



United States Department of Agriculture

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

THE SNAP TIMELINESS STUDY

Final Report

Nutrition Assistance Program Report
Food and Nutrition Service
Office of Policy Support

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Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net and is a central component of American policy to alleviate hunger and poverty. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers SNAP at the Federal level according to provisions of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended¹ and the regulations in subchapter C of title 7 in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which derive their authority from that law.²

An important aspect of SNAP administration is ensuring that eligible households have timely access to SNAP benefits. Timely access to benefits depends on the States' speed and accuracy in both processing applications and determining households' eligibility. Timely processing ensures the household has the opportunity to participate in SNAP within 7 days of their application date for expedited cases and within 30 days of the application date for regular cases.

FNS monitors States' compliance with statutory requirements for application processing timeliness through the SNAP Quality Control System (SNAP-QC). SNAP-QC calculates an application processing timeliness (APT) rate for each State on a quarterly and annual basis. FNS uses these rates and onsite case reviews to determine States' adherence to timeliness standards.

The APT rate is the number of active SNAP applications that were approved as timely within the 30-day or 7-day SNAP statutory processing requirements, divided by the total number of applications approved within a given timeframe, multiplied by 100. While 100 percent compliance with the 30-day and 7-day application processing standards has long been the stated requirement, FNS' practice is to consider:

- Timely (acceptable) performance as 95 percent and above;
- Untimely (borderline) performance as 90 percent to 94.99 percent; and
- Very Untimely (unacceptable) performance as below 90 percent.

FNS uses these three APT performance categories—Timely, Untimely, and Very Untimely—to describe States' APT status. Table 1 displays the number of States in each APT performance category or status for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2012–FFY 2015. Only 5 (10 percent) of the 51 States demonstrated Timely APT performance in FFY 2012, 7 (14 percent) demonstrated Timely APT performance in FFY 2013, only 3 (6 percent) demonstrated Timely APT performance in FFY 2014, and 10 (20 percent) achieved Timely APT performance in FFY 2015.³

¹ Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/Food-And-Nutrition-Act-2008.pdf>.

² Certification of Eligible Households, 7 C.F.R. § 273 (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=16e53d682d02cf9a96756bd1f9ae8ef&mc=true&node=pt7.4.273&rgn=div5>.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2018). *Recognizing States for exceptional nutrition assistance service: Application Processing Timeliness 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service.pdf>.

Table 1. State APT Status, by Federal Fiscal Year

Year	States and APT Status					
	Timely		Untimely		Very Untimely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
FFY 2012	5	10%	19	37%	27	53%
FFY 2013	7	14%	21	41%	23	45%
FFY 2014	3	6%	19	37%	29	57%
FFY 2015	10	20%	22	43%	19	37%

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015 retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

Note: Timely States in FFY 2012: DC, ID, KY, NM, ND. Timely States in FFY 2013: DC, ID, KY, MS, NM, ND, SD. Timely States in FFY 2014: ID, ND, WI. Timely States in FFY 2015: AL, DC, ID, NH, NM, ND, OK, OR, UT, WY.

States that demonstrate an APT rate of less than 90 percent must develop and implement a corrective action plan and could be subject to financial penalties. Courts have affirmed the importance of timely processing in cases where clients have sued States for failure to process their applications within statutory guidelines.⁴

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to survey all 50 States and the District of Columbia (51 States) to identify factors associated with timely application processing. This study surveyed States on their use of administrative waivers, demonstration projects, policy options, business process reengineering (BPR), modernization initiatives, workflow analyses or process management strategies, actions to prioritize APT, and incentives or penalties designed to improve APT. This study highlights practices States use to improve APT and explores the association between SNAP management practices and APT performance.

FNS established three overall research objectives for this study: (1) describe SNAP policy and operational procedures, (2) identify SNAP management practices that impede or facilitate APT, and (3) describe associations between SNAP management practices and APT. Each research objective included associated research questions.

To meet the objectives and respond to the research questions, the study team conducted a policy-driven study of State SNAP management practices and operational procedures related to APT performance between calendar years (CY) 2012 and CY 2015. The study team collected quantitative and qualitative survey data from two groups of respondents: (1) State SNAP directors in 51 States, and (2) local SNAP office managers in five selected States. The five States selected for the local office survey provided a mix of high performing States and States that have improved their APT rates in recent years. These five States included Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, and Washington.

The study team conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses on State and local office data, as presented throughout this report. We also compiled State survey data into a State Profile for each of

⁴ Food Research and Action Center (2005). Getting Food Stamps to Hungry Families on Time: Federal Rules and the High-Performance Bonus for Timeliness.

the 51 States (see appendix C) and compiled local office survey data into a Case Study for each of the five selected States (see appendix D). Although these local offices do not represent all local SNAP offices across the country, they serve to highlight common themes and trends in application processing procedures employed during the study timeframe.

Study Findings

Between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, States demonstrated improvements in SNAP APT performance, with a doubling in the number of States achieving Timely APT status and a 3.5 percentage point increase in mean APT rate. More than half of States demonstrated some improvement in their APT rate during this time, although several States improved dramatically without achieving Timely APT status.

Table 2 displays the distribution of States’ mean APT rate over the study period. The mean APT rate among the 51 States rose from 86.68 percent in FFY 2012 to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015. Between FFY 2012 and FFY 2014, State APT rates averaged about 87 percent, which represents Very Untimely (unacceptable) APT status and improved to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015, which represents Untimely (borderline) APT status.

Table 2. Mean State APT Rates, by Federal Fiscal Year

	Mean APT Rates for 50 States and the District of Columbia			
	FFY 2012	FFY 2013	FFY 2014	FFY 2015
Mean	86.68%	87.71%	86.93%	90.18%

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015 retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

SNAP management practices studied included operation of administrative waivers, demonstration projects, and policy options; implementation of business process reengineering, workflow analyses, or process management strategies; operation of modernization initiatives; actions to prioritize APT; and the use of performance-based incentives or penalties. Comparisons of mean APT rates between States that did or did not operate any specific SNAP management practice found no significant differences. Similarly, tests of association between the operation of any SNAP management practice and States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status found no significant differences. Standard tests of statistical significance proved insufficient in this study for detecting meaningful associations. These findings of no difference may have resulted in part from studying the universe of all 51 States, and the resulting relatively small cell sizes available for statistical analysis.

Descriptive findings from this study focused on trends in SNAP management practices in three analytic groups of States:

- 1) Four States maintained Timely (acceptable) APT status between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 (District of Columbia, Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico).⁵ For this report, these are referred to as the four States that remained Timely.

⁵ Although APT rates for District of Columbia and New Mexico dipped below Timely status for one year between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, we consider their APT performance as Timely.

- 2) Six States improved from Very Untimely (unacceptable) or Untimely (borderline) to Timely APT status by FFY 2015 (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming). For this report, these are referred to as the six States that improved to Timely.
- 3) Eight States demonstrated at least 10 percent improvement in APT rates between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 but remained in Untimely (borderline) APT status in FFY 2015 (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont). For this report, these are referred to as the eight States that improved but remained Untimely.

This study identified several practices used by States to improve APT performance. States have adopted many approaches to improve APT, including working with FNS to select administrative waivers, demonstration projects, and policy options to enhance their SNAP administration at the State level. Between CY 2012 and CY 2015, almost all States operated the Telephone Interview in lieu of the Face-to-Face Interview Waiver, and States most frequently described this waiver as having a positive effect on APT. Demonstration projects are operated by fewer States. The most commonly operated demonstration project was the Standard Medical Deductions Project, which States use to streamline the certification process by applying a standardized medical deduction for elderly and disabled households claiming medical expenses in lieu of calculating actual expenses. The most commonly operated policy option during this timeframe was the Standard Utility Allowance.⁶

Conducting reviews of workflow and operational procedures are additional approaches to improve APT that are used at the State and local office levels. These approaches range from implementing formally structured BPR initiatives to less formal workflow analyses or process management strategies. BPR is a business management strategy of assessing operational procedures aimed at restructuring the business process. Workflow analyses or process management strategies are less structured business management tools and approaches used to streamline the efficiency of operational procedures.

Most States reported implementing BPR initiatives or less formalized workflow analyses or process management strategies between CY 2012 and CY 2015, with an additional State reporting having implemented BPR prior to CY 2012. The number of States reporting BPR initiatives and workflow analyses or process management strategies increased each year during this timeframe, suggesting a rapid rise in the use of these approaches.

Workflow improvements and operational changes resulting from these BPR approaches included integrating workflow improvements into existing application processing procedures and transitioning to new certification processing models. Many States reported changing caseload management models

⁶ The policy option names and descriptions used in this report were developed specifically for the survey instrument used for data collection from the States. The policy option names and descriptions in this report may differ from policy options and descriptions used in other documents, including previous studies and reports. The survey was not designed to collect detailed information on how each State implemented a particular policy option. For example, States have flexibility in how long they certify households for benefits. Certification periods may vary from 4, 5, 6, 12, or 24 months depending on household circumstances and State policy. The survey inquired as to which States were implementing this option, identified as Simplified Reporting—Certification Length in this report; however, the survey did not explore the specifics of which certification period lengths were being implemented by the States who reported using this option. Therefore, the reporting on the State policy options should be carefully interpreted as the analysis is based solely on the names and descriptions used in this report, which may not reflect the granularity available within an option.

from the traditional caseload model in which an application is assigned to one worker from start to finish, to more task-based processing and shared workload models. Under the task-based processing and shared workload models, each task may be processed separately by any worker in any location within the State. States also described transitioning to a specialized work unit model. Under this model, staff perform specific, discrete certification-related tasks, such as processing only initial applications or processing specific parts of the application based on a worker's specialty. Specialized workers may focus on intake, recertifications, or special populations. These task-based processing models emphasize collecting as much information and verifications as possible at intake or first client contact to avoid pending cases.

Stemming from BPR initiatives and workflow analyses or process management strategies, most States created new positions to handle new duties or responsibilities. States also enhanced automation or modernization features, such as developing increased timeliness reporting capabilities and new workflow management tools.

States developed modernization initiatives on a broader scale for reasons independent of BPR or other more informal reviews. These modernization features typically include online eligibility screening tools; electronic case files; call centers that handled general inquiries and requests; call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations; document imaging; electronic or telephonic signatures; online account management systems that allowed clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents; and online e-authentication procedures which access electronic data to verify client income and other eligibility requirements.

State actions to make APT a priority further revealed four practices that contribute to APT: (1) establishing clear performance targets or goals for improving APT, (2) holding workers accountable for overdue cases in the worker's performance reviews or decisions about the worker's employment status, (3) training staff about new application processing procedures, and (4) monitoring APT performance either weekly or monthly. State strategies most strongly associated with high APT rates reflected an emphasis on performance targets and accountability. However, the ability to hold individual workers accountable for APT diminishes with the transition to task-based processing models in which several workers may process the same application. Providing training to workers about new processing procedures and monitoring APT performance monthly or weekly also contribute to improved APT performance.

Conclusions

This study examined practices States use to improve APT rates to help FNS better understand what factors influence APT and how to help States achieve acceptable APT rates. This study examined a wide range of SNAP management practices and application processing procedures between CY 2012 and CY 2015 by surveying 51 States and local SNAP offices in five selected States.

States demonstrated considerable improvements in SNAP APT performance between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015. The number of States achieving Timely APT status doubled from 5 in FFY 2012 to 10 in FFY 2015 and the mean APT rate increased 3.5 percentage points from 86.68 percent in FFY 2012 to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015. More than half of States demonstrated some improvement in their APT rate, with six States improving from either Untimely or Very Untimely to Timely APT status and

eight States showing at least 10 percent improvement in APT rates but remaining in Untimely APT status.

This study confirmed earlier findings reported in the study conducted by FNS in 2013, *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*.⁷ The 2013 study identified important factors for improving APT performance such as making APT a priority, changing application processing procedures, implementing business process reengineering, allocating necessary resources, and using administrative waivers and policy options. The current study confirmed that these factors continue to demonstrate important contributions to improving APT performance.

Between CY 2012 and CY 2015, States reported increased efficiencies in SNAP management practices. Several specific features of State SNAP management practices showed associations with APT. The most important findings suggest that the following practices may contribute to improved APT performance:

- BPR initiatives, workflow analyses, or process management strategies that resulted in integrating workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures and transitioning toward new task-based certification processing models;
- modernization features that increase efficiency in application processing, particularly operating electronic case files; document imaging; online account management systems that allowed clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents; electronic or telephonic signatures; and call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations; and
- actions that prioritize APT such as establishing clear performance targets or goals for improving application timeliness, holding workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in determining employment status, and administrative monitoring of APT at least monthly or weekly.

The current study further enhances FNS's understanding of what factors help States achieve improvements in APT rates. Through technical assistance and programmatic support to States in implementation of these approaches, FNS continues to foster improvements in APT rates and enhanced client access.

Recognizing that staffing levels appropriate to the demands of SNAP application processing are an important element in APT, the study team recommends a future study to work with States in compiling these data. A future study, perhaps using workload study methods which can identify a more reliable method to collect data on SNAP application processing staff, could calculate caseload-to-staffing ratios accurately and contribute important insight into potential associations between caseload-to-staffing ratios and APT status. The study team also recommends future analyses that more closely examine associations between APT performance and specific timeframes during which States operated various SNAP management practices, and additional population and economic factors that were beyond the scope of the current study.

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (Summer, 2013). *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/timeliness_app_process.pdf.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net and is a central component of American policy to alleviate hunger and poverty. An important aspect of SNAP administration is ensuring that eligible households have timely access to SNAP benefits. SNAP's ability to fulfill all its functions depends on the speed and accuracy with which eligibility determinations can be made. This study examined State and local offices' SNAP management practices that are associated with application processing timeliness (APT).

1.1 The SNAP Application Process

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers SNAP at the Federal level according to provisions of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended (the Act).⁸ The regulations in subchapter C of title 7 in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) derive their authority from the Act.⁹ Below is a summary of key points in these statutory requirements.¹⁰

- Applying for SNAP is a multi-step process which includes filing an application, being interviewed, and having the information verified.
- The application process begins when an applicant submits an application that contains at a minimum the name, address, and signature of the applicant or authorized representative. The date of application is the date the agency receives an initial SNAP application with this minimum information.
- States must provide applicants the opportunity to participate within 30 days, except in cases of extreme hardship, when States must expedite processing an eligible household's application within seven days.
- Households entitled to expedited processing are those whose total gross monthly income and liquid resources are less than their monthly rent or mortgage and utilities; migrant or seasonal farmworkers with less than \$100 in liquid resources; and households with less than \$150 in monthly gross income and less than \$100 in liquid resources.
- Once an application is determined eligible, the State provides SNAP benefits to the household retroactively to the date of application.

States must screen all SNAP applications for expedited service eligibility on the day of application, regardless of how the application is filed (in-person, mail, fax or electronically). When screening applications for expedited service, the eligibility worker checks that at least name, address, and signature are included on the application, and compares the applicant's income, deductions, and assets with the criteria for expedited processing. The State will issue benefits as quickly as possible after eligibility has been determined.

To serve applicants with different needs and constraints as efficiently as possible, States may modify their SNAP application process in cooperation with FNS and its Regional Offices. This State-specific modification of the application process takes four general forms: (1) requesting waivers of SNAP

⁸ Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/Food-And-Nutrition-Act-2008.pdf>.

⁹ Certification of eligible households, 7 C.F.R. § 273 (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=16e53d6820d02cf9a96756bd1f9ae8ef&mc=true&node=pt7.4.273&rgn=div5>.

¹⁰ Office operations and application processing, 7 C.F.R. § 273.2 (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=0d78a2a17fe633449bfadaf0bbe00eb4&mc=true&node=se7.4.273.12&rgn=div8>.

regulations by FNS when it is evident that service can be improved without threat to the integrity of the program; (2) selecting State policy options offered by FNS; (3) modernizing or innovating technological systems; and (4) reengineering procedures to better align process inputs at the local office level.

1.2 SNAP Application Processing Timeliness: Definition and Measurement

The Act requires that households have the opportunity to participate in SNAP within 7 days for expedited cases and 30 days for regular cases. SNAP is critical to the health and well-being of low-income households and it is vital that eligible families receive benefits in a timely manner in accordance with Federal law and regulations. FNS monitors States' compliance with statutory requirements for application processing timeliness through the SNAP Quality Control System (SNAP-QC). SNAP-QC calculates an APT rate for each State on a quarterly and annual basis. FNS uses these rates and onsite case reviews to determine State's adherence to timeliness standards.

An application is considered processed in a timely manner if the household has the opportunity to participate in SNAP within 7 days of their application date for expedited cases and within 30 days of the application date for regular cases. The APT rate is the number of active SNAP applications that were approved within the 30-day or 7-day SNAP statutory processing requirements, divided by the total number of applications approved within a given time.

While 100 percent compliance with the 30-day and 7-day application processing standards has long been the stated requirement, FNS' practice is to consider:

- Timely (acceptable) performance as 95 percent and above;
- Untimely (borderline) performance as 90 percent to 94.99 percent; and
- Very Untimely (unacceptable) performance as below 90 percent.

FNS uses these three APT performance categories—Timely, Untimely, and Very Untimely—to describe States' APT status.

While many States have worked to improve the administration of SNAP, the mean APT rate has remained below or near 90 percent for the last several years, with most States struggling to meet statutory and regulatory requirements. During the timeframe of focus for this study, only two States consistently maintained 'Timely APT' status.¹¹ Courts have affirmed the importance of timely processing in cases where clients have sued States for failure to process their applications within statutory guidelines.¹² If a State records an APT rate of less than 90 percent, it must develop and implement a corrective action plan and could be subject to financial penalties.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2018). *Recognizing States for exceptional nutrition assistance service: Application Processing Timeliness 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

¹² Food Research and Action Center. *Getting Food Stamps to Hungry Families on Time: Federal Rules and the High- Performance Bonus for Timeliness*. September 2005. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/timeliness.pdf>.

1.3 Previous Research on SNAP Application Processing Timeliness

FNS has sponsored several studies to examine APT. In 2013, FNS conducted *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*, a survey of nine States to identify policy options and operational procedures associated with high APT rates. Results of this survey identified four primary factors associated with high performance: (1) making APT a priority, (2) managing the certification process for efficiency, (3) conducting formal business process reengineering (BPR) initiatives or informal process improvements, and (4) changing operational procedures.¹³

Another FNS study, *The Evolution of SNAP Modernization Initiatives in Five States*, looked at SNAP modernization initiatives to determine whether adopting new technology (e.g., switching from paper to online applications) improved APT rates. This study found that trends in APT rates were more likely due to changes in the number of applications submitted, and the lack of corresponding changes in the number of staff to process them, rather than any modernization initiative. This study also found that APT differed between online and paper applications, with online applications taking longer to process and verify documentation than paper applications.¹⁴

Further, a recent study, *Assessment of the Contributions of an Interview to SNAP Eligibility and Benefit Determinations*, assessed the contributions of the application interview to SNAP eligibility and benefit determinations and found that eliminating the SNAP interview actually increased the time it took to process applications, thereby reducing application timeliness, but also decreased error rates.¹⁵

FNS also provides contract support to States to help them improve their business process. For example, in 2013, FNS provided technical assistance and training to State and local representatives in BPR techniques to improve the administration of SNAP in three counties in Colorado, and statewide in Nebraska and Tennessee. Results of this effort identified key factors of successful BPR initiatives to streamline application procedures and improve customer service as (1) effective leadership, (2) involvement of staff at all levels, (3) planned communication, (4) consistent monitoring of process improvements, and (5) maintaining and building partnerships.¹⁶

1.4 Study Objectives and Research Questions

Building upon prior research studies, FNS sponsored this current study, *Identifying Program Components and Practices that Influence SNAP Application Processing Timeliness Rates*, otherwise referred to as *The SNAP Timeliness Study*. The purpose of this study was to conduct comprehensive research of all 50 States and the District of Columbia (51 States) to identify factors associated with timely application processing. This study examined the association of APT with administrative waivers, demonstration projects, policy options, business process reengineering, workflow analyses or process management strategies,

¹³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (Summer, 2013). *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/timeliness_app_process.pdf.

¹⁴ Hulsey, L., Conway, K., Gothro, A., Kleinman, R., Reilly, M., Cody, S., and Sama-Miller, E. (2013). *The evolution of SNAP modernization initiatives in five States*. Report prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/EvolutionSNAPMod.pdf>.

¹⁵ Rowe, G., Gothro, A., Brown, E., Dragoset, L., and Eguchi, M. (2015). *Assessment of the contributions of an interview to SNAP eligibility and benefit determinations: final report*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/assessment-contributions-interview-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-eligibility-and-benefit>.

¹⁶ Baretto, T. (2015). *Business process reengineering: final outcomes report*. Prepared by IMPAQ International, LLC for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

modernization initiatives, actions to make APT a priority, and the use of performance-based incentives or penalties to improve APT. The primary purpose of this study was to determine best practices for facilitating high APT rates. These findings will help FNS understand why many States have not been able to achieve the legislated program efficiency measure to provide benefits within 30 days of the application dates or within 7 days for expedited applications.

FNS established three overall research objectives for this study, as listed below. Each research objective included associated research questions.

- **Objective 1:** Describe each State’s SNAP policy and operational procedures.
- **Objective 2:** Identify the policy and operational procedures that may impede or facilitate SNAP APT when certifying new applications.
- **Objective 3:** Describe the associations between State policy and operational procedures and APT rates.

Table E–1 in appendix E lists the research questions associated with each objective and identifies the data sources used to respond to each research question. Primary data sources consisted of (1) FNS reports and resources, (2) a web-based survey of 51 State SNAP personnel, and (3) a web-based survey of local SNAP office personnel from five selected States.

1.5 Study Methods

To meet the objectives and respond to the research questions, the study team conducted a policy-driven study of State management practices and local office operational procedures related to SNAP APT between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The study team implemented a mixed-method approach to collecting quantitative and qualitative survey data from State and local office personnel.

To minimize burden on State and local SNAP office personnel, we sought to minimize exclusive dependence on the survey instruments for all study information. The study team first conducted preliminary research by reviewing reports from previous studies as discussed above and obtaining data related to States’ SNAP application processing already available from the FNS website.^{17,18,19,20,21,22,23} To inform the development of the survey instrument, the study team worked with a Study Advisory Board comprised of representatives from eight State SNAP agencies.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2013). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State options report (eleventh edition)*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/11-State_Options.pdf.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State options report (twelfth edition)*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/12-State_Options.pdf.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State activity report fiscal year 2014* <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FY14%20State%20Activity%20Report.pdf>.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State activity report fiscal year 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/2015-State-Activity-Report.pdf>.

²¹ SNAP Certification Policy Waiver Database, Retrieved September 24, 2015, from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/waivers-rules>

²² *SNAP Workload Management Matrix*, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/matrix.pdf>.

²³ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (2017). *SNAP online: a review of State government SNAP websites*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-online-a-review-of-state-government-snap-websites>.

For this study, the study team collected data primarily through surveys of two groups of respondents: (1) SNAP directors in 51 States, and (2) SNAP managers in all local SNAP offices within five²⁴ selected States. The State survey instrument asked about the State's use of:

- administrative waivers, demonstration projects, and policy options²⁵; and
- business process reengineering, workflow analyses, or process management strategies.

The Local Survey instrument asked SNAP office managers about their office's operational procedures, specifically procedures for:

- receiving applications and entering into their eligibility system,
- triaging applications,
- assigning cases,
- scheduling and conducting interviews,
- verifying information, and
- processing applications for multiple social service programs in addition to SNAP.

In addition, both the State Agency Survey and the Local Survey instruments asked respondents about:

- modernization features,
- actions to prioritize APT,
- performance-based incentives or penalties designed to improve APT,
- practices that had a positive and negative effect on APT,
- changes that could improve APT, and
- barriers to improving APT.

Most survey questions asked respondents to select answers from provided response options with opportunities to specify other options in open-ended text. Both survey instruments included three questions for which respondents provided longer open-ended narrative text. The State Survey instrument is provided in appendix A, and the Local Agency Survey instrument is provided in appendix B. The study team also collected summary administrative data from State leadership.

²⁴ Although six States were originally selected for participation, local agencies in one of the six States did not provide sufficient data for analysis.

²⁵ The policy option names and descriptions used in this report were developed specifically for the survey instrument used for data collection from the States. The policy option names and descriptions in this report may differ from policy options and descriptions used in other documents, including previous studies and reports. The survey was not designed to collect detailed information on how each State implemented a particular policy option. For example, States have flexibility in how long they certify households for benefits. Certification periods may vary from 4, 5, 6, 12, or 24 months depending on household circumstances and State policy. The survey inquired as to which States were implementing this option, identified as Simplified Reporting—Certification Length in this report; however, the survey did not explore the specifics of which certification period lengths were being implemented by the States who reported using this option. Therefore, the reporting on the State Policy Options should be carefully interpreted as the analysis is based solely on the names and descriptions used in this report, which may not reflect the granularity available within an option.

The five States selected for the local office survey included a mix of high performing States and States that have improved their APT rates in recent years. 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.

Between June and December 2017, the study team administered the surveys online, with a telephone interview option, and conducted follow-up for clarification and non-response. To administer the web-based surveys, the study team used survey methods that have been demonstrated to maximize response rates.²⁶ To promote a high response rate, study coordinators sent multiple follow-up email letters and reminders, made telephone calls to non-respondents, and worked with FNS and FNS Regional Offices to provide additional reinforcement.

Through these efforts, the study team obtained 100 percent survey response from all 51 States, and an overall 88 percent survey response from local SNAP offices in the five selected States. Because application processing procedures vary across local offices, the study included all local SNAP offices within the selected States in the survey. All local offices in two of the selected States responded to the survey, and between 67 percent and 83 percent of local offices in three selected States responded.

The study team conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses to respond to the study's descriptive research questions. We conducted simple Pearson chi-square tests to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the APT status groups in their implementation of each SNAP management practice. We also conducted t-tests to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the mean APT rates for States that did or did not implement each SNAP management practice. The study team conducted qualitative analysis of open-ended text and narrative responses by examining similarities and differences across all States' responses to each question and within the context of each State's overall survey responses. Through this inductive process, we developed summary categories that represented patterns, themes, and interrelationships found among the responses.

The study team also compiled State data into a State Profile for each of the 51 States (see appendix C) and compiled local office data into a Case Study of application processing procedures for each of five selected States (see appendix D).

The study team encountered several challenges in conducting this study. First, a key challenge to data collection was aligning the timeframe for FFY APT rates with State fiscal years and activities. Because fiscal year timeframes vary across States, and do not consistently align with the FFY, the timeframe for data collection could not be defined according to the FFY. To provide a common timeframe, the study team collected data based on calendar years, recognizing that the difference in aligning calendar years with FFYs would introduce some misalignment in observing trends over time.

Second, measuring the impact of some State SNAP management practices was particularly challenging because they may not be fully implemented instantaneously and may involve a gradual rollout over time

²⁶ Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

across a State. Actual impact of these practices on APT rates may take several years to be fully realized. These time lags may have obscured the study's ability to detect relationships between these practices and APT rates. To accommodate this, the study team expanded the original study timeframe to a four-calendar year (CY) timeframe (2012–2015) to better measure changes over a broader span of time. Expanding this timeframe even more may have better detected trends over time, but the potential for diminishing accuracy in institutional memory or documentation limited the reliability of data collection about earlier years.

Third, although the study achieved a survey response rate of 100 percent from the 51 States, analysis of the data resulted in very small and unevenly distributed numbers in each analysis cell for many of the relationships examined. This limited the likelihood of achieving statistically significant differences between groups. In addition, although the study examined a wide range of SNAP management practices, findings must acknowledge that numerous other unmeasured contextual factors were also influencing APT during the study period.

Fourth, the study team intended to calculate State caseload-to-staffing ratios as an indicator of effort and resources related to APT rate. The study team requested data from all States related to numbers of applications received and staffing numbers related to application processing. However, most States were unable to provide these data uniformly and many could not provide these data at all. Because the analyses of these data proved to be unreliable rather than accurately representing trends, we omitted this critical variable.

2. STUDY FINDINGS

2.1 Findings Overview

In this section, we first provide an overview of the States' SNAP administrative structures and summarize changes to their APT rates and APT status—Timely, Untimely, and Very Untimely—between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015.

Next, in response to the study's research questions, we describe State SNAP management practices including: administrative waivers, demonstration projects, policy options, business process reengineering, workflow analyses or process management strategies, modernization initiatives, leadership actions to prioritize APT, and the use of incentives or penalties to improve APT. We also describe operational procedures for processing SNAP applications used in local offices in five selected States.

For each State management practice, we examined relationships between State activities and both APT status and mean APT rates. We include shorter tables displaying findings in the body of the report, moving longer tables to appendix E. We also include summaries of States' survey text responses to provide additional qualitative depth to quantitative findings.

In addition, we provide data for each State compiled into a State Profile in appendix C and provide data on SNAP application processing procedures within local offices in a Case Study for each of five selected States in appendix D.

2.2 SNAP Administrative Structure

States administer SNAP according to Federal regulations and State-specific policies and maintain primary responsibility for certification policies and reporting. States have flexibility to adapt their organizational structure to administer SNAP. While most States administer SNAP at the State level, some States opt to decentralize their administrative responsibilities and share SNAP administration with county agencies

Of the 51 States included in this study, 41 (80 percent) are State-administered and 10 (20 percent) are county-administered. Among the 10 States that are county-administered, only North Dakota achieved a Timely APT rate (96.83 percent) in FFY 2015.

2.3 SNAP Application Timeliness Rates

For this study, APT rates and APT status served as primary performance measures. Tables 2.1–2.3 display APT rates published by FNS for all States between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015.²⁷ In each table, States are sorted according to FFY 2015 APT rates and grouped according to the three APT status categories—Timely, Untimely, and Very Untimely.²⁸

²⁷U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2018). *Recognizing States for exceptional nutrition assistance service: Application Processing Timeliness 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

²⁸Timely, also referred to as Acceptable (APT rates $\geq 95.00\%$), Untimely, also referred to as Borderline (APT rates = 90.00–94.99%), Very Untimely, also referred to as Unacceptable (APT rates <90.00%).

Table 2.1 displays the changes in APT rates between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 for the States achieving a Timely APT Rate (Timely $\geq 95.00\%$) in FFY 2015. The number of States achieving Timely APT status doubled from five in FFY 2012 to 10 in FFY 2015. The 10 States achieving Timely APT status in FFY 2015 are Alabama, District of Columbia, Idaho, North Dakota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming.

Table 2.1. Changes in APT Rates (FFY 2012–FFY 2015): States with Timely APT Rates in FFY 2015

State	APT Rates				% Change FFY 2012–FFY 2015	APT Status in FFY 2015
	FFY 2012	FFY 2013	FFY 2014	FFY 2015		
Idaho	99.28%	98.98%	99.61%	99.13%	0%	Timely $\geq 95.00\%$ APT Rate (10 States)
New Mexico	97.85%	98.64%	85.75%	98.63%	1%	
New Hampshire	91.58%	91.12%	92.89%	96.94%	6%	
North Dakota	96.62%	97.24%	97.14%	96.38%	0%	
Wyoming	88.93%	90.18%	94.70%	96.32%	8%	
Utah	94.04%	93.75%	89.64%	95.71%	2%	
Alabama	78.65%	85.88%	84.91%	95.60%	22%	
Oregon	92.98%	90.58%	91.72%	95.54%	3%	
Oklahoma	92.05%	91.50%	93.63%	95.16%	3%	
District of Columbia	96.41%	97.62%	94.53%	95.08%	-1%	

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015 retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

The 10 ‘Timely States’ APT performance fluctuated considerably between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015. These changes in APT status are highlighted below:

- Four States maintained Timely APT status between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 (District of Columbia, Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico).²⁹
- Six States improved from Very Untimely or Untimely to Timely APT status by FFY 2015 (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming).

Table 2.2 displays the changes in APT rates between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 for the 22 States with an Untimely APT Rate (Untimely=90.00–94.99%) in FFY 2015. More than half of the Untimely States demonstrated improvements in APT rates, for some as high as 66 percent, even though not all achieved Timely APT status. Notably, eight States demonstrated at least 10 percent improvement in APT rates but remained in Untimely APT status:

- Connecticut improved by 66 percent,
- Hawaii improved by 15 percent,
- Louisiana improved by 12 percent,
- Nebraska improved by 29 percent,
- Nevada improved by 11 percent,
- Pennsylvania improved by 24 percent,

²⁹ Although APT rates for District of Columbia and New Mexico dipped below Timely status for one year between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, we consider their APT performance as Timely.

- Tennessee improved by 15 percent, and
- Vermont improved by 24 percent.

Table 2. 2. Changes in APT Rates (FFY 2012–FFY 2015): States with Untimely APT Rates in FFY 2015

State	APT Rates				% Change FFY 2012–FFY 2015	APT Status in FFY 2015
	FFY 2012	FFY 2013	FFY 2014	FFY 2015		
Florida	91.91%	94.07%	88.65%	94.57%	3%	Untimely 90.00–94.99% APT Rate (22 States)
Hawaii	81.77%	91.95%	94.41%	94.43%	15%	
South Dakota	94.71%	96.02%	91.85%	94.39%	0%	
Connecticut	56.71%	57.36%	80.21%	94.35%	66%	
Colorado	91.64%	94.94%	91.91%	94.13%	3%	
Kentucky	97.26%	98.41%	90.21%	94.03%	-3%	
Minnesota	94.06%	91.52%	89.46%	93.93%	0%	
Montana	93.29%	88.62%	93.29%	93.71%	0%	
Pennsylvania	75.78%	80.00%	85.54%	93.59%	24%	
Wisconsin	87.14%	91.85%	95.87%	93.33%	7%	
Arkansas	86.98%	90.57%	92.42%	93.26%	7%	
Rhode Island	91.49%	91.87%	91.93%	93.23%	2%	
Arizona	93.07%	91.21%	91.92%	92.93%	0%	
Mississippi	93.88%	95.13%	94.88%	92.50%	-1%	
Virginia	91.98%	91.57%	93.32%	91.48%	-1%	
Vermont	73.60%	85.58%	79.46%	91.35%	24%	
Nevada	81.96%	73.90%	83.93%	91.15%	11%	
Nebraska	70.07%	68.03%	65.80%	90.68%	29%	
Washington	90.22%	93.10%	93.13%	90.67%	0%	
Tennessee	78.81%	78.44%	84.59%	90.53%	15%	
Indiana	88.25%	87.86%	90.91%	90.26%	2%	
Louisiana	80.47%	87.17%	84.67%	90.15%	12%	

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015 retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

Table 2.3 displays the changes in APT rates between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 for the 19 States with a Very Untimely APT Rate (Very Untimely <90.00%) in FFY 2015. It is also worth noting that two States demonstrated significant improvements in APT rates but remained Very Untimely in FFY 2015. New Jersey’s APT rate improved by 40 percent and Illinois’ APT rate improved by 28 percent.

Table 2.3. Changes in APT Rates (FFY 2012–FFY 2015): States With Very Untimely APT Rates in FFY 2015

State	APT Rates				% Change FFY 2012–FFY 2015	APT Status in FFY 2015
	FFY 2012	FFY 2013	FFY 2014	FFY 2015		
Michigan	91.86%	89.52%	85.58%	89.84%	-2%	Very Untimely < 90.00% APT Rate (19 States)
California	84.71%	86.57%	86.82%	89.64%	6%	
South Carolina	82.77%	76.76%	89.40%	88.93%	7%	
Texas	88.63%	93.53%	90.06%	88.57%	0%	
Kansas	85.87%	92.36%	88.24%	88.41%	3%	
New York	90.38%	91.89%	83.36%	87.08%	-4%	
Maryland	87.29%	89.78%	86.74%	86.42%	-1%	
Ohio	79.56%	80.47%	79.72%	86.27%	8%	
New Jersey	60.70%	68.81%	76.57%	85.25%	40%	
Illinois	66.03%	82.13%	63.36%	84.82%	28%	
West Virginia	93.82%	90.10%	91.15%	84.54%	-10%	
Massachusetts	87.44%	83.78%	85.05%	83.16%	-5%	
North Carolina	87.62%	75.36%	72.63%	82.69%	-6%	
Missouri	84.72%	82.88%	84.00%	81.45%	-4%	
Iowa	85.51%	90.64%	89.10%	80.82%	-5%	
Georgia	81.08%	77.99%	64.82%	80.50%	-1%	
Maine	91.54%	92.51%	84.25%	78.98%	-14%	
Delaware	84.62%	85.51%	73.93%	75.00%	-11%	
Alaska	93.08%	87.88%	85.66%	73.54%	-21%	

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015, retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

Table 2.4 shows the distribution of APT rates across the 51 States between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, with means and standard deviations. Note that the means shown here are the average of APT rates for the 51 States in this study and not the true national average. The unit of analysis for this report is States, so each State has equal weight regardless of caseload size. If producing a national average of APT rates, the individual application would be the unit of analysis.

Table 2.4. Mean APT Rates, by Federal Fiscal Year

	Mean APT Rates for 50 States and the District of Columbia			
	FFY 2012	FFY 2013	FFY 2014	FFY 2015
Mean	86.68%	87.71%	86.93%	90.18%
Standard Deviation	9.13	8.48	8.01	5.87

Source: APT for FFY 2012–FFY 2015 retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recognizing-states-exceptional-nutrition-assistance-service>.

The distribution of these means reveals two important trends in APT between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015. First, the mean APT rate among the 51 States rose from 86.68 percent in FFY 2012 to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015. Between FFY 2012 and FFY 2014, State APT rates averaged about 87 percent, which

represents Very Untimely APT status and improved to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015, which represents Untimely APT status. Second, the standard deviation of APT rates decreased from 9.13 in FFY 2012 to 5.87 FFY 2015, indicating a reduction in variation and showing that the improvement toward timeliness was becoming more consistent across States.

Among the 10 county-administered States identified earlier, only North Dakota maintained Timely APT status between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, and Wisconsin achieved Timely APT status only in FFY 2014. Among the 10 States that remained Timely, all except one (North Dakota), are State administered. There were no significant differences in mean APT rates for FFY 2012 through FFY 2015 between the state- or county-administered States. Therefore, we did not include administrative structure in further analyses.

Findings from this study highlight trends in SNAP management practices in three groups of States:

1. Four States that maintained Timely APT status between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 (District of Columbia, Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico).³⁰ For this report, these will be called be the four States that remained Timely.
2. Six States that improved to Timely APT status by FFY 2015 (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming). For this report, these will be called the six States that improved to Timely.
3. Eight States that demonstrated at least 10 percent improvement in APT rates between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 but remained in Untimely APT status in FFY 2015 (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont). For this report, these will be called the eight States that improved but remained Untimely.

2.4 State Implementation of SNAP Administrative Waivers

This study examined States' use of seven administrative waivers that pertain to SNAP application processing between CY 2012 and CY 2015. At the request of a State, FNS may grant administrative waivers of SNAP regulations.³¹ States typically request administrative waivers to increase their flexibility in administering SNAP, to improve their program efficiency and effectiveness, or to be consistent with State program regulations.³²

Table E–2 in appendix E displays State implementation of these seven waivers between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The total number of States operating these waivers increased over time and all States except North Dakota operated at least one waiver during this timeframe.

States most commonly operated three waivers:

³⁰ Although APT rates for District of Columbia and New Mexico dipped below Timely status for one year between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, we consider their APT performance as Timely.

³¹ A complete list of FNS regulations pertaining to SNAP and all FNS programs can be found on the Government Publishing Office website at: http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=025dbc5a9909d38b6dff4cb2c78b7985&mc=true&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title07/7cfrv4_02.tpl#0.

³² U.S. Department of Agriculture (2013). *Program access toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/2013-toolkit.pdf>.

- Fifty (98 percent) used the Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver, which allows eligibility workers to conduct telephone interviews rather than face-to-face interviews without the need to document client hardship.^{33,34}
- Twenty-six (51 percent) operated the Early Denial/10-Day Denial if Verification is Missing Waiver by CY 2015, which allows States to deny an application before the 30th day if the household does not respond to a request for verification within 10 days, as long as the interview had been conducted.
- Twenty-five (49 percent) operated the Reinstatement without New Application Waiver by CY 2015, which allows households whose cases have been closed to forgo a second application and interview if they submit any missing information within 30 calendar days of their case being closed, as long as there is at least one month remaining in the certification period after the effective date of ineligibility.

Three of the four States that remained Timely, all except one (North Dakota) operated the Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver. Of these four Timely States, one (District of Columbia) States operated the Reinstatement without New Application Waiver.

All six of the States that improved to Timely operated the Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver. Four of these six States operated the Reinstatement without New Application Waiver.

All eight of the States which improved but remained Untimely operated the Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver. Four of these States operated the Reinstatement without New Application Waiver and four operated the Early Denial/10-Day Denial if Verification is Missing Waiver.

Table E-3 in appendix E compares States in each APT status group that operated SNAP administrative waivers in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant differences were found in the use of any administrative waivers between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status.

Table E-4 in appendix E compares the relationship between the mean FFY 2015 APT rates among States that operated each SNAP administrative waivers in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015 and those States that did not. No significant differences in mean APT rates were found between States that did or did not operate specific administrative waivers.

2.5 State Operation of SNAP Demonstration Projects

Demonstration projects are pilot projects designed to test program changes that may increase administrative efficiency, improve SNAP access among underserved populations, or introduce other efficiencies in SNAP service provision. Demonstration projects are typically limited to a five-year timeframe and include a thorough evaluation to determine effectiveness.

³³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2013). *SNAP workload management matrix*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/snap-workload-management-matrix>.

³⁴ At the time of this study, SNAP regulations required that a household participate in a face-to-face interview with an eligibility worker at the time of initial certification and every 12 months thereafter. However, as of January 6, 2017, this regulation changed to allow States the option to use telephone interviews instead of a face-to-face interview.

Table E–5 in appendix E identifies demonstration projects related to SNAP application processing between CY 2012 and CY 2015. A total of 38 States (75 percent) reported operating at least one demonstration project between CY 2012 and CY 2015.

States most frequently reported operating two demonstration projects between CY 2012 and CY 2015:

- 19 (38 percent) operated the Standard Medical Deductions Project
- 14 (28 percent) operated the Combined Application Project-Modified

Among the four States that remained Timely, two reported operating the Standard Medical Deductions Project (Idaho and North Dakota). Two of these States reported operating the Combined Application Project-Modified (District of Columbia and New Mexico).

Three of the six States that improved to Timely reported operating the Standard Medical Deductions Project (Alabama, New Hampshire, and Wyoming). One State reported operating the Combined Application Project-Modified (Wyoming).

Of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely, one reported operating the Standard Medical Deductions Project (Vermont) and one reported operating the Combined Application Project-Modified (Louisiana).

Table E–6 in appendix E compares States in each APT status group that operated demonstration projects in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant differences were found in the operation of any demonstration project between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status.

Table E–7 in appendix E compares mean FFY 2015 APT rates between States that operated each demonstration project in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015 and States that did not. No significant differences in mean APT rates were found between States that did or did not operate any demonstration project.

2.6 State Operation of SNAP Policy Options

Policy options provide States with flexibility to adapt SNAP to best meet their State needs. SNAP statutes, regulations, and waivers provide various policy options for program administration, application requirements, and certification procedures.³⁵ This flexibility helps States better target benefits, streamline program administration and field operations, and coordinate SNAP activities with other programs.³⁶

Table E–8 in appendix E shows State operation of specific SNAP policy options that pertain to application processing between CY 2012 and CY 2015. This study surveyed State agencies about certain options to determine which options are in use. This study did not explore every policy option available

³⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State options report (twelfth edition)*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/12-State_Options.pdf.

³⁶ Dean, S. (2016). *Balancing State flexibility without weakening SNAP's success: Testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/food-assistance/balancing-state-flexibility-without-weakening-snaps-success>.

to States. Therefore, this report does not give a comprehensive account of all policy and administrative options available to States.

All 51 States reported operating at least one of these policy options between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The most commonly reported policy options operated were the:

- Standard Utility Allowance (49 States)
- Simplified Reporting—Certification Length (45 States)
- Simplified Reporting—Action on Changes (43 States)
- Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (41 States)
- Ineligible Non-Citizens' Income and Deductions (38 States)
- Simplified Income and Resources (34 States)

Operation of SNAP policy options can be fluid over time, as States modify their business practices.³⁷ However, between CY 2012 and CY 2015, States reported very little change in the use of policy options, with only three States beginning or discontinuing each of five of the policy options included in this survey during this timeframe.

Of the four States that remained Timely:

- four reported operating the Standard Utility Allowance policy option (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota);
- four reported operating the Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility policy option (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota); and
- three reported operating the Simplified Income and Resources policy option (District of Columbia, New Mexico, and North Dakota).

Of the six States that improved to Timely:

- six reported operating both the Standard Utility Allowance policy option and the Simplified Income and Resources policy option (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming);
- five reported operating the Simplified Reporting—Certification Length policy option (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wyoming);
- five reported operating the Simplified Reporting—Action on Changes policy option (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Utah, and Wyoming);
- five reported operating the Ineligible Non-Citizens' Income and Deductions policy option (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah); and
- four reported operating the Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility policy option (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Oregon).

Of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely:

³⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program State options report (twelfth edition)*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-options-report>.

- eight reported operating the Simplified Reporting—Action on Changes policy option (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont);
- seven reported operating the Simplified Reporting—Certification Length policy option (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee);
- seven reported operating the Standard Utility Allowance (Connecticut, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont);
- seven reported operating the Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility policy option (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Vermont);
- six reported operating the Simplified Income and Resources policy option (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, and Pennsylvania); and
- six reported operating the Ineligible Non-Citizens' Income and Deductions policy option (Connecticut, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee).

Table E–9 in appendix E compares the proportion of State use of SNAP policy options in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015 across the three APT status groups. No significant differences were found in the use of any policy option between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status. However, the proportion of Timely States operating two specific policy options was notably higher than the proportion of Untimely or Very Untimely States. Among States with Timely APT status, 90 percent operated the Simplified Income and Resources policy option compared to 59 percent of States with Untimely APT status and 63 percent of States with Very Untimely APT status. Sixty percent of States with Timely APT status operated the Treatment of Self-Employment Income policy option compared to 23 percent of States with Untimely APT status and 42 percent of States with Very Untimely APT status.

Table E–10 in appendix E compares the mean FFY 2015 APT rates among States that operated each SNAP policy option in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015 with those States that did not. No meaningfully significant differences in mean APT rates were found between States that did or did not operate any specific policy options.

2.7 State Implementation of Business Process Reengineering

BPR initiatives are assessments to determine potential for workflow improvements and subsequently implementing those improvements. BPR uses a variety of closely related methods—Continuous Process Improvement, Business Process Analysis, Continuous Quality Improvement, Quality Management Systems, Lean, Lean Six Sigma, Total Quality Management, the Toyota Production Process, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000, Kaizen, or Rapid Improvement Events—to institute a radical redesign of business processes, job definitions, management systems, organizational structure, workflow, and underlying assumptions to achieve dramatic improvements.³⁸ While States may choose different BPR methods, the fundamentals of BPR are the same. BPR involves a cycle of structured institutional self-evaluation, prototype design, implementation, data collection, and data assessment. The common goal is to align all an institution's productive resources—physical and human—into processes that maximize output and minimize cost. BPR techniques recognize that no

³⁸ Business process reengineering (BPR). Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/business-process-reengineering-BPR.html>.

business process can remain unchanged and expect to remain optimal. Thus, BPR emphasizes a culture of change that embraces continuous self-examination and, if necessary, process reengineering.

Table 2.5 identifies States that reported implementing BPR initiatives between CY 2012 and CY 2015.³⁹ A total of 34 States (72 percent) reported implementing BPR initiatives in any year during this timeframe, with an increasing number implementing these initiatives each year. Some States reported implementing BPR in only one or two years, but not consistently throughout this timeframe. In CY 2012, 18 States (35 percent) reported implementing BPR initiatives, which increased 40 percent to 30 States (59 percent) in CY 2014 and CY 2015.

Table 2.5. State Implementation of Business Process Reengineering Initiatives, by Calendar Year

Calendar Year	# States	States Implementing BPR
2012	18	AK, AZ, CT, HI, KS, MD, MN, NE, NJ, NM, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, WA, WY
2013	26	AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IN, KS, MD, ME, MN, MT, NE, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, WA, WY
2014	30	AK, AL, AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IN, KS, MA, ME, MD, MN, MT, NE, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, WI, WY
2015	30	AK, AL, AZ, CA, CT, FL, GA, HI, IN, KS, MA, MD, ME, MN, MT, NE, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, WI, WY
<i>year unknown</i>	2	IA, VT

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study State Survey, 2017.

year unknown=State implemented BPR, but years not reported.

Note: Total States with BPR in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015: 34. States that did not report BPR between 2012 and 2015: DE, DC, ID, KY, LA, MS, MO, NH, NC, ND, SD, VA, WV. States that did not specify BPR status: AR, IL, MI, OH.

Of the four States that remained Timely, one reported implementing BPR initiatives between CY 2012 and CY 2015 (New Mexico). It is also worth noting that Idaho, a Timely State with the highest APT rate, reported implementing BPR prior to CY 2012.⁴⁰

Five of the six States that improved to Timely reported implementing BPR initiatives (Alabama, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming).

Seven of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely reported implementing BPR initiatives (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont).

Table 2.6 identifies State activities resulting from BPR initiatives. States most commonly reported that they:

- integrated workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures (32 States),
- implemented a new certification processing model (24 States),

³⁹ The State Survey instrument did not ask whether States implemented each BPR initiative statewide or in some parts of the State only.

⁴⁰ Rohachek, M. (2013). *Early lessons from the work support strategies initiative: Idaho*. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/23481/412791-Early-Lessons-from-the-Work-Support-Strategies-Initiative-Idaho.PDF>.

- created new position(s) to handle new duties or responsibilities (18 States),
- enhanced automation or modernization features (15 States).

Table 2.6. State Activities Resulting from Business Process Reengineering, CY 2012–CY 2015

Activities Resulting from BPR	# States	States Implementing
Created new position(s) to handle new duties/responsibilities	18	AZ, CT, GA, IA, KS, MA, ME, MN, NE, NV, NY, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT
Integrated workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures	32	AK, AL, AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, GA, HI, IA, IN, KS, MA, MD, ME, MN, MT, NE, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI
Implemented a new certification processing model ¹	24	AK, AZ, CA, CT, GA, HI, KS, MA, MD, ME, MN, NE, NV, NJ, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI
Enhanced automation or modernization features	15	AK, CT, FL, GA, IN, MD, ME, MN, NM, NY, TX, UT, WA, WI, WY
Established call centers	8	AK, CT, FL, GA, ME, MN, UT, WA
Other actions taken ²	3	CT, NJ, TX

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study State Survey, 2017.

¹ New processing models reported include task-based processing or specialized work units; casebanking, shared caseload, virtual caseload, statewide business model, universal caseload, geographical caseload; first-available worker, one-touch processing, first-contact resolution, and same-day/next-day service.

² Other actions reported include implementing the Unscheduled/On-Demand Telephone Interview Waiver.

Note: Total States with BPR in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015: 34. States that did not report BPR between 2012 and 2015: DE, DC, ID, KY, LA, MS, MO, NH, NC, ND, SD, VA, WV. States that did not specify BPR status: AR, IL, MI, OH.

Among the four States that remained Timely, one reported integrating workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures and enhancing automation or modernization features resulting from BPR initiatives between CY 2012 and CY 2015 (New Mexico).

Of the six States that improved to Timely, four reported integrating workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures (Alabama, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah). Three of these States reported implementing a new certification processing model (Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah). Two States reported enhancing automation or modernization features (Utah and Wyoming), or changing or creating new positions to handle new duties or responsibilities (Oregon and Utah).

Among the eight States that improved but remained Untimely, seven reported integrating workflow improvements resulting from BPR initiatives into existing certification processing procedures (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont). Six of these States reported creating new positions to handle new duties or responsibilities as a result of BPR initiatives (Connecticut, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont), or implementing a new certification processing model resulting from BPR initiatives (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Vermont).

Table E–11 in appendix E compares the number and proportion of States within each APT status group that reported each activity resulting from BPR initiatives in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant difference was found in any activity resulting from BPR initiatives between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status.

Table E–12 in appendix E compares mean FFY 2015 APT rates between States that reported each activity resulting from BPR initiatives in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015 and those States that did not. No significant difference in mean APT rate was found between States that did or did not implement any activity resulting from BPR initiatives.

2.8 State Implementation of Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

Like BPR, workflow analyses or process management strategies are additional tools used in examining business processes for improvement and can include a broader range of approaches than are typically included in formalized BPR methods. Table 2.7 identifies those States that reported implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies to improve application processing efficiency. A total of 37 States (82 percent) implemented these analyses or strategies in at least one year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The number of States implementing these increased each year during this timeframe, from less than half to almost two thirds.

Table 2.7. State Implementation of Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies, by Calendar Year

Calendar Year	# States	States Implementing Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies
2012	23	AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ND, NE, NM, NY, OR, SC, SD, WA, WV, WY
2013	26	AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, ID, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MI, ND, NE, NM, NV, NY, OR, SC, SD, VT, WA, WV, WY
2014	29	AK, AL, AZ, CA, CT, DE, HI, ID, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MT, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OR, SC, SD, TN, TX, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY
2015	33	AK, AL, AZ, CA, CT, DE, GA, HI, ID, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MI, MT, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OR, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY
<i>year unknown</i>	1	MN

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

year unknown=State implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies but did not report the years.

Note: Total States implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015: 37. States not implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies: DC, FL, IL, IA, NH, OK, UT, VA. States not reporting: AR, MA, MS, MO, OH, PA.

Several States further specified the workflow analyses they implemented, either internally or through contractors, as:

- workflow analyses,
- value stream analyses,
- predictive analytics,
- process mapping, and
- program access management evaluations.

States also further specified process management strategies they implemented as:

- collaborative problem-solving work groups,
- corrective action plans,
- increased timeliness reporting,
- workflow tools and management automation,
- statewide training and communications,
- lobby flow improvements, and
- transitions to task-based processing, business-process management, statewide processing, first-contact resolution models, and single-point-of-contact resolution models.

Three of the four States that remained Timely reported implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies (Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico). Most notably, Idaho reported beginning most of their innovations prior to CY 2012, including transitions to task-based processing, universal workforce, single-point-of-contact resolution, processing centers, and statewide communications.

Three of the six States that improved to Timely reported implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies (Alabama, Oregon, and Wyoming). Oregon reported conducting both workflow and workload analyses, developing a new triage system, and transitioning to task-based processing.

Among the eight States that improved but remained Untimely, seven implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Tennessee, and Vermont). Connecticut restructured workflow into specialist units and developed reporting tools. Hawaii and Nevada implemented task-based processing or system assignments. Nebraska used predictive analytic strategies to manage workload, and value stream mapping to manage workflow.

Table E–13 in appendix E compares States within each APT status group that reported implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant differences were found in implementation of workflow analyses or process management strategies between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status.

Table E–14 in appendix E compares mean FFY 2015 APT rates between States that implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies and States that did not. No significant differences in mean APT rates were found between States that did or did not implement workflow analyses or process management strategies.

2.9 Local Office Implementation of Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies

Local offices also implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies to improve application processing efficiency. Table 2.8 indicates that between 64 percent and 100 percent of local offices in the selected States implemented these analyses or strategies to improve application processing efficiency.

Table 2.8. Local Agencies in Five Selected States Implementing Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies, CY 2012–CY 2015

Workflow Analyses or Process Management Strategies	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=77)		Mississippi (n=58)		Nevada (n=20)		Washington (n=38)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Implementation of any workflow analysis or process management strategies to improve application processing efficiency	8	100%	49	64%	40	69%	15	75%	29	76%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies. Local offices further specified workflow analyses or process management strategies as: supervisor reviews, daily or weekly case status reviews, regular review meetings, a process improvement assessment by an outside consultant, business process reengineering, workforce optimization system to monitor staff schedules to ensure coverage, a work prioritization team, a new evaluation tool for service delivery review, first-contact resolution system, statewide intake interviews and processing, reduced verification, standardized process delivery, and scheduling all applications for 7-day processing regardless of expedited status.

2.10 Local Office Application Processing Procedures

While States administer SNAP and provide leadership, application processing occurs at the local office level. There is considerable variability in application processing procedures across local offices within some States. States enforce the Federal regulations, policy options, demonstration projects, administrative waivers, BPR initiatives, and to some extent statewide modernization initiatives. Local offices are responsible for the daily implementation of application processing procedures. For example, local offices typically determine whether workers process applications for multiple social service programs, manage staff workload and scheduling, and establish approaches for case assignment and operational procedures.

This study collected data on application processing procedures used between CY 2012 and CY 2015 by local offices in five selected States. Although procedures used by these local offices do not represent processing procedures across all States, some insight can be gained by examining the variations and trends reported. Because States were not able to provide APT rates for all local offices in all five selected States, the study team could not examine associations between local offices’ application processing procedures and APT. Further details on local office application processing procedures are presented in the Case Studies in appendix D.

2.10.1. Processing Applications for SNAP and Other Social Service Programs. Not all local offices administer SNAP independently from other social service programs. Some local offices combine eligibility staff across multiple social service programs. Table 2.9 identifies the percentage of local offices within the five selected States that reported the number of programs for which workers processed applications.

Table 2.9. Processing Applications for Multiple Programs in Local Offices in Five Selected States, CY 2012–CY 2015

Number of Other Programs	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=104)		Mississippi (n=77)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=42)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Workers processed SNAP applications only	6	75%	81	78%	72	94%	15	71%	29	69%
Workers processed SNAP and one other program	7	88%	94	90%	16	21%	16	76%	30	71%
Workers processed SNAP and two other programs	5	63%	64	62%	4	5%	12	57%	32	76%
Workers processed SNAP and three or more other programs	8	100%	104	100%	77	100%	21	100%	42	100%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.
n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that processed other social service program applications. Local offices may use more than one option, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

Local offices in all five selected States reported that some eligibility workers processed only SNAP applications, while other eligibility workers processed SNAP and at least one other social service program. In all five selected States, most local offices reported that some eligibility workers processed SNAP applications only, and all local offices reported that some workers processed applications for SNAP and three or more other programs.

Other social service programs for which workers processed applications are identified in Table 2.10. In addition to SNAP, local offices in all five selected States also processed Medicaid applications and most also processed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applications.

Table 2.10. Other Social Service Program Applications Processed in Addition to SNAP in Local Offices in Five Selected States, CY 2012–CY 2015

State	Other Social Service Programs
Connecticut (n=8)	All community programs, Medical Cash, Family and Adult Medical, Family and Adult Cash, Medicaid, Cash, Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB)
Kentucky (n=108)	Depends on staff's level of training; all staff are trained in Medicaid (Family Medical, Adult Medical); Health, Benefits and Employee Services (HBE); K Transitional Assistance Program (KTAP); K Works Program (KWP); Long Term Care (LTC); Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); State Supplement Medicare Savings Program
Mississippi (n=82)	Most local offices process SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Employment & Training Tuition Assistance, Supportive Services, Child Care and Transportation
Nevada (n=21)	Medical Assistance for the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (MAABD); Medicaid; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Family Medicine Center (FMC)
Washington (n=23)	Cash; Medicaid; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Aged, Blind and Disabled Cash Assistance (ABD); Aged, Housing, and Essential Needs (HEN); Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program (ADATSA); Childcare; Adult Cash; Medical; Refugee Cash; HealthPlanFinder; Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP); State-Funded Cash Assistance

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.
n=number of local office respondents.

2.10.2. Receiving SNAP Applications. Local offices receive SNAP applications in multiple ways. Table 2.11 identifies the percentage of local offices in the five selected States receiving applications in four ways. Almost all local offices in all five selected States received applications that were mailed or dropped off in person. Many local offices received online applications, while fewer local offices received applications through call centers or contact centers.⁴¹

Table 2.11. Ways SNAP Applications are Received by Local Offices in Five Selected States, CY 2012–CY 2015

Ways SNAP Applications are Received	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=105)		Mississippi (n=81)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Walk-in/drop-off	8	100%	104	99%	81	100%	19	90%	43	100%
Mail	8	100%	100	95%	81	100%	20	95%	42	98%
Call center/contact center	2	25%	93	89%	7	9%	7	33%	24	56%
Online	7	88%	89	85%	36	44%	20	95%	42	98%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.
n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that received applications each way. Local offices may use multiple ways to receive applications, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

⁴¹ Contact centers communicate with clients through email, web chat/instant messaging, or shared web pages, in addition to phone calls.

2.10.3. Entering SNAP Applications. Once received, the procedures used by local offices to enter information from SNAP applications into computer systems vary by application type and the extent to which eligibility systems were automated and integrated. Table 2.12 shows various procedures for entering both paper and online applications, which were reported by local offices in the five selected States.

While staff at some call centers handled paper applications, eligibility workers in local offices were more likely to handle these applications. Most paper applications were entered manually into the system, although paper applications were also scanned and uploaded into the computer system. Similarly, eligibility workers in local offices were also more likely than call center staff to handle applications received online. Applications received online were also primarily entered manually, or scanned and uploaded, into computer systems. In only one of the five selected States (Washington), most local offices reported that applications received online were automatically uploaded into their computer system.

Table 2.12. Procedures for Entering SNAP Applications into Computer Systems Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Procedures	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=107)		Mississippi (n=80)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local office entered applications into computer system										
Paper	8	100%	107	100%	80	100%	21	100%	39	91%
Online	6	75%	75	70%	43	54%	19	90%	34	79%
Call center entered applications into computer system										
Paper	6	75%	29	27%	5	6%	3	14%	9	21%
Online	5	63%	36	34%	7	9%	6	29%	19	44%
Local office scanned and uploaded applications into computer system										
Paper	2	25%	101	94%	80	100%	18	86%	10	23%
Online	1	13%	67	63%	47	59%	16	76%	10	23%
Call center scanned and uploaded applications into computer system										
Paper	0	0%	18	17%	6	8%	5	24%	5	12%
Online	1	13%	30	28%	5	6%	6	29%	5	12%
Application automatically uploaded into the computer system										
Online	3	38%	39	36%	4	5%	6	29%	31	72%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.
n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each procedure. Local offices may use multiple procedures, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.4. Triageing SNAP Applications. Table 2.13 shows procedures used by local offices in the five selected States to triage SNAP applications. Almost all local offices reported screening SNAP applications for expedited eligibility, with call center staff in most of the selected States also screening

for expedited eligibility. Relatively few local offices, and even fewer call centers, screened applications for targeted interviewing based on complexity.⁴²

Table 2.13. Procedures for Triaging SNAP Applications Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, CY 2012–CY 2015

Procedure for Triaging SNAP Applications	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=104)		Mississippi (n=81)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Local office screened application for expedited eligibility	8	100%	103	99%	81	100%	21	100%	43	100%
Call center screened application for expedited eligibility	8	100%	72	69%	6	7%	7	33%	22	51%
Local office screened application for targeted interviewing based on complexity	0	0%	28	27%	35	43%	4	19%	8	19%
Call center screened application for targeted interviewing based on complexity	0	0%	20	19%	3	4%	1	5%	1	2%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each procedure. Local offices may use multiple procedures, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.5. Assigning Cases. Approaches to assigning SNAP applications to staff can range from (1) assigning case ownership to one worker for complete application processing through determination, to (2) some degree of specialization among workers, or to (3) shared case ownership in which any worker conducts whatever step in the processing is needed, as shown in Table 2.14. Among the five selected States, local offices reported using a variety of approaches rather than a single consistent approach across the State. For both expedited and regular applications, the most commonly reported approaches were assigning case ownership to one worker from interview through determination and shared case ownership in which any worker conducts any processing step needed.

⁴² Screening for complexity allows an agency to fast track non-expedited applications that can be processed quickly based on application characteristics. Applications for a single elderly person receiving only Social Security income are much less complex than applications for large multigenerational households. Triaging applications for complexity is one approach that agencies might use to assign less complex applications to less experienced staff and more complex applications to more experienced staff.

Table 2.14. Approaches to Assigning Expedited and Regular SNAP Applications to Staff Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Approaches	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=105)		Mississippi (n=77)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Same worker owned case from interview through eligibility determination										
Expedited Applications	5	63%	74	70%	67	87%	16	76%	12	28%
Regular Applications	2	25%	65	62%	66	86%	15	71%	6	14%
Same worker owned case from interview through eligibility determination, but specialist obtained and processed verifications										
Expedited Applications	1	13%	12	11%	7	9%	0	0%	3	7%
Regular Applications	0	0%	14	13%	7	9%	0	0%	3	7%
Different workers specialized in each processing step										
Expedited Applications	1	13%	35	33%	6	8%	7	33%	4	9%
Regular Applications	1	13%	39	37%	6	8%	9	43%	3	7%
Any worker conducted any processing step										
Expedited Applications	6	75%	80	76%	37	48%	13	62%	40	93%
Regular Applications	7	88%	89	85%	38	49%	14	67%	42	98%
Other approaches to SNAP case assignment ¹										
Expedited Applications	2	25%	13	12%	9	12%	2	10%	5	12%
Regular Applications	0	0%	13	12%	6	8%	1	5%	2	5%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

¹Other reported approaches to SNAP case assignment include: workers take applications on a rotation basis, cases are assigned to workers alphabetically by last name, some workers processed new applications and other workers processed recertifications, and workers are assigned to watch an expedited list.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each approach. Local offices may use multiple approaches, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.6. Scheduling Interviews. Among the five selected States, local offices reported using a variety of approaches to scheduling interviews rather than a single consistent approach across each State. Table 2.15 shows the percentage of local offices using a range of approaches for both expedited and regular applications. The most commonly used approach to scheduling interviews among local offices in the five selected States were unscheduled/on-demand interviews and manual/paper-based scheduling. Less commonly used were online scheduling and call center scheduling. Local offices in these States reported very little difference in scheduling interviews between expedited and regular applications.

Table 2.15. Approaches to Scheduling Interviews Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Approach	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=107)		Mississippi (n=79)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=41)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unscheduled/on-demand interviews										
Expedited Applications	8	100%	103	96%	42	53%	19	90%	39	95%
Regular Applications	8	100%	104	97%	39	49%	19	90%	39	95%
Manual/paper-based scheduling at local office										
Expedited Applications	4	50%	71	66%	76	96%	21	100%	20	49%
Regular Applications	4	50%	74	69%	77	97%	21	100%	21	51%
Online scheduling										
Expedited Applications	1	13%	16	15%	9	11%	0	0%	19	46%
Regular Applications	0	0%	16	15%	8	10%	0	0%	18	44%
Call center scheduling										
Expedited Applications	1	13%	13	12%	1	1%	2	10%	8	20%
Regular Applications	2	25%	14	13%	1	1%	3	14%	8	20%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each approach. Local offices may use multiple approaches, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.7. Conducting Interviews. Table 2.16 identifies the percentage of local offices in the five selected States that reported various approaches to conducting interviews with SNAP clients. Most local offices used multiple approaches, rather than just one. Almost all local offices conducted face-to-face interviews, and the majority conducted telephone interviews through the local office or through call centers. For expedited applications, local offices were typically more likely to conduct face-to-face interviews than telephone interviews. Relatively few local offices within the five selected States conducted telephone interviews using interactive voice response systems,⁴³ and no local offices used video interviewing.

⁴³ Interactive voice response (IVR) uses computer-assisted technology to administer and record interview responses via telephone, replacing a human interviewer with a high-quality recorded script to which the interviewee responds.

Table 2.16. Approaches to Conducting Interviews Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Approach	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=103)		Mississippi (n=81)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Face-to-face interviews										
Expedited Applications	8	100%	101	98%	81	100%	19	90%	43	100%
Regular Applications	8	100%	102	99%	80	99%	19	90%	43	100%
Telephone interviews with local office										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	79	77%	72	89%	21	100%	32	74%
Regular Applications	8	100%	84	82%	79	98%	20	95%	34	79%
Telephone interviews with call center										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	87	84%	1	1%	13	62%	31	72%
Regular Applications	8	100%	85	83%	1	1%	13	62%	32	74%
Telephone interviews with interactive voice response										
Expedited Applications	1	13%	13	13%	3	4%	1	5%	2	5%
Regular Applications	0	0%	13	13%	1	1%	1	5%	2	5%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each approach. Local offices may use multiple approaches, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.8. Gathering Verification. All local offices in the five selected States reported multiple procedures to verify application information, with only slight differences between verifying expedited and regular applications. Table 2.17 identifies the percentage of local offices in the five selected States that reported using each of a variety of procedures to obtain verification. Almost all local offices verified information from documents provided by clients either in person or via email or fax. Fewer local offices facilitated clients uploading scanned verification documents. Workers in most local offices either requested data or accessed data in real time from commercial, State, or Federal databases.

Table 2.17. Procedures for Gathering Verification Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Procedure	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=107)		Mississippi (n=81)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Client provided paper documents										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	106	99%	79	98%	21	100%	41	95%
Regular Applications	8	100%	106	99%	79	98%	21	100%	42	98%
Client provided documents via email/fax										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	103	96%	78	96%	20	95%	39	91%
Regular Applications	7	88%	103	96%	79	98%	20	95%	41	95%
Client uploaded scanned documents										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	71	66%	20	25%	15	71%	7	16%
Regular Applications	7	88%	69	64%	17	21%	14	67%	8	19%
Worker requested data from commercial/State/Federal databases										
Expedited Applications	8	100%	85	79%	63	78%	20	95%	42	98%
Regular Applications	8	100%	83	78%	64	79%	20	95%	42	98%
Worker accessed commercial/State/Federal databases in real time										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	72	67%	36	44%	16	76%	41	95%
Regular Applications	7	88%	76	71%	41	51%	16	76%	41	95%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each procedure. Local offices may use multiple procedures, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.10.9. Application Processing Approaches. Local offices typically used a combination of approaches to process SNAP applications. Table 2.18 identifies the percentage of local offices using each of three approaches. Workers in most local offices attempt to start and finish processing applications within hours rather than days and to verify as much information as possible at first contact, particularly for expedited applications. Fewer local offices reported holding applications until the client provided complete documentation.

Table 2.18. Approaches for Processing SNAP Applications Used by Local Offices in Five Selected States, by Application Type, CY 2012–CY 2015

Approach	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=106)		Mississippi (n=80)		Nevada (n=21)		Washington (n=43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Workers verified as much information as possible at first contact										
Expedited Applications	8	100%	106	100%	80	100%	20	95%	43	100%
Regular Applications	8	100%	105	99%	79	99%	20	95%	43	100%
Workers attempted to start and finish processing applications within hours rather than days										
Expedited Applications	7	88%	93	88%	72	90%	19	90%	42	98%
Regular Applications	7	88%	83	78%	63	79%	19	90%	42	98%
Workers pended applications until the client provided complete documentation										
Expedited Applications	4	50%	30	28%	16	20%	14	67%	6	14%
Regular Applications	5	63%	60	57%	62	78%	15	71%	10	23%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.
n=number of local office respondents.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that used each approach. Local offices may use multiple approaches, so column percentages may not add up to 100%.

2.11 State Implementation of Modernization Initiatives

When used in the context of SNAP, the term “modernization” has a very broad meaning. Two past FNS studies of SNAP modernization, one conducted by the Urban Institute in 2010⁴⁴ and the other by Mathematica Policy Research in 2013,⁴⁵ defined modernization as the reorganization of administrative functions, the broader use of state-of-the-art technologies, the application of simplified SNAP policies, and partnerships with other community-based organizations. For the purposes of this study, we defined modernization more specifically as the application of new technologies to improve SNAP application processes. Common examples include the use of centralized call centers, a secure web-based application, sophisticated management information systems (MIS) to facilitate caseload sharing and real-time data access, and document imaging technologies to convert paper documents to digital editable files.

Modernization initiatives take many years to design, develop, pilot, and roll out before they are fully operational. State and local SNAP offices operate different modernization features and within varying timeframes based on priorities and funding. Even if a State reports that they operate a specific modernization feature, this does not mean that the feature is fully operational across all local offices within that State.

⁴⁴ Rowe, G., O'Brien, C., Hall, S., Pindus, N., Eyster, L., Koralek, R., and Stanczyk, A. (2010). Enhancing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) certification: SNAP modernization efforts. Report prepared by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/EnhancedCertification_Vol1Final.pdf.

⁴⁵ Hulsey, L., Conway, K., Gothro, A., Kleinman, R., Reilly, M., Cody, S., and Sama-Miller, E. (2013). *The evolution of SNAP modernization initiatives in five States*. Report prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/EvolutionSNAPMod.pdf>.

Table E–15 in appendix E identifies those States that reported having various modernization features in operation between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The most commonly reported features, operated by more than half, were:

- online eligibility screening tool (38 States),
- electronic case files (38 States),
- call centers that handled general inquiries and requests (37 States),
- document imaging (38 States),
- electronic or telephone signatures (33 States),
- online application systems that allowed clients to apply online and allowed staff to input the information into the eligibility system (30 States),
- online e-authentication procedures (access to electronic data to verify client income and other eligibility requirements) (29 States), and
- online account management system that allowed clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents (28 States).

Of the four States that remained Timely:

- all four operated electronic case files (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota),
- all four operated call centers that handled general inquiries and requests (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota),
- three operated call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations (District of Columbia, Idaho, and New Mexico),
- three operated document imaging (District of Columbia, Idaho, and New Mexico),
- three operated electronic or telephonic signatures (Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico), and
- three provided applications in PDF format that clients could submit online (Idaho, North Dakota, and New Mexico).

Of the six States that improved to Timely:

- four operated electronic case files (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Utah),
- four operated document imaging (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Utah),
- four operated online account management for clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Utah),
- four operated electronic or telephonic signatures (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Utah), and
- four operated call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations (New Hampshire, Oregon, Oklahoma, and Utah).

Among the eight States that improved but remained Untimely:

- seven reported operating call centers that handled general inquiries and requests (Connecticut, Nebraska, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),
- seven reported operating electronic case files (Connecticut, Nebraska, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),

- seven reported operating document imaging (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),
- six reported operating call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations (Connecticut, Nebraska, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont), and
- six reported operating online e-authentication procedures (access to electronic data to verify client income and other eligibility requirements) (Connecticut, Nebraska, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont).

Table E–16 in appendix E compares the percentage of States in each APT status group that reported operating each modernization feature at any time between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant differences in operating specific modernization features were found between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status. However, one notable relationship was found in the use of call centers. Among States with Timely APT status, 70 percent operated call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations compared to 50 percent of States with Untimely APT status and 39 percent of States with Very Untimely APT status.

Table E–17 compares the mean FFY 2015 APT rate between States that reported operating each of 18 different modernization features in any year from CY 2012 through CY 2015 with those that did not operate these modernization features. No significant differences were found in mean APT rates between States that did or did not operate any specific modernization features. However, States providing an application in PDF format that a client downloads, completes, and submits online or via email or mail had a higher mean APT rate (92.10 percent) compared to the mean APT rate among States that did not provide this feature (89.07 percent). Also, the mean APT rate among States that provided video interviews was higher (95.13 percent) compared to the mean APT rate among States that did not provide this feature (90.08 percent).

2.12 Local Office Operation of Modernization Initiatives

Local offices in four selected States also reported on modernization initiatives. Table 2.19 shows the percentage of local offices implementing each modernization feature. Similar to the findings on modernization initiatives among States, the local offices in four selected States most commonly operated:

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

Table 2.19. Local Offices in Four Selected States Operating Modernization Initiatives, CY 2012–CY 2015

Modernization Features	Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=105)		Mississippi (n=72)		Nevada (n=21)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Call center(s) that handled general inquiries and requests	8	100%	91	87%	11	15%	21	100%
Call center(s) that scheduled appointments, processed complaints, entered changes, and set task alerts	6	75%	68	65%	4	6%	8	38%
Call centers(s) that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations	8	100%	97	92%	5	7%	16	76%
Contact center(s) that communicated with clients through email, web chat/instant messaging, or shared web pages, in addition to phone calls	0	0%	16	15%	4	6%	1	5%
Online eligibility screening tool	5	63%	58	55%	19	26%	5	24%
An application in PDF format that the client downloads, completes, and submits online or via email or mail	4	50%	33	31%	22	31%	2	10%
Online application system that allowed clients to apply online and was integrated with the eligibility system	2	25%	63	60%	16	22%	17	81%
Online application system that allowed clients to apply online and staff to input the information into the eligibility system	8	100%	77	73%	24	33%	18	86%
Online account management that allowed clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents	8	100%	67	64%	17	24%	2	10%
Online case management for workers that organized caseloads by queue, tracked application routing, and alerted workers when case actions were due	3	38%	52	50%	11	15%	16	76%
Integrated systems that handled online applications, eligibility system, and data verification	3	38%	47	45%	4	6%	16	76%
Electronic messages to notify clients of appointments or for client-caseworker communication	5	63%	80	76%	49	68%	2	10%
Mobile applications for clients to apply, submit verification, or report changes	1	13%	21	20%	10	14%	0	0%
Video interviews	0	0%	7	7%	1	1%	0	0%
Online e-authentication procedures (access to electronic data to verify client income and other eligibility requirements)	5	63%	53	50%	11	15%	6	29%
Document imaging	8	100%	70	67%	38	53%	21	100%
Electronic or telephonic signatures	7	88%	85	81%	6	8%	19	90%
Electronic case files	8	100%	101	96%	50	69%	21	100%
Other modernization feature ¹	1	13%	3	3%	0	0%	1	5%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

¹ Other modernization features reported include a lobby and workflow management system, and interactive voice response system.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that implemented each modernization feature. Local offices may implement multiple modernization features, so column percentages may not add up to 100%. Among the five selected States, Washington requested that local offices not respond to this survey question separately from the State response.

These data demonstrate the wide variation across features and across these four States. States reported that even if a local office operates a specific modernization feature, this does not indicate that the feature is fully operational across all local offices within that State. Modernization features are often piloted within selected areas within the State prior to being rolled out statewide. Some States develop statewide eligibility systems, while other States operate multiple eligibility systems across the State.

2.13 State Actions to Make APT a Priority

States used various approaches to prioritize the importance of APT. Table E–18 in appendix E identifies State actions taken to prioritize APT between CY 2012 and CY 2015. Among the 51 States, all reported taking some action to prioritize APT. Actions used by States to prioritize APT increased over time between CY 2012 and CY 2015. States demonstrated their emphasis on APT in a variety of ways.

- Additional Training, Support, or Resources:
 - trained staff in new application processing procedures (44 States)
 - supported business process reengineering initiatives (37 States)
 - allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing (35 States)
 - allocated resources for technical assistance to help workers use new technology (31 States)
- Performance Goals and Accountability:
 - established clear performance targets or goals for improving the State’s APT rate (37 States)
 - held workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in decisions about the worker’s employment status (33 States)
- State APT Rate Monitoring:
 - monthly or weekly (42 States)
 - quarterly (32 States)
 - annually (32 States)
- Local APT Rate Monitoring:
 - monthly or weekly (33 States)
 - quarterly (26 States)
 - annually (25 States)

Of the four States that remained Timely:

- four monitored both State and local APT rates monthly or weekly (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota),
- four trained staff in new application processing procedures (District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, and North Dakota),
- three allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing (District of Columbia, Idaho, and New Mexico), and
- three allocated resources for technical assistance to help workers use new technology (District of Columbia, Idaho, and New Mexico).

Of the six States that improved to Timely:

- six monitored State APT rates monthly or weekly (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming),
- six supported business process reengineering initiatives (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming),
- six held workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in decisions about the worker's employment status (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming),
- five established clear performance targets or goals for improving APT rates (Alabama, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming),
- five monitored local APT rates monthly or weekly (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wyoming),
- five trained staff in new application processing procedures (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wyoming), and
- five allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing (Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wyoming).

Of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely:

- eight trained staff in new application processing procedures (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),
- seven supported business process reengineering initiatives (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),
- seven allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing (Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Vermont),
- six allocated resources for technical assistance to help workers use new technology (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Vermont),
- six established clear performance targets or goals for improving the State's APT rate (Connecticut, Hawaii, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee),
- six monitored State APT rates monthly or weekly (Connecticut, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont),
- five monitored local APT rates monthly or weekly (Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee), and
- five held workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in decisions about the worker's employment status (Connecticut, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee).

Table E–19 in appendix E compares the percentage of States in each of the APT status groups that took each action to make APT a priority at any time between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No significant differences were found between any action to make APT a priority between States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status. However, the proportion of States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status that monitored State or local APT rates at least monthly was notably different. States with Timely APT status were more likely to monitor State APT rates at least monthly (100 percent) compared to States with Untimely APT status (82 percent) and States with Very Untimely

APT status (74 percent). States with Timely APT status were also more likely to monitor local office APT rates at least monthly (90 percent) compared to States with Untimely APT status (59 percent) and States with Very Untimely APT status (58 percent).

Table E–20 in appendix E compares the mean APT rate between States that implemented each activity to make APT a priority at any time between CY 2012 and CY 2015 and those States that did not implement the activity. No significant differences were found in mean APT rates between States that did and did not implement any activity to make APT a priority. However, noticeable differences were found in mean APT rates of States that did and did not implement two actions to make APT a priority. States that provided staff training in new application processing procedures had a higher mean APT rate (90.63 percent) than States that did not provide this training (87.35 percent). Also, States that held workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in decisions about employment status had a higher mean APT rate (91.24 percent) than States that did not (88.23 percent).

2.14 Local Office Actions to Make APT a Priority

Local offices also took actions to prioritize APT. Table 2.20 identifies local office actions reported. Among local offices in four selected States, most established clear performance targets or goals for improving the State’s APT rate, monitored local APT rates monthly or weekly, held workers accountable for overdue cases, or provided staff training in new application processing procedures. Some local offices also supported business process reengineering initiatives, allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing, or allocated resources for technical assistance to help workers use new technology.

Table 2.20. Local Offices in Four Selected States Taking Actions to Make APT a Priority, CY 2012–CY 2015

Actions to Make APT a Priority		Connecticut (n=8)		Kentucky (n=100)		Mississippi (n=79)		Nevada (n=21)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Provided Additional Training, Support, or Resources	Supported business process reengineering initiative(s)	7	88%	52	52%	6	8%	19	90%
	Provided staff training about new application processing procedures	8	100%	84	84%	73	92%	21	100%
	Allocated resources for new technology designed to improve application processing	8	100%	54	54%	33	42%	20	95%
	Allocated resources for technical assistance to help workers use new technology	8	100%	48	48%	22	28%	20	95%
Established Performance Goals and Accountability	Established clear performance targets or goals for improving the State's APT rate	6	75%	83	83%	65	82%	20	95%
	Held workers accountable for overdue cases	6	75%	90	90%	77	97%	20	95%
Monitored Local APT Rates	Annually	7	88%	76	76%	44	56%	19	90%
	Quarterly	7	88%	71	71%	37	47%	20	95%
	Monthly or weekly	6	75%	75	75%	69	87%	21	100%
Other local office action ¹		2	25%	5	5%	4	5%	0	0%

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study Local Agency Survey, 2017.

n=number of local office respondents.

¹ Local offices further specified other ways they took action to prioritize APT. Actions reported include waivers, supervisor case reviews, local quality control reviews, and the hiring of additional staff to help keep up when cases were due.

Note: Percent of local offices in each State are those that took each action to prioritize APT. Local offices may take multiple actions, so column percentages may not add up to 100%. Among the five selected States, WA requested that local offices not respond to this survey question separately from the State responses.

2.15 State Use of Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties

Performance-based incentives included telework options for productive staff, overtime pay, award programs for local offices meeting targeted metrics, worker recognition and awards, and pay-for-performance plans. Performance-based penalties included linking workers' performance evaluation to APT rates, disciplining or dismissing workers for low APT rates, and penalties for low-performing local offices. Table 2.21 shows State use of performance-based incentives or penalties between CY 2012 and CY 2015.

Only five States (Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Utah) used performance-based incentives between CY 2012 and CY 2015. Another five States (Alabama, Arkansas, Ohio, Oregon, and Wyoming) used performance-based penalties each year between CY 2012 and CY 2015. No State used both performance-based incentives and penalties.

None of the four States that remained Timely used performance-based incentives or performance-based penalties.

Table 2.21. State Use of Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties Designed to Improve APT Rates, by Calendar Year

Calendar Year	# States	States Using Performance-Based Incentives or Penalties
Performance-based incentives designed to improve APT rates		
2012	4	FL, MD, MA, UT
2013	4	FL, GA, MD, MA
2014	4	FL, GA, MD, MA
2015	4	FL, GA, MD, MA
Performance-based penalties designed to improve APT rates		
2012	4	AR, OH, OR, WY
2013	4	AR, OH, OR, WY
2014	5	AL, AR, OH, OR, WY
2015	5	AL, AR, OH, OR, WY

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study State Survey, 2017.

Note: Total States reporting use of performance-based incentives in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015: 5. Total States reporting no use of performance-based incentives, 44: AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MI, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY. States not responding about use of performance-based incentives: DE, MN. Total States reporting use of performance-based penalties in any year between CY 2012 and CY 2015: 5. Total States reporting no use of performance-based penalties, 45: AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NM, NV, NY, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV. States not responding about use of performance-based penalties: NJ.

Of the six States that improved to Timely, only Utah used performance-based incentives. Alabama, Oregon, and Wyoming used performance-based penalties.

None of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely used performance-based incentives or performance-based penalties.

2.16 State Identification of Existing Practices that Affect Timeliness

The State Survey instrument asked States to identify existing policies, business processes, or modernization features that had a positive or negative effect on APT, in open-ended text responses. Table 2.22 summarizes those responses that reflect a positive effect, as reported by at least two States. The most commonly reported practices that had a positive effect include:

- Modernizations
 - Dashboards, reports, quality control reports, APT reports (15 States)
 - Document imaging, document management center (nine States)
 - Task routing features, work queues (six States)
 - Client portal for online applications, reporting, and uploading documents (six States)
- Business Processes
 - Process mapping/redesign, business process reengineering (nine States)
 - Prioritizing expedited applications (eight States)
 - Prioritizing and monitoring APT rates regularly (eight States)
 - Workflow/workflow management (six States)
 - Staff training (six States)
 - Case review for timeliness, internally or by third party (six States)

- Same-day or same-day/next-day service, first-contact resolution (six States)
- Administrative Waivers
 - Telephone interview in lieu of face-to-face interview (six States)

Table 2.22. State Reports of Existing Policies, Business Processes, or Modernization Features Having a Positive Effect on APT, CY 2012–CY 2015

Existing Policies, Processes, or Features With Positive Effect	States
Policy	
Policy alignment across social service programs	FL, MN, NE
Policy options	
Simplified reporting	CO, IL, NE, WI
Standard utility allowance	CO, IL, WI
Broad-based categorical eligibility	IL, MN, NE
Administrative waivers	
Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver	CO, CT, MT, NE, OK, RI
Unscheduled/On-Demand Interview Waiver	CT, NY, WI
30 Days to Provide Verification for New Household Member Waiver	CT, PA
Early Denial/10-Day Denial if Verification is Missing Waiver	AK, NE
Postpone Certification Interview for Certain Expedited Service Households Waiver	AK, CT, PA
Reinstatement Without New Application Waiver	AK, NE
Business processes	
Prioritizing and monitoring APT rates regularly	AL, AZ, DE, FL, NC, PA, UT, VA
Process mapping/redesign, business process reengineering (BPR)	AK, IL, IN, ME, NE, NV, OH, RI, TN
Workflow/workload management	CO, ID, ME, MN, NE, TX
Call center interviews, interview unit	AK, TX, VT
Lobby flow management	AZ, MN
Prioritizing expedited applications	CT, DE, MD, MN, ND, PA, UT, VT
Staff training	CT, ID, IN, MN, NH, PA
Close monitoring of pending applications	CT, MN, NE, SC, VT
Pro-actively call or notify clients about interview schedule	CT, FL, IN, MN, VT
Case reviews for timeliness, internally or by third party	DE, IN, MI, MN, PA, TN
Implement best practices	DE, NC
Same-day or same-day/next-day service, first-contact resolution	GA, NE, OK, OR, SC, TX
Single point of contact resolution	ID, MN
Process-based or task-based operations	CT, ID, IL, IN, NE
Statewide communications	ID, NC, PA
Performance incentives	MN, MS
Modernization features	
New software, system redevelopment, modernize eligibility system	AK, NV, PA
Electronic case files	AR, LA
Document imaging, document management center	AR, CT, IN, LA, MA, MN, NE, PA, UT
Integrated eligibility system	CO, CT, MI, NY
Online applications, electronic applications	CT, LA, IN, NE, TX
Auto-populate online application information into eligibility system	FL, GA
Automated verification system	AZ, FL, MD, NE
Task routing features, work queues	AK, GA, IN, MA, MN, WA
Statewide management system	ID, IN, LA, MD
Dashboards, reports, quality control reports, APT reports	AZ, DE, IN, LA, MI, MO, NE, NH, OH, PA, TX, VA, WA, WI, WY
Client portal for online applications, reporting, uploading documents	GA, IN, MD, MI, OK, UT

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study, 2017.

Fewer States reported policies, processes, or features that had a negative effect. Table 2.23 summarizes those that had a negative effect, as reported by at least two States. The most commonly reported policies, processes, or features that had a negative effect include:

- Modernizations
 - Initial rollout of major modernization features due to learning curve (five States)
 - Old eligibility system, low bandwidth (five States)

Table 2.23. State Reports of Existing Policies, Business Processes, or Modernization Features Having a Negative Effect on APT, CY 2012–CY 2015

Existing Policies, Processes, or Features With Negative Effect	States
Policy	
Mandatory interview policy	CT, NY
Limited ability to use data sources accepted by other programs	CT, NY
Administrative waivers	
Lack of 30 Days to Provide Verification for New Household Member Waiver	AR, ID
Business processes	
Staffing cap, high staff turnover	DE, NC
Modernization features	
Old eligibility system, low bandwidth, lack of modernized automated system	AK, AL, DE, LA, NY, WY
Initial rollout of major modernization features due to learning curve	CT, GA, NC, RI, VA
Other	
Increased caseloads	DE, NC, VT

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study, 2017.

More specifically, among the four States whose APT rates declined between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, three reported challenges that illustrate the impact of policies, processes, or features that had a negative effect. Alaska reported the lack of electronic document management, low bandwidth for application processing, two eligibility systems, and different phone systems in many offices. Delaware reported using a system of 20 manual Excel spreadsheets to track application status, experiencing a caseload that had doubled while under a staffing cap, while being required to eliminate several additional positions. Maine reported that their modernization initiatives have detracted from their ability to provide direct client services such as face-to-face interviews, phone calls, and walk-ins.

2.17 State Recommendations for Improving Timeliness

The study survey asked States to identify specific changes in policies, business processes, or modernization features that could be implemented to improve APT. Table 2.24 summarizes the specific changes reported in open-ended text responses by at least two States. The most commonly reported changes in policies, processes, or features that could improve APT were all associated with modernization:

- Modernize computer system (seven States)

- Automate verification in real time (six States)
- Implement online applications/mobile applications (three States)
- Automate case tracking (three States)

Table 2.24. State Recommendations of Specific Changes in Policies, Business Processes, or Modernization Features that Could Be Implemented to Improve APT

Changes in Policies, Processes, or Features that Could Improve APT	States
Policy	
Eliminate mandatory interview policy	CT, NY
Eliminate policies that require verification, eliminate second request for verification	CT, VT
Eliminate policies that limit State's use of data sources from other programs	CT, NY
Integrate eligibility across all programs at the Federal level	OR, WI
Business processes	
Implement business process reengineering (BPR)	MO, SC
Modernization features	
Modernize computer system	AK, AL, LA, MD, OR, RI, WY
Integrate computer systems	AK, CT
Automate verification methods in real time (e.g., Data Services Hub, TALX Work Number)	ID, IN, MN, NC, NH, NY
Implement online applications, mobile applications	CT, OK, WY
Automate case tracking	DE, RI, WA
Automate 30-day denials	WA, WI
Automate interview scheduling feature	GA, OK
Automate task routing, work queues	WA, WI

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study, 2017.

2.18 State Reports of Barriers to Improving Timeliness

The study survey asked States to report the biggest barriers to improving APT in their State. Table 2.25 summarizes those barriers identified by States in open-ended text responses. Barriers most commonly reported pertained primarily to business processes and modernization:

Business Processes

- Lack of eligibility staff, hiring freezes, high turnover, low unemployment rate (nine States)
- Delays in timely receipt of information from client (five States)
- Lack of resources, budget shortfalls (three States)
- Delays in timely appointment or interview scheduling (three States)
- Difficulty reaching clients by phone, particularly online applicants (three States)
- Insufficient knowledge of requirements among new or specialized workers (three States)

Modernization

- Lack of funding to modernize computer system (four States)
- Lack of centralized data hubs to support eligibility verifications (three States)

Table 2.25. States Reporting Biggest Barriers to Improving APT

Biggest Barriers to Improving APT	States
Policy	
Restricted use of automated real-time verification (e.g., Data Services Hub, TALX Work Number)	IN, WI
Lack of coordination between Federal agencies in integrating policy and systems across programs	AZ, NH
Business processes	
Lack of eligibility staff, hiring freezes, high turnover, low unemployment rate	AK, DE, HI, IL, LA, MA, MN, MT, NH
Challenges in staff management	HI, NE
Lack of resources, budget shortfalls	AK, OK, SC
Delays in timely appointment or interview scheduling	AR, GA, NC
Difficulty reaching clients by phone, particularly online applicants	DE, LA, TN
Delays in timely receipt of information from client	AR, IL, MA, ME, UT
Balancing policy and procedures within a county-administered model	CO, OH
Coordinating SNAP with other programs	CO, MN
Insufficient knowledge of requirements among newer workers or specialized workers	DE, MO, VA
Insufficient training, worker error	IL, PA
Modernization features	
Lack of funding to modernize computer system	AL, MD, NY, WY
Lack of centralized data hubs to support eligibility verifications	CT, IN, NC
Lack of online applications	AK, DC
Lack of system integration	AK, CT
New system issues	KY, RI
Other	
Increase in case volume	DE, MA

Source: SNAP Timeliness Study, 2017.

Reports from three of the four States whose APT rates declined between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 more fully illustrate these barriers. Alaska reported as barriers a lack of eligibility staff in their largest offices, budget shortfalls, furlough days, hiring freezes on certain job classes, not having online applications, and staff having to work back and forth between two systems. Delaware reported as barriers the lack of knowledge about policy, system, and procedural requirements among newer workers; the loss of data from tracking application status manually through Excel spreadsheets; difficulty reaching clients who apply online to conduct a telephone interview; and caseload increases and staff reductions. Maine reported as barriers problems in receiving information and supporting documentation from clients.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Synthesis of Findings

The primary purpose of this study was to determine SNAP management practices associated with better APT outcomes and identify best practices for high APT performance. This study examined State SNAP management practices and local SNAP office application processing procedures between CY 2012 and CY 2015. In this chapter, we summarize the most important findings.

3.1.1. SNAP Application Processing Timeliness. Between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, States demonstrated improvements in SNAP APT performance, with a doubling in the number of States achieving Timely APT status and a 3.5 percentage point increase in mean APT rate. More than half of States demonstrated some improvement in their APT rate during this time, although not all of this improvement was sufficient to achieve Timely APT status.

While APT performance within individual States fluctuated considerably year to year between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, overall the mean State APT rate improved to 90.18 percent in FFY 2015. Four States maintained Timely APT status between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015, and six States improved to Timely status by FFY 2015. Even among those States that remained Untimely, eight States demonstrated substantial improvement in APT rates of 10 to 66 percent between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015.

3.1.2. Associations Between SNAP Management Practices and APT Performance. SNAP management practices studied included operation of administrative waivers, demonstration projects, and policy options; implementation of business process reengineering, workflow analyses, or process management strategies; operation of modernization initiatives; actions to prioritize APT; and the use of performance-based incentives or penalties. Comparisons of mean APT rates between States that did or did not operate any specific SNAP management practice found no significant differences. Similarly, tests of association between the operation of any SNAP management practice and States with Timely, Untimely, or Very Untimely APT status found no significant differences. Standard tests of statistical significance proved insufficient in this study for detecting meaningful associations. These findings of no difference may have resulted in part from studying the universe of all 51 States, and the resulting relatively small cell sizes available for statistical analysis.

3.1.3. Practices States Use to Improve APT. This study identified several practices used to improve APT, particularly among those States that remained Timely, those that improved to Timely, and those that improved but remained Untimely.

States have adopted many approaches to improve APT, including working with FNS to select administrative waivers, demonstration projects, and policy options to enhance their SNAP administration at the State level. Between CY 2012 and CY 2015, almost all States operated the Telephone Interview in lieu of Face-to-Face Interview Waiver, and States most frequently described this waiver as having a positive effect on APT. Demonstration projects are operated by fewer States, with only 38 States participating in at least one demonstration project at some time between CY 2012 and CY 2015. The most commonly operated demonstration project was the Standard Medical Deductions Project, employed by 19 States (38 percent) and 6 of the 10 States with Timely APT in FFY 2015. Half of States that either maintained or achieved Timely APT between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015 operated the Standard Medical Deductions Project. The most commonly operated policy option between CY

2012 and CY 2015 was the Standard Utility Allowance. This option was operated by 47 States, including all of the States with Timely APT in FFY 2015.

Conducting reviews of workflow and operational procedures are additional approaches to improve APT used at the State and local office levels. These approaches range from implementing formally structured BPR initiatives to less formal workflow analyses or process management strategies.

Most States (67 percent) reported implementing formal BPR initiatives between CY 2012 and CY 2015, with an additional State (Idaho) reporting having implemented BPR prior to CY 2012. FNS' earlier study, *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*,⁴⁶ documented three States' implementation of BPR prior to CY 2013. An even higher proportion (73 percent) implemented less formalized workflow analyses or process management strategies. Similarly, the current study found that three of the four States that remained Timely reported implementing workflow analyses or process management strategies, as did three of the six States that improved to Timely. Notably, seven of the eight States that improved but remained Untimely implemented workflow analyses or process management strategies. FNS' earlier *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process* study documented these types of process improvements as helping to improve APT in three States by early CY 2013. In this current study, the number of States reporting BPR initiatives and workflow analyses or process management strategies increased each year during this timeframe, suggesting a rapid rise in the use of these assessments.

Workflow improvements and operational changes resulting from these reviews included integrating workflow improvements into existing application processing procedures, transitioning to new certification processing models, creating new positions, enhancing automation or modernization features, and establishing call centers. Most States reported integrating workflow improvements into existing certification processing procedures (32 States) and approximately half reported implementing a new certification processing model (24 States).

States described these new certification processing models using various terms including "task-based processing," "casebanking," "shared caseload," "virtual caseload," "statewide business model," "universal caseload," or "geographical caseload." These suggest States are moving from the traditional caseload model in which an application is assigned to one worker from start to finish, to more task-based processing and shared workload models in which each task may be processed separately by any worker in any location within the State. States also described new approaches to application processing as "first available worker," "one-touch processing," and "first-contact resolution." These suggest States are also transitioning to assigning staff to work on all parts of the application, or on any part of the application that is next in the queue, or on specific parts of the application based on a worker's specialty.

Findings from local SNAP offices surveyed in five selected States reinforced trends reported by States. Most local offices in all five selected States reported moving from a caseload model where one worker owns the case from beginning to end to more task-based processing, in which specialized units focus on intake, recertifications, or specialized populations. Most reported trying to collect as much information and verifications as possible at intake or first client contact to avoid pending cases.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (Summer, 2013). *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/timeliness_app_process.pdf.

Stemming from BPR initiatives and workflow analyses or process management strategies, States created new positions to handle new duties or responsibilities. Eighteen States (35 percent) created new positions. Among the eight States which had improved APT rates but remained in Untimely APT status, six created new positions to handle new duties or responsibilities.

BPR initiatives and workflow analyses or process management strategies also result in enhanced automation or modernization features. Fifteen States (30 percent) reported developing enhanced automation or modernization features as a result of BPR initiatives, and some States described modernization features that specifically resulted from process management strategies. These included increasing timeliness reporting capabilities and developing new workflow management tools.

States also developed modernization initiatives on a broader scale for reasons independent of BPR or other more informal reviews. Modernization features operated by more than half of States include online eligibility screening tools; electronic case files; call centers that handled general inquiries and requests; document imaging; electronic or telephonic signatures; or online account management systems that allows clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents. Similarly, at least half of the four States that remained Timely operated all these features except online eligibility screening tools, but also operated call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations. At least half of the six States that improved to Timely status operated electronic case files, document imaging, call centers that handled general inquiries and requests, and call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations. An additional modernization feature operated by nearly all the eight States that improved but remained Untimely was online e-authentication procedures which access electronic data to verify client income and other eligibility requirements. States providing an application in PDF format that a client downloads, completes, and submits online or via email or mail had a higher mean APT rate compared to the mean APT rate among States that did not provide this feature.

The *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process* study conducted by FNS in 2013 identified making APT a priority as one of the common leadership characteristics of high performing States in improving APT rates. This current study confirms the importance of State actions to make APT a priority. Strategies used by States with higher APT performance reflected an emphasis on performance targets and accountability. All or most of the six States that improved to Timely by FFY 2015 established clear performance targets or goals for improving the State's APT rates and held workers accountable for overdue cases. In narrative responses, local offices emphasized that with the transition to task-based processing models in which several workers may process the same application, holding individual workers accountable for APT timeliness presented new challenges.

Providing staff training in new processing procedures and monitoring State and local APT performance either weekly or monthly are also practices employed by States that remained Timely and States that improved to Timely. Local offices surveyed in selected States confirmed these findings in reporting recommendations that managers increase monitoring of tasks due; reward performance and hold staff with subpar timeliness accountable; provide training on process changes; and support performance with reports, alerts, and dashboards.

3.2 Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Study

Recognizing the importance of staffing levels appropriate to caseload volume is an important element to timely performance, the study team requested data from States on the number of new SNAP applications received and the number of staff processing these applications for each year between CY 2012 and CY 2015, with the intention of calculating caseload-to-staffing ratios as an indicator of effort and resources dedicated to each application. We found that most States were unable to provide these data uniformly or reliably. While administrative FNS data on number of applications submitted by States on Form 366B was available as an alternative to State self-report of number of applications, the number of staff in each State was not available from any other source. The primary difficulty in collecting these data was in defining the number of full-time equivalent staff who work on SNAP application processing. Because many SNAP agencies process applications for multiple social service programs, determining the proportion of time an eligibility worker spends only on SNAP applications proved too challenging to yield reliable estimates across States. Uniformly defining the differences between eligibility workers and various levels of supervisory staff across States presented further difficulties for this data collection effort. The study team decided that calculating this caseload-to-staffing ratio might be misleading rather than highlighting true trends, so we omitted this critical variable from this report. A future study, perhaps using workload study methods to identify a more reliable method for collecting data on SNAP application processing staff, could calculate caseload-to-staffing ratios accurately and contribute important insight into potential associations between caseload-to-staffing ratio and APT status.

In addition, other challenges encountered in conducting this study suggest possible future analyses. Aligning the timeframe of FFY APT rates with State activities necessitated collecting data from States based on calendar years. This, combined with many State SNAP management practices requiring a gradual rollout over several years to be fully implemented across a State, obscured the study's ability to clearly define timeframes for SNAP management practices and detect relationships between these practices and APT performance. To further explore these relationships, future analysis might compare APT performance of States that operated SNAP management practices consistently over the study timeframe with States that began operating these practices later within this timeframe and with States that did not operate these practices at all.

Furthermore, other variables beyond the scope of this study may be contributing to State APT performance. The study team noted that none of the 10 States with Timely APT status in FFY 2015 have large populations. In fact, nine of these 10 States are below the median population and six of these States are in the lower third of States ranked by population size. Even if administrative costs per case were similar across all States, sheer volume of applications may be a barrier to States' ability to achieve Timely APT performance. Some SNAP management practices may be qualitatively different in States of different sizes and may impact APT differently due to scale of operation. Additional economic factors such as poverty levels and unemployment may be examined for their association with APT. A future study could explore the interaction between these population and economic factors with State APT performance, along with the SNAP management practices identified in this survey.

3.3 Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to determine best practices for facilitating high APT rates, and to identify SNAP management practices associated with high APT performance. These findings are intended to help FNS better understand why States do not achieve timely APT. Study findings examined

a wide range of SNAP management practices and application processing procedures between CY 2012 and CY 2015, as reported by 51 States and local SNAP offices in five selected States.

States demonstrated considerable improvements in SNAP APT performance between FFY 2012 and FFY 2015. The number of States achieving Timely APT status doubled and the mean APT rate showed a 3.5 percentage point increase. Although only 10 States achieved Timely APT status by FFY 2015, more than half of States achieved some improvement in their APT rate, with 8 States demonstrating between 10 percent and 66 percent improvement despite remaining in Untimely APT status.

This study confirmed many of the findings reported in the study conducted by FNS in 2013, *Timeliness in the SNAP Application Process*. The 2013 study identified important factors for improving APT performance, such as making APT a priority, changing application processing procedures, implementing business process reengineering, allocating necessary resources, and using administrative waivers and policy options. The current study confirmed that these factors continued to demonstrate important contributions to improving APT performance.

Between CY 2012 and CY 2015, States reported increased efficiencies in SNAP management practices. Several specific features of State SNAP management practices showed associations with APT. The most important findings suggest that the following practices may contribute to improved APT performance:

- BPR initiatives, workflow analyses, or process management strategies that resulted in integrating workflow improvements into existing SNAP certification processing procedures and transitioning toward new task-based certification processing models;
- modernization features that increase efficiency in application processing, particularly operating electronic case files; document imaging; online account management systems that allows clients to check benefit information, report changes, and upload documents; electronic or telephonic signatures; call centers that processed changes, conducted interviews, and made eligibility determinations; and
- actions that prioritize APT such as establishing clear performance targets or goals for improving application timeliness, holding workers accountable for overdue cases in performance reviews or in determining employment status, and administrative monitoring of APT at least monthly or weekly.

Recognizing that staffing levels appropriate to the demands of SNAP application processing is an important element in APT, the study team recommends a future study to work with States in compiling these data. A future study—perhaps using workload study methods which could identify a more reliable method to collect data on SNAP application processing staff—could calculate caseload-to-staffing ratios accurately. These data could facilitate important insight into potential associations between caseload-to-staffing ratios and APT performance. The study team also recommends future analyses that more closely examine associations between APT performance and specific timeframes during which States operated various SNAP management practices, and additional population and economic factors that were beyond the scope of the current study.

