before 2015.

Screening SNAP Applications for Expedited Processing

All but two of the local offices that responded had an expedited eligibility screening process throughout the four years of the study period. Only one call center screened for expedited applications, but it did so for the entire four years.

Scheduling SNAP Interviews

Fifteen of Mississippi's local offices allowed for unscheduled SNAP application interviews. An equal number of local offices (15) allowed unscheduled interviews for expedited and regular applications. Almost all responding local offices manually scheduled interviews for expedited applications (37) and regular applications (38).

By 2015, five local offices used online interview scheduling.

Conducting SNAP Interviews

Whether face-to-face or by telephone, all SNAP application interviews in Mississippi were conducted by the local offices. Call centers did not conduct application interviews.

The number of local offices conducting face-to-face interviews remained constant throughout the study period: 36 for expedited applications and 42 for regular applications. However, the number of local offices using telephone interviews increased from 24 to 36 for expedited applications and from 28 to 42 for regular applications.

Obtaining Verification

In 2015, there were 43 local offices using the traditional manner of verifying application information, in which the client provided documents in person. Nearly as many local offices (41) accepted documentation by email and fax. Both numbers fluctuated very little over the four years of the study period. In contrast, the number of local offices that accepted scanned documents increased slightly each year, but did not exceed 13.

Over the study period, the number of local offices that had eligibility workers who requested verifications directly from commercial, State, or Federal databases for both expedited and regular applications averaged 32. In contrast, an average of 14 had eligibility workers who directly accessed commercial, State, or Federal online verification sources. While the number of local offices that requested data stayed relatively constant during the study period, the number that accessed the data themselves increased each year to 20 by 2015.

Processing SNAP Applications

Throughout the study period, 41 of Mississippi's local offices had eligibility workers gather as much information at first contact as possible for both expedited and regular applications. There were fewer local offices (31) that attempted to finish application processing within hours rather than days. Both numbers were virtually unchanged over the study period.

Processing Multiple Program Applications

Mississippi had one local office where the SNAP eligibility workers processed only SNAP applications. An additional 11 local offices had one group of staff that processed only SNAP applications and another group that processed applications for SNAP and one other program. Most local offices (27) processed applications for SNAP and one other program. There were very few (2) local offices that assigned staff to process applications for SNAP and two other programs and none that assigned SNAP and three or more other programs.

Modernizing SNAP Application Processing

Mississippi had six call centers handling inquiries and requests during the study period. Of those six, one also processed changes, set alerts, and scheduled appointments.

By 2015, nine local offices had an online screening tool, up from two in 2012. Eight local offices, seven of which had the online screening tool, offered clients an online PDF application that could be completed and then submitted.

As of 2015, six of the local offices had an online application that was integrated with the eligibility system. There were no local offices with that capacity in 2012. In nine local offices, clients could submit an online application, but local staff had to manually enter the application data into the eligibility system.

The use of automated system workload support features increased slightly during the study period. The percentage of local offices with an automated eligibility system that allowed customers to check benefits, report changes, and upload documents grew from two in 2012 to seven by 2015. Six local offices had system support for organizing caseloads, tracking applications from one process to another, and alerting workers when case actions were due during the study period.

By 2015, 27 local offices had electronic messaging to notify clients of appointments or for client-caseworker communication and 62 percent had online e-authentication capability. Video interviewing and mobile applications were nonexistent and only two local offices had electronic signatures. During the study period, 22 of Mississippi's local offices had document imaging and 30 had electronic case files.

Prioritizing SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

Most of Mississippi's local offices set APT goals and monitored the achievement of those goals. Twenty-two local offices monitored APT annually, 17 monitored quarterly, and 37 monitored APT monthly. Seventeen local offices monitored APT annually, quarterly, and monthly. Thirty-five local offices held eligibility workers responsible for their individual APT.

One local office reported that it had participated in BPR. Thirty-five local offices reported training eligibility staff in application processing features and practices. Less than one in ten of the local offices reported that they had provided resources for new technology over the study period.

Improving Efficiency Using Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

The number of local offices that completed a workflow analysis or implemented process management strategies increased from 22 to 27 during the study period.

Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties to Improve APT Rates

Ten local offices instituted penalties for eligibility workers' APT performance during the study period and each employed the penalties for all four years. Fewer local offices (four) offered incentives. Only one of the local offices implemented both.

Case Study of SNAP Application Processing Procedures

NEVADA

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Local SNAP Offices	16	17	19	21
Number of Local SNAP Office Workers, Statewide	574.5	574.5	701.5	777.5
Average Number of SNAP Workers per Local Office	26	26	31	35
State APT Rate ¹³	81.90	73.90	83.93	91.15
State APT Status ¹⁴	Very Untimely	Very Untimely	Very Untimely	Untimely
State or County Administered	State Administered			

By 2015, Nevada had 21 local SNAP offices, and all agreed to participate in the survey. This case study summarizes responses reported by these 21 local offices.

Assigning SNAP Applications

Between 2012 and 2015, Nevada’s local offices transitioned from a generalist case assignment model to a specialized model. By 2015, the number of local offices using the generalist model decreased from 14 to 7 for expedited applications and from 13 to 4 for regular applications. By 2015, the number of local offices using a specialized model increased from 12 to 21 for both expedited and regular applications.

The specialized case assignment model took one of two forms: either an eligibility worker specialized in one application processing task (5), or an eligibility worker specialized in all tasks but only used the one needed for the daily assignment (12).

Receiving SNAP Applications

The number of local offices accepting SNAP applications in person, by mail, or via fax increased from 33 in 2012 to 39 by 2015. The use of call centers to receive applications increased from two in 2012 to seven in 2015. The number of local offices which could receive applications online increased from 13 in 2012 to 20 in 2015.

Entering SNAP Applications into the Eligibility System

Nearly all of Nevada’s local offices manually entered SNAP applications—both paper applications submitted by the applicant and those received online—into an automated eligibility system between

¹³ *FY 2012 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2013 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2014 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2015 Application Processing Timeliness*, Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>

¹⁴ Timely status is an APT rate of 95 percent and above, Untimely status is an APT rate of 90–94.99 percent, and Very Untimely status is an APT rate below 90 percent.

2012 and 2015. The number of local offices that scanned online applications into the eligibility system increased from 9 to 14 and the number that scanned paper applications increased from 6 to 16.

The number of call centers that either manually entered or scanned applications never exceeded six during the study period. Only five local offices ended the study period with the ability to automatically upload an online application into the automated eligibility system.

Screening SNAP Applications for Expedited Processing

Each of Nevada's local offices had a process for screening SNAP applications for expedited eligibility throughout the study period. By 2014, seven of Nevada's call centers were also screening SNAP applications for expedited processing.

Scheduling SNAP Interviews

During the study period, the number of local offices that allowed unscheduled/on-demand interviews for both expedited and regular applications increased from 2 to over 19.

The number of local offices that had a manual process for scheduling interviews dropped from 18 in 2012 to 14 in 2015.

Only three of Nevada's call centers scheduled interviews in advance. Two centers scheduled both expedited and regular applications, and one limited scheduling to regular application interviews.

Conducting SNAP Interviews

The number of local offices using face-to-face interviews grew steadily during the study period. By 2015, face-to-face interviews were used in all but two local offices. The use of telephone interviews for both expedited and regular applications grew by nearly one third over the same time. One local office did not offer face-to-face interviewing for either type of application at any point and one did not offer telephone interviews for regular applications.

Nevada's call centers increased their use of telephone interviews from 1 in 2012 to 12 in 2015. One local office conducted telephone interactive response interviews over the final three years of the study period.

Obtaining Verification

By 2015, all of Nevada's local offices used the traditional manner of verifying application information, i.e. having the applicant provide documents in person or by email or fax. The number of local offices that could receive uploaded scanned documents increased from 2 to 10 during the study period.

Eligibility workers requested verifications from commercial, State, or Federal databases in 14 local offices in 2012 and the number increased to 19 by 2015. Eligibility workers in 11 local offices directly accessed commercial, State, or Federal online verification sources in 2012 and this number increased to 16 in 2015.

Processing SNAP Applications

Local offices with eligibility workers who gather as much information at first contact as possible, for both expedited and regular applications, increased from 7 to 20. All but two local offices attempted to finish application processing within hours rather than days.

Processing Multiple Program Applications

Four of Nevada's local offices had staff process SNAP applications and three or more other programs. Another four local offices had eligibility workers who processed SNAP applications only or SNAP and one or two other programs. Five local offices had staff process applications for SNAP only and/or one, two, three or more other programs. The application processing methodology did not change for any local office during the study period for either expedited applications or regular applications.

Modernizing SNAP Application Processing

At least 16 local offices relied on a call center to handle inquiries and requests since 2012. Fifteen of the local offices used call centers to schedule appointments, process complaints, enter changes, and set task alerts. The number of local offices that used call centers to process changes, conduct interviews, and make eligibility determinations increased from 2 in 2012 to 15 in 2015.

Only three of Nevada's local offices had an online screening tool and two offered an online PDF application that clients could complete and then submit either online or by email or mail. Five local offices offered clients an application online that was integrated into the automated eligibility system. The remainder of the local offices offered an online application, but the completed application had to be manually entered into the system.

By 2015, 16 of the local offices had an automated eligibility system that organized caseloads by queue, tracked when applications were routed from one process to another, and alerted workers when case actions were due. Fifteen local offices had integrated eligibility systems that handled online applications, eligibility processing, and data verification.

Six local offices had online e-authentication procedures, i.e. automatic interfaces that verified items of eligibility information. As of 2015, over 20 of the local offices had document imaging, 21 had electronic case files, and 15 had electronic signatures.

Just two local offices provided online account management where the applicant could check on benefit information, report changes, and upload documents. Another two had electronic messaging between applicant and eligibility worker.

Prioritizing SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

Prior to 2012, almost all of Nevada's local offices set APT goals, monitored progress annually, quarterly, or monthly, and held staff accountable. These offices continued these practices throughout the study period. By 2013, all local offices instituted BPR initiatives that resulted in process changes. To support the BPR, between 2012 and 2015:

- all local offices provided staff training on new application processing procedures;
- all but three local offices allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing; and

- all local offices allocated resources for technical assistance to help eligibility workers use new technology.

Improving Efficiency Using Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

The number of local offices implementing some workflow analysis plan grew from 9 to 14 between 2012 and 2015.

Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties to Improve APT Rates

No local offices in Nevada used either performance-based incentives or penalties as a strategy to improve APT rates.

Case Study of SNAP Application Processing Procedures

WASHINGTON

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Local SNAP Offices	52	52	52	52
Number of Local SNAP Office Workers, Statewide	1,002	1,213	1,223	1,088
Average Number of SNAP Workers per Local Office	19	23	24	21
State APT Rate ¹⁵	90.22	93.10	93.13	90.67
State APT Status ¹⁶	Untimely	Untimely	Untimely	Untimely
State or County Administered	State Administered			

Washington had 52 local SNAP offices at the time of the survey. Nine chose not to participate in the survey. This case study summarizes responses reported by 43 local offices.

Assigning SNAP Applications

During the study period, 17 of Washington’s local offices processed both expedited and regular SNAP applications by implementing the specialized model in which the worker specialized in all tasks but only used the one needed for the daily assignment.

Receiving SNAP Applications

The majority of Washington’s local offices offered applicants three means of submitting their SNAP applications: dropping-off, mailing or submitting online. These three methods were in use in these local offices throughout the study period. Seven out of 10 call centers accepted SNAP applications, including online submissions.

Entering SNAP Applications into the Eligibility System

By 2015, the staff in 22 local offices and 22 call centers manually entered SNAP applications into the automated eligibility system regardless of whether the application was submitted in hard copy or online. The number of local offices manually entering applications ranged from 17 to 20 between 2012 and 2015, whereas the number of call centers that handled this task dropped slightly over the four years. By 2015, 10 call centers received and manually entered applications. Both local office and call center staff entered almost twice as many online applications as they did paper applications.

¹⁵ *FY 2012 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2013 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2014 Application Processing Timeliness, FY 2015 Application Processing Timeliness*, Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>

¹⁶ Timely status is an APT rate of 95 percent and above, Untimely status is an APT rate of 90–94.99 percent, and Very Untimely status is an APT rate below 90 percent.

The number of local offices (3) or call centers (1) that had the ability to scan and upload an application was nominal and did not change over the study period. Fourteen local offices had received and automatically uploaded online applications over the four years.

Screening SNAP Applications for Expedited Processing

Twenty-one of Washington's local offices and seven call centers had a process for screening SNAP applications for expedited eligibility during the study period.

Scheduling SNAP Interviews

Twenty of Washington's local offices offered unscheduled interviews for both expedited and regular applications prior to and throughout the study period. Twelve local offices manually scheduled interviews for both expedited and regular applications during the four-year study period.

Only two call centers scheduled interviews for both expedited and regular applications. Ten local offices offered applicants the ability to go online to schedule an application interview appointment.

Conducting SNAP Interviews

Twenty-one local offices used face-to-face interviews for both expedited and regular applications throughout the study period. The number of telephone interviews also remained constant and was nearly equal for both local offices and call centers.

Twelve call centers conducted telephone interviews. Two local offices conducted telephone interactive response interviews for all four years of the study.

Obtaining Verification

Twenty of the 21 responding local offices used the traditional manner of verifying application information, with the client providing documents in person, by email, or fax. This number remained unchanged during the study period. Only one local office was able to upload scanned verification documents submitted by the applicant.

In 90 percent of Washington's local offices, eligibility workers accessed or requested verifications from commercial, State, or Federal databases. The numbers were consistent for the four years.

Processing SNAP Applications

Throughout the study period, all of Washington's local offices had eligibility workers gather as much information at first contact as possible and attempt to finish application processing within hours rather than days. This standard procedure existed for both expedited and regular applications.

Processing Multiple Program Applications

Six of Washington's local offices had eligibility workers who only processed SNAP applications. However, in each of these six, the local offices also had other eligibility workers who processed eligibility for SNAP and one, two, or three other programs. In the other 14 local offices, all eligibility workers processed eligibility for SNAP and one or more other programs.

Modernizing SNAP Application Processing

No responses.¹⁷

Prioritizing SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

No responses.

Improving Efficiency Using Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

Fifteen local offices conducted workflow analyses and implemented the process management strategies identified in the analysis.

Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties to Improve APT Rates

No responses.

¹⁷ Washington requested that the questions regarding Modernization and Prioritization be removed from their local office survey.

