

PART II APPLICATION/PROCESSING

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A. APPLICATION PROCESSING

Application processing includes filing and completing an application, interviewing, and verifying certain information. The local department of social services must act promptly on all applications and provide SNAP benefits retroactive to the month of application to households that complete the application process and are eligible. An application may be an initial application, a reapplication, or a recertification.

This chapter contains the responsibilities of households and local departments in the application process. Expedited service is available to households in immediate need. See Part V for instructions regarding expedited service processing.

B. FILING AN APPLICATION (7 CFR 273.2(c)(1))

Households must file an application for SNAP benefits with the local department of social services in the locality where the household resides. Households may file applications in person, by mail, by fax, by telephone to the Enterprise Customer Service Center (initial application and reapplication only), or online. Households may also file the application through an authorized representative. The application and instructions are contained in Part XXIV.

Each household has the right to file an application for SNAP benefits on the same day it contacts the local department during normal business hours. The local department must document the application filing date by recording the date on which the local department received the application. The date of application will be the date the local department received the application during the normal business hours. The next business day will be the application date for any application received outside normal business hours.

Households must normally apply for SNAP benefits for all persons who reside together and who purchase and prepare food together. In some instances, households may choose to exclude certain persons from the application process to avoid providing identifying information about these individuals. Such an instance might include a household with certain immigrant members who want to avoid the receipt of benefits in connection with their immigration status. Another example would be sponsored immigrants who elect not to give information about their sponsors as required in Part XII.C. Households may classify certain members as "nonapplicants" and omit providing Social Security numbers, immigration status and immigration control numbers. If an applicant classifies a mandatory household member as a nonapplicant, as per Part VI.A.2 (spouse, parent, child), the worker must determine the eligibility of the remaining household members using the income and resources of the nonapplicant in the same manner as disqualified members (Part XII.E.2.b). If the nonapplicant is not a mandatory household member, the worker must not count any of the income or resources of the excluded person.

For a resident of a public institution who jointly applies for SSI and SNAP benefits before the release from the institution, the SNAP application filing date will be the date of the applicant's release from the institution.

1. Agency Action for the Initial Contact

When a household contacts the local department and expresses an interest in obtaining

SNAP benefits, at a minimum, the agency must:

- a. Provide an application upon request or, if contacted by telephone or through other means, advise the household that it may obtain the form in the office or that it is available by mail or online. The local department must mail the application the same day it receives a request.
- b. Encourage households to file applications on the same day they contact the agency or when households indicate food insecurity. Advise that completed applications should be submitted as soon as possible. Advise that applications may be submitted by mail, in person, by fax, online, or by telephone
- c. Explain that only SNAP rules are used to determine eligibility so that households should apply for SNAP benefits even if they may not be eligible for other programs.

The local department may get information from potential applicants that indicates probable ineligibility. The local department must not deny persons who contact the department before they file an application nor discourage households from filing applications for SNAP benefits. Persons who express an interest in SNAP benefits must have an opportunity to apply and, if determined ineligible, receive a written denial notice.

2. Agency Actions for the Application Filing Date

Applicants may file an application that contains minimal information to protect the application filing date. Minimal information needed for a valid application is the applicant's name, address, and signature of a responsible household member or authorized representative. (See Part II.D for a discussion of responsible household members.) Depending on the type of application, signature may be written or unwritten. Unwritten signatures may include electronic signature, recorded telephonic signature, or recorded gestured signatures.

Upon receipt of a valid application, the local department must:

- Determine the household's entitlement to expedited service processing.

Local department staff should screen for expedited entitlement while applicants are present in the office when possible. If the applicant is not present in the office, local department staff must review the application on the day of receipt to determine the entitlement to expedited service processing.

If the applicant did not sufficiently complete the application to allow the expedited screening, the local department must attempt to contact the household by telephone if the application contains a number. If contact with the household to obtain the necessary information is not possible within the seven days, the worker must process the application under normal processing policies until further contact with the household allows a delayed screening for expedited processing to take place.

- Complete the *SNAP - Hotline Information* form and provide it to any household that files a new application, a reapplication, or a late recertification application.

3. Subsequent Actions Required After An Application Is Filed

Once the local department receives an application that contains at least the applicant's name, address and signature, advise the applicant that an interview must be conducted before certification. Advise the household that the interview may be conducted in the office or by telephone. Provide the interview scheduling hours for the agency.

4. Withdrawing An Application

The household may voluntarily withdraw its application at any time before the certification interview. The local department must document the case file as to the reason for withdrawal, if the household provides a reason, and that the local department made contact with the household to confirm the withdrawal. If the household makes the withdrawal request in person or submits a written note from a responsible household member, no further confirmation is needed. The local department must advise the household of its right to reapply at any time after the withdrawal. The BPS must send the Notice of Action to deny the application.

5. Contacting The Wrong Locality

Note: The case transfer procedures of Part XIV.A.8 do not apply to this section.

If a household contacts the wrong locality, the local department must give the household the address and telephone number of the appropriate office. The local department must also offer to forward the household's application by mail or courier to the appropriate office that same day if the household completed enough information on the application to file. The local department must offer to forward the application, by fax or other means, the next day as long as the application gets to the receiving agency the same day. The local department must inform the household that the filing date and the processing standards will not begin until the appropriate office receives the application.

If the household mails its application to the wrong office, the local department must mail the application to the appropriate office on the same day. The local department may forward the application the next day by fax or any other means as long as the application gets to the receiving agency the same day. The normal processing time standards described in Part II.F do not begin until the correct office receives the application, except when the Social Security Administration forwards the application and the household meets the expedited processing entitlement, as noted in Part II.H.2.b.

C. HOUSEHOLD COOPERATION (7 CFR 273.2(d))

If the household refuses to cooperate with the local department in completing the application process, the BPS must deny the application at the time of refusal. For the BPS to determine that the household refused to cooperate, the household must be able to cooperate but clearly demonstrate that it will not take required actions that it can take to complete the application process.

Example

An applicant files an application. The BPS notifies the applicant of the interview requirement and schedules an interview. The applicant must refuse the interview, not merely fail to appear for the interview in order for the BPS to deny the application for refusal to cooperate.

If there is any question as to whether the household failed to cooperate or refused to cooperate, the BPS must not deny the household for refusal to cooperate and the BPS must assist the household, as appropriate.

The household will also be ineligible if it refuses to cooperate in any subsequent review of its eligibility, including reviews generated by reported changes and at recertification. Once denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate, the household may reapply but will not be eligible until its members cooperate with the local department. In addition, the household will be ineligible if the members refuse to cooperate for a subsequent review of its eligibility as part of a quality control review. If the BPS closes a household's case for refusal to cooperate with a quality control review, the household will not be eligible again until it cooperates with the quality control reviewer if the household reapplies before the end of the quality control reporting year (generally January 21), regardless of the original sample month.

The household will not be ineligible when a person outside the household fails to cooperate with a request for verification. The agency may not consider disqualified or ineligible people excluded from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as nonhousehold members. See Part VI.C.

D. INTERVIEWS (7 CFR 273.2(e)(1) and (3))

All applicant households, including those submitting applications by mail, fax, telephone, or electronically, must have an interview with a qualified BPS before initial certification, certification based on a reapplication, or for recertification. The individual interviewed may be the head of household, spouse, any responsible member of the household, or an authorized representative. For the purposes of this manual, when adults and children reside together, a responsible household member means a household member 18 years of age or older who has sufficient knowledge of the household's circumstances to provide any necessary information. The applicant may bring anyone to the interview as desired.

The certification interview may occur by telephone or may occur in the local department or other mutually acceptable site if the household requests a face-to-face interview or if the worker determines a face-to-face interview is warranted for the household. (The agency does not need to document the reason a telephone interview was conducted or why an in-office interview was held.) The interview may take place in the applicant's home provided the BPS arranges for the visit in advance as per Part III.A.3.

The interviewer must not simply review the information that appears on the application, but must explore and resolve with the household unclear and incomplete information. At the same time, the BPS must make the applicant feel at ease. The interview must include:

1. An explanation of basic program procedures, including the local agency's responsibilities and application processing time frames. Include an explanation of the issuance process and use of SNAP benefits, as outlined in Part I.C.
2. An explanation of the options available to the household and the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Include an explanation that the utility standard, homeless shelter standard and medical standard deductions will be used, if appropriate, unless the household opts to use actual amounts. If actual amounts are used, discuss the choice to have expenses averaged or counted only in the month billed.
3. A verbal and written explanation of the household's rights and responsibilities. Include an explanation of the consequences if these responsibilities are not met. Include an explanation of the consequences of voluntarily quitting employment.
4. An explanation that the agency may receive information through the Income and Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) or that the agency will access other computer systems. The agency will use and verify the information. Information that the agency receives may affect the household's eligibility and benefit level.
5. A discussion of appropriate collection actions for households that owe outstanding payments on claims.

In all instances, the agency must respect the household's right to privacy; the BPS must conduct the interview as a confidential discussion of household circumstances. The scope of the interview may not extend beyond the examination of household circumstances that directly relate to the determination of household eligibility.

If an BPS does not conduct the interview on the day the applicant files an application, the agency must schedule an interview. For applications and reapplications, the local agency must schedule interviews as promptly as possible to ensure eligible households receive an opportunity to participate within seven days, if expedited, or within 30 days after the household files an application. The agency should schedule the interview no later than 20 days after the application filing date for households that are not entitled to expedited processing. The BPS must allow households a minimum of 10 days to provide information after the interview is scheduled.

If the household does not respond to the scheduled telephone interview or fails to appear for the scheduled office interview, the local agency must send the household the *Missed Interview Notice*. The notice advises the household to reschedule the interview and that the agency will deny the application if the household does not reschedule the interview. The agency needs to send the notice after the first missed interview appointment only.

The agency must deny the application on the 30th day after the application filing date if the household does not request another interview. If the household requests a second interview during the initial 30-day period, the agency must not deny the application. If the household is eligible for benefits, the agency must issue prorated benefits from the application date.

The agency must not deny the application on the 30th day if the agency has not scheduled the interview before the 30th day. In addition, the agency must not deny the application on the 30th day

if the agency has not allowed the household a minimum of 10 days after the interview to supply verification or needed information to process the application.

For agencies with walk-in systems for interviewing, the agency must assign a specific period for the applicant to appear for the interview if the applicant elects not to complete the interview on the day of the contact. The agency must schedule an interview even if the agency otherwise advises of the full range of interview hours available. As indicated above, the BPS must send the *Missed Interview Notice* if the interview does not occur when scheduled. The agency must deny the application on the 30th day after the application filing date if the applicant misses the interview and does not reschedule the interview. See Part IV.C.3 for interview time frames for the recertification process.

The agency may request a certified household appear for an in-office interview during the certification period in order to clarify the household's circumstances. The agency may not require an interview however. See Part XIV.A.2 for a discussion of the agency's required actions on changes.

E. NORMAL PROCESSING STANDARD (7 CFR 273.2(g)(1); 274.1)

The filing date of an application is the day the appropriate SNAP office receives an application. The minimal information an application needs is the applicant's name, address, and a signature by either a responsible member of the household or the authorized representative of the household. The local agency must provide eligible households that complete the initial application process an opportunity to participate, as soon as possible, but not later than 30 calendar days following the application filing date.

The 30-day processing standard does not apply for residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and SNAP benefits before their release from the institution. For these applicants, the agency must provide an opportunity to participate as soon as possible, but not later than 30 calendar days from the applicant's release from the institution.

The processing standards for households entitled to expedited service are in Part V. The processing standards for the recertification process are in Part IV.C.

The agency may not impose application procedures or processing standards of other programs on SNAP applicants.

1. Opportunity to Participate (7 CFR 273.2(g))

A household must receive the EBT card, the agency must authorize benefits and the vendor must post authorized benefits to the account in order for the household to have an opportunity to participate timely.

Example

A household files an application on July 15. If the household is eligible, the agency must give the household an opportunity to participate by August 14. If August 14

falls on a Sunday, the EW must process the case by Friday, August 5 so that the household may receive the EBT card by mail by Saturday, August 13 or authorize the issuance of a vault card that the Primary Cardholder or authorized representative could pick up before August 14. Additionally, the SNAP benefits must be posted to the EBT account.

2. Denying the Application (7 CFR 273.2(g)(3))

The agency must send a *Notice of Action* to deny an application if households are ineligible for benefits. The agency must send the denial notice as soon as possible, but not later than 30 days following the application date. Part XXIV contains a copy of the *Notice of Action* and instructions.

3. Processing Cases with Prior Participation in another Locality

When a household indicates on the application or during the interview that it had been certified in another locality or State, for either the month of application or the prior month, the BPS must establish the household's current status with the prior agency. The BPS must establish and document the effective date of case closure with the prior agency.

The new locality may not issue duplicate benefits for any months covered by the application if the agency can establish that the household or any of its members are still active in the prior locality.

Note: Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) benefits received from Puerto Rico are not SNAP benefits. There is no duplicate benefit if a household applies for SNAP benefits in the same month. There is no need to determine if the NAP case is closed.

Contacts with Other States

For applications filed by persons who claim they have received SNAP benefits in another state, the agency must confirm that the individual is no longer receiving benefits in that state. If the agency is not able to verify this by the end of the processing period and all other eligibility factors have been met, the agency must approve the application. The agency must continue to seek verification from the other state to minimize the overpayment period in case the individual continued to receive benefits in that state however. If there is no response from the other state, the agency must contact the regional consultant who will ensure the information is forwarded to FNS to follow up with the other state.

If duplicate participation occurs, the Virginia agency must file a claim for any benefits the household received while it also received benefits from the other state. The claim will be household-caused if the household failed to report its connection to another state and the receipt of benefits from the other state. An agency-caused claim will exist if the agency failed to verify termination of benefits from another state.

For household members who are subject to the Work Requirement, the agency must also address participation in another state towards the number of countable months if there is

an indication from the application or interview that the member may have received SNAP benefits during the current 36-month period.

F. DELAYS IN PROCESSING

If the local agency does not determine a household's eligibility and provide an opportunity to participate within 30 days following the date the application was filed, the local agency must take the following action:

1. Determining Cause (7 CFR 273.2(h)(1))

The local agency must determine who caused the delay using the following criteria:

- a. A delay must be considered the fault of the household if the household failed to complete the application process even though the local agency took all required action to assist the household. The local agency is required to take the following actions before a delay can be considered the fault of the household:
 - 1) For households that failed to complete the application, the local agency must have offered, or attempted to offer, assistance in its completion.
 - 2) If one or more members of the household failed to register for work, as required in Part VIII.A, the local agency must have informed the household of the need to register and given the household at least 10 days from the date of notification to register these members.
 - 3) In cases where verification is incomplete, the local agency must have provided the household with a statement of required verification and offered to assist the household in obtaining required verification and allowed the household sufficient time to provide the missing verification. Sufficient time will be at least 10 days from the date of the local agency's initial request for the verification that was missing.
 - 4) For households that failed to appear for an interview, the local agency must have scheduled an interview within 30 days following the date the household filed the application. If the household failed to appear for the interview, and the household does not request that the agency reschedule another interview until after the 20th day but before the 30th day following the application filing date, the household must appear for the interview, bring verification and register members for work by the 30th day; otherwise, the delay will be the fault of the household. If the agency must allow the household additional time to provide information or verification, the delay will be the fault of the household. If the household failed to appear for the interview and requests another interview to occur after the 30th day following the date of application, the delay will be the fault of the household. If the household missed the scheduled interview and misses the one it requested, the household must request another interview and any delay will be the fault of the household.

- b. Delays that are the fault of the local agency include, but are not limited to, those cases where the local agency failed to take the actions described in items 1-4 above.
- c. In some situations, a case file is complete except for a household member's failure to comply with an eligibility requirement that results in disqualification for noncompliance (e.g. failure to register for work). In such situations the BPS must:
 - 1) Ensure that the household had at least 10 days to comply. If the household did not have that timeframe, consider the delay agency-caused and hold the application in pending status for an additional 30 days.
 - 2) If an individual must be disqualified, instead of the entire household, process the case for the remaining household members. Consider the disqualification imposed with the effective date of the initial allotment. If the entire household must be disqualified (e.g., the head of the household failed to register for work, or the household simply has one member), extend the pending status of the case an additional 30 days, as client delay.

2. Delays Caused By The Household (7 CFR 273.2(h)(2))

If by the 30th day the local agency cannot take any further action on the application because of the household's delay, the household will lose its entitlement to benefits for the month of application. In addition to the loss of benefits for the month of application, the agency must prorate benefits from the date the household completes its final task for processing the application. The local agency, however, must give the household an additional 30 days to take any required action.

The local agency must send the household the *Notice of Action* to extend the pending status of the application. The agency must send the pending notice on the 30th day following the application filing date, unless the 30th day is a weekend or holiday. The notice must advise the household of the outstanding actions the household must take to complete the processing of the application. The agency does not need to take any further action, including sending an additional notice, after the agency sends the notice if the household fails to take the required action within 60 days following the application filing date.

The local agency may include in the notice a request that the household must report all changes in circumstances since it filed its application.

If the household was at fault for the delay in the first 30-day period, but the agency finds the household eligible during the second 30-day period, the local agency must provide benefits from the day the household completes the final required action or provides the last verification. The household is not entitled to benefits for the month of application when the delay was the fault of the household. Once the household furnishes the information necessary to determine its eligibility, it is the agency's obligation to process the case during the second 30-day period.

3. Delays Caused by the Local Agency (7 CFR 273.2(h)(3))

Whenever a delay in the initial 30-day period is the fault of the local agency, the local agency must take immediate corrective action. The local agency may not deny the application if it caused the delay, but must notify the household that the agency is still holding the application. The BPS must send the *Notice of Action* to notify the household of the extended pending status of the application on the 30th day following the application filing date, unless the 30th day is a weekend or holiday. The *Notice of Action* must also notify the household of any action it must take to complete the application process.

If the agency finds the household eligible during the second 30-day period, the agency must provide the household benefits retroactive to the month of application. If, however, the household is ineligible, the local agency must deny the application. Once the household furnishes the information necessary to determine its eligibility, it is the agency's obligation to process the case during the second 30-day period.

4. Delays Beyond 60 Days (7 CFR 273.2(h)(4))

If the local agency is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, and the case file is otherwise complete, the local agency must continue to process the application. If the household is eligible and the local agency was at fault for the delay in the initial 30 days, the household must receive benefits retroactive to the month of application. If, however, the initial delay was the household's fault, the household will receive benefits retroactive only to the day the household completes the final action needed to process the application.

If the local agency was at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, but the case file is not complete enough for the BPS to determine eligibility the local agency must deny the case and notify the household to file a new application. The agency must also advise the household of its possible entitlement to benefits lost as a result of the agency-caused delays.

If the household provides the necessary information and the agency determines the household eligible for the previous 60-day period, the household must receive benefits retroactive to the month of application if the local agency was at fault for the delay in the initial 30 days. If, however, the initial delay was the household's fault, the household will receive benefits retroactive only to the day the household completes the final action needed to process the application.

If the household is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, the local agency must deny the application. The agency must advise the household to file a new application if it wishes to participate. If the household was at fault the first 30 days also, the household would have been sent the Notice of Action to extend the pending status of the application. The local agency does not need to take any further action at the end of the second 30 days if the initial delay is the fault of the household. If the local agency was at fault the first 30 days, the agency must send the Notice of Action to deny the application. The household is not entitled to any lost benefits, even if the delay in the initial 30 days was the fault of the local agency.

5. Reinstatements

The agency must return applications denied incorrectly because of agency error to pending status if the action date is within 60 days from the date of application. After the 60th day, the application must remain denied. The agency must encourage the household to file a new application and determine entitlement to lost benefits, if appropriate. In determining whether to reinstate the pending status within the first 60 days, the agency should consider the nature of the error and the amount of time that has passed which might affect the reliability of the information provided.

Ongoing cases incorrectly closed due to agency error may be reinstated to the certification period at the time of the closure only if the case was correct as of the effective date of the closure. The agency may reinstate the case either before the effective date of the closure or in the month following the closure.

Whenever the agency needs to reinstate an application or ongoing case, agency records must reflect this change. Reinstating cases, as described in this chapter, is only appropriate when an agency error caused the erroneous denial or termination.

G. JOINT PROCESSING AND CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY OF PA CASES

This chapter contains requirements for joint processing that apply to SNAP applicants who are also applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Relief – Unattached Child (GR), or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This chapter also contains procedures for categorical eligibility for SNAP benefits for these public assistance (PA) households. See the PA Case definition in Definitions for program descriptions needed to qualify as a public assistance program.

1. Applications for TANF or GR and SNAP Benefits (7 CFR 273.2(j))

The local agency should encourage households in which all members are applying for TANF or GR – Unattached Child to apply for SNAP benefits at the same time. The agency must regard all applications for TANF and GR – Unattached Child, except those on which the household indicates that it does not want SNAP benefits, as applications for SNAP benefits. If the household's intention to apply for SNAP benefits is unclear, the local agency must determine at the interview or through other contact with the household if the household wants the application processed for SNAP purposes. The BPS must base SNAP eligibility and benefit levels solely on SNAP eligibility criteria and certify the household according to the notice, procedural and timeliness requirements of this manual.

The local agency must not discourage households from applying for SNAP benefits even when there might be encouragement or inducements to avoid dependence on other public assistance programs or benefits.

The local agency must conduct a single interview at initial application for both the public assistance programs and SNAP purposes. The agency must not have different BPS

interview households entitled to joint processing or otherwise subject them to two interviews to obtain the benefits of both programs. Following the single interview, separate workers may process the applications for public assistance and SNAP benefits to determine eligibility and benefit levels. Note however, the SNAP out-of-office interview overrides the requirement for a single interview when a household wants to have a telephone interview for SNAP, in accordance with Part II.D, but a face-to-face interview is needed for the PA eligibility determination.

The BPS must follow the verification procedures described in Part III.A for eligibility factors that are needed to determine the household's SNAP eligibility. For eligibility factors needed to determine both PA and SNAP eligibility, the BPS must use the PA verification rules. The local agency may not delay processing the SNAP application if, at the end of seven days or 30 days following the application date, as appropriate, the agency has sufficient verification to meet SNAP requirements but does not have sufficient verification to meet the PA verification rules.

Because of differences between PA and SNAP application processing procedures and timeliness standards, the BPS may need to determine the SNAP eligibility before determining the household's eligibility for PA payments. The BPS may not delay acting on the SNAP application simply because the PA application is pending. The BPS may not deny the SNAP application because of the pending PA application if the household is otherwise eligible for SNAP benefits.

Inclusion of the initial PA payment in the SNAP benefit calculation depends on whether the BPS knows the date of receipt and amount of the PA payment when the SNAP application is approved. If the BPS can anticipate the amount and the date of receipt of the PA payment, the worker may include the income in computing the allotment for the month(s) the worker anticipates the payment.

The BPS must not count as income any portion of initial PA payments that cover previous months. While the retroactive payment does not count as income, the money must count as a resource.

If the BPS factors in the PA payment in the SNAP benefit calculation at the time of initial certification, the Notice of Action must reflect the varying allotments. When the EW cannot anticipate the PA payment at the time of initial certification, the BPS should note on the Notice of Action that the benefits may be reduced or terminated without another notice once the PA payment is included in the SNAP determination. If the notice did not inform the household of the potential impact, the agency must provide an advance notice if the SNAP benefit is reduced or terminated as a result of the counting the PA payment.

If the BPS denies the PA application, the household does not need to file a new SNAP application. The BPS must determine or continue the SNAP eligibility based on the original applications filed jointly for PA and SNAP purposes. The BPS must use any other documented information obtained after the application if it is relevant to SNAP eligibility or level of benefits.

If the BPS approves the TANF application after the SNAP certification period begins, the BPS may lengthen the SNAP certification period to coincide with the scheduled TANF case review. See Part IV.D.2. for a discussion about lengthening the certification period and the limitations on this process.

2. Application for SSI and SNAP benefits

Households that consist solely of SSI applicants or recipients may apply for SNAP benefits at the Social Security Administration (SSA) Office. SSA personnel will accept SNAP applications at each SSA office. Households must report that there is no SNAP application pending and that they are not current SNAP participants, unless the application is for recertification.

The SSA office and the local social services agency must take the following actions:

- a. Whenever a member of a household consisting only of SSI applicants or recipients transacts business at an SSA office, the SSA office must inform the household of its right to apply for SNAP benefits at the SSA office without going to the local social services office. SSI applicants and recipients may apply at the local social services office if they choose to do so.

SSA staff must complete joint SSI and SNAP applications for residents of public institutions applying for benefits before their release from the institution. In such cases, the date of the SNAP application will be the date of release from the institution. If SSA or the household does not notify the local agency of the applicant's release date, the agency must restore benefits to the applicant back to the date of release.

- b. Within one working day after receipt of a signed application, the SSA office must complete and forward the SNAP application to the local agency along with a transmittal form. The local agency must make an eligibility determination and provide an opportunity to participate within thirty days following the date the SSA office received the signed application. If the household is entitled to expedited service however, the processing time standards will begin on the date the correct local agency receives the application.

- c. The local agency may not subject the household to an additional interview. In addition, the local agency may not contact the household in order to obtain additional information unless:

- 1) the application is improperly completed;
- 2) mandatory verification is missing;
- 3) information received is questionable as determined by the local agency; or,

- 4) it is necessary to discuss options available to the household, e.g., the use of the utility standard or actual bills, the choice to have expenses averaged or counted only in the month billed.

Even when the agency needs additional information, the agency may not require the applicant to appear at the local agency to finalize the eligibility determination for the application taken at the SSA office.

- d. The SSA office must refer persons who are not entitled to joint processing to the local social services agency.
- e. The SSA office must prescreen all applications for entitlement to expedited services on the day the SSA office receives the application. SSA must mark "expedited processing" on the first page of all applications that appear to be entitled to such processing. The SSA office must inform households that appear to meet the expedited service criteria that the household may receive the benefits sooner if the household applies directly with the local social service agency. The household may take the application from SSA directly to the local social service agency.

The local agency must prescreen all applications received from the SSA office for entitlement to expedited service on the day the correct agency receives the application. The local agency must certify all SSI households entitled to expedited services in accordance with Part V except that the expedited service processing time standard will begin on the date the correct agency receives the application.

- f. The local agency must ensure that households whose SNAP applications are forwarded by the SSA office are not already participating in the program in any Virginia locality.
- g. If the SSA office takes the SSI application or re-determination by telephone from a member of a pure SSI household, SSA must also complete the SNAP application during the telephone interview. In these cases, the SNAP application must be mailed to the applicant for signature. The household may return the application to the SSA office or to the local agency. If the SSA office receives the application, SSA will forward the application to the social services agency. The local agency may not require the household be interviewed again and the agency may not contact the household in order to obtain additional information except for those reasons indicated in item c. above.
- h. SSA must send information to SSI recipients being re-determined for SSI by mail to inform them of the right to file a SNAP application at the SSA office (if they are members of a pure SSI household) or at their local social service agency. SSA must also notify SSI recipients of their right to an out-of-office SNAP interview performed by the local agency if the household is unable to appoint an authorized representative.

- i. If the SSA office sends the application to the wrong agency, the local agency must forward the application to the correct agency within one working day. The incorrect mailing will not affect processing time standards except as indicated in Item b above, when the household is entitled to expedited processing.
- j. Recertification - Any household that may apply at the SSA for initial certification has the right to recertify at the SSA office also, regardless of whether the application for initial certification was taken at the SSA office. SSA will interview the applicant, obtain any readily available verification, complete a transmittal form, and send this material to the local agency.

In order to be eligible for uninterrupted benefits, however, applicants must file the recertification application at the SSA office on or before the date on the *Notice of Expiration*.

The local agency may not re-verify information obtained and documented by SSA unless the information is questionable or insufficient.

3. Categorical Eligibility for PA Households (7 CFR 273.2 (j)(2))

- a. Any household in which all members receive or are authorized to receive a cash payment from the TANF, GR – Unattached Child, or SSI Program is eligible for SNAP benefits regarding income and resources. Any household in which at least one person receives or is authorized to receive services funded through the TANF block grant also will be categorically eligible regarding income and resources.

To confer with broad-based categorical eligibility, all households with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty limit and receive or is authorized to receive a non-cash or in-kind TANF funded service will be considered categorically eligible. See the “PA Case” in the Definitions section. Eligibility for SNAP benefits does not apply if the entire household:

- is residing in an institution;
- is disqualified for any reason from receiving SNAP benefits; or
- fails to meet nonfinancial criteria, as addressed in Part VII.

Residents of public institutions who jointly apply for SSI and SNAP benefits before release from the institution will not be categorically eligible when SSA determines potential SSI eligibility before the release. These individuals will be categorically eligible when SSA makes a final SSI determination and the individual leaves the institution.

Eligibility and SNAP benefits determinations will be based on information provided by households. Categorically eligible households are subject to the same verification requirements as other households. However, categorically eligible households meet the following eligibility factors without additional verification:

- Resource limits, except note that categorically eligible households that receive lottery or gambling winnings of **\$4,500** or more are ineligible for benefits as allowed in Part XII.E.3;
- Gross and net income limits (200 percent gross income limit is applicable for broad-based categorical eligible households);
- Social Security number information;
- Sponsored alien information, provided information exists in the PA case; or
- Residency.

Exception: Social Security number information, sponsored alien information, and residency verification is required for broad-based categorical eligible households.

If any of the following factors are questionable, the BPS must verify that the household that is categorically eligible:

- Contains only members that are TANF, GR – Unattached Child, or SSI recipients or that at least one member receives a TANF-funded service;
- Meets the household definition in Part VI.A;
- Includes all persons who purchase and prepare food together in one SNAP household, regardless of whether or not they are separate units for the public assistance program purposes; and,
- Includes no persons as provided in Part II.G.3.b below.

For purposes of determining categorical eligibility, any household in the TANF program that is suspended for TANF or that is entitled to zero benefits under the TANF program will be a TANF household.

Categorical eligibility will continue at recertification even if a TANF review is not completed.

- b. Households in which all members receive TANF, SSI, or GR – Unattached Child income or at least one member receives a TANF-funded service will not be categorically eligible if:
1. Any member who would normally participate with the household has been disqualified for an intentional program violation;
 2. The head of household failed to comply with work registration or employment and training requirements;
 3. The head of the household voluntarily quits or reduces work without good cause (Part VIII.B); or
 4. Any member of the household is ineligible if:
 - i. Any member is fleeing prosecution or imprisonment or is violating probation or parole terms (Part VI.C.2.e); or

- ii. There is a conviction for and sentencing noncompliance for murder or sexual assault crimes (Part VI.C.2.g).

The agency must handle these households using all normal SNAP rules and procedures.

- c. A disqualified or ineligible person who resides with the household and who would normally be included with the household for SNAP participation will not cause the remainder of the household to lose categorical eligibility, except as noted in subsection b above. The remainder of the household must meet the definition in Part II.G.3.a regarding the receipt of income or benefits. The remaining household is eligible if the disqualified or ineligible person is excluded because the person is:
 1. an ineligible alien (Part VII.F.);
 2. an ineligible student (Part VII.E.);
 3. a resident of a nonexempt institution (Part VII.C.);
 4. disqualified for failure to apply for a Social Security Number (Part VII.G);
 5. ineligible because of failure to comply with a work registration or employment and training requirement by a person other than the head (Part VIII); or
 6. ineligible because of the work requirement (Part XV).

For purposes of work registration, the agency must apply the exemptions in Part VIII.A.1 to individuals in categorically eligible households. Individuals who are not exempt from work registration are subject to requirements in Part VIII.A.

4. Application Processing for PA Cases

Once the TANF, GR – Unattached Child, or SSI application is approved, the household is categorically eligible, if conditions of Part II.G.3 are met. If the household's income is at or below the 200% allowable gross income limit, the household meets the income criteria for broad-based categorical eligibility and the application is processed.

In order to determine if a household will be eligible due to its status as a PA household, the local agency may delay the SNAP eligibility determination within the normal timeliness standards of Part II.E. The processing delay may occur as long as the household is not entitled to expedited service processing and it appears to be categorically eligible but it might otherwise be denied due to factors which will not be relevant once the PA application is approved.

The agency must ensure that the denied application of a potentially categorically eligible household is easily retrievable. The *Notice of Action* to deny the SNAP application must inform the household to notify the SNAP worker if its PA benefits are approved.

The local agency must reevaluate any denied application, filed jointly, or pending simultaneously for SNAP and PA benefits, whenever the household requests it or the agency becomes aware of the household's approval for PA benefits. The local agency may not require the client to come to the office for another interview but, must use any available information to update the application that was denied. The local agency may contact the household by mail or telephone to determine any changes in circumstances.

If the applicant amends the application, the household must initial and date any changes, and re-date and re-sign the application.

Except for residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and SNAP benefits before to their release from the institution, any categorically eligible household determined eligible for TANF, SSI or GR – Unattached Child benefits within the 30-day SNAP processing time must receive benefits back to the date of the SNAP application. The agency may not provide SNAP benefits for a month a household is ineligible for PA benefits unless the household is eligible for SNAP benefits as a NA case.

Households that become categorically eligible after the SNAP application is denied or during the extended pending period are eligible for SNAP benefits retroactive to the PA benefit effective date or the SNAP application date, whichever is later. Residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and SNAP benefits before their release from the institution are eligible for benefits from the date of their release from the institution.

Examples

- a. A household files a joint application for TANF and SNAP benefits on 11/15. The household has bank accounts with balances that total \$4200. Because of the difference between the TANF and SNAP Programs in the evaluation of resources, the household would be ineligible for SNAP benefits as a NA household but, categorically eligible if TANF was approved.
 - 1) Suppose TANF eligibility is determined on 12/4, with the first money payment issued for December.

Because the household was determined eligible for TANF within the 30-day SNAP application processing timeframe and was not determined ineligible for TANF for November, the household is considered categorically eligible back to 11/15, the date of the SNAP application.
 - 2) Suppose as of 12/15, a determination on the TANF application has not been made because of exceptions to the 30-day TANF processing period. The agency may deny the SNAP application on the 30th day, keeping it easily retrievable, or issue a *Notice of Action* to extend the pending for an additional 30 days while awaiting a decision on TANF eligibility.

b. A client applies for SSI on November 10. He does not want to apply for SNAP benefits at that time. On December 3 he changes his mind and files a SNAP application. He would be ineligible for SNAP benefits according to NA standards.

1) Suppose SSI determines the household eligible for a money payment on December 30.

Because the household was determined eligible for SSI within the 30-day SNAP application processing time frame, the household is categorically eligible back to December 3, the date of the SNAP application.

2) Suppose as of January 2, the SSI determination is pending. The agency chooses to deny the SNAP application on the 30th day.

On February 9, the household informs the agency that SSA approved SSI benefits retroactive to November. The agency reinstates the original SNAP application and provides SNAP benefits back to December 3. That date is the later of the SSI effective date or the SNAP application date.

5. Categorical Eligibility and Benefit Level

Once the worker determines a household's entitlement to SNAP benefits, the benefit level must be determined. Other eligibility factors described in this manual apply to categorically eligible households in determining the benefit amount. The agency must prorate benefits for the initial month based on the application date. The following additional criteria apply:

- a. One- and two-person categorically eligible households are entitled to at least \$23, regardless of net SNAP income, except when benefits for the initial month prorate to less than \$10. There will be no issuance in this instance.
- b. Categorically eligible households of four or more members will receive benefits if its net income entitles them to a benefit of \$1.00 or more on the appropriate allotment table, even if its net SNAP income is above the maximum for the household size.
- c. The agency must deny or terminate any categorically eligible household entitled to zero SNAP benefits. The notice must explain that the household will not receive benefits because the benefit amount is \$0 (zero).

H. AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES (7 CFR 273.2(n))

The head of the household, spouse or any other responsible member of the household may designate an authorized representative to act on behalf of the household in applying for SNAP benefits or in using SNAP benefits. In the event that the only adult living with a household is classified as a nonhousehold member (as defined in Part VI.C.), that individual may be the authorized representative for the minor household members. If households designate employers, growers, crew chiefs, etc. as authorized representatives for farm workers or when any single authorized representative has access to a large number of EBT cards, the worker should exercise caution to assure that the household freely requested the help of the authorized representative; the authorized representative is accurately stating the household's situation; and the authorized representative is properly using the SNAP benefits.

1. Making Application

When the head of the household or the spouse cannot file an application, another household member may apply or the household may designate an adult nonhousehold member as the authorized representative for that purpose. The head of the household or the spouse should prepare or review the application whenever possible, even though another household member or the authorized representative will actually be interviewed. Agency staff must inform the household that the household will be liable for any overissuance that results from erroneous information given by the authorized representative, except as specified in Part II.H.5 regarding participation by residents of drug addict/alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation centers.

Households may designate adults who are nonhousehold members as authorized representatives for certification purposes only under the following conditions:

- a. The head of the household, spouse, or another responsible member of the household may designate the authorized representative in writing; and,
- b. The authorized representative is an adult who is sufficiently aware of relevant household circumstances.

The worker may determine, on a case-by-case basis, the frequency with which the agency requests the written designation at a subsequent recertification. The worker may request the household's written designation at the recertification application as often as necessary.

Upon written authorization by the household, the representative must receive copies of all correspondence sent to the household itself. This will include all notices, e.g. *Notice of Action*, *Notice of Expiration*, etc. The agency must send the notices to the representative as long as the representative named on the authorization remains the household's authorized representative unless the written authorization specifies an ending date.

2. Using SNAP Benefits

The authorized representative may use SNAP benefits to purchase food for the household's consumption. The household will give its implied consent to the representative for access to the EBT account as long as the household does not withdraw access to the account by the representative, either by naming another representative or by canceling the representative's access.

3. Restrictions on Appointment

Certain individuals may not serve, as an authorized representative for a household unless the agency determines there is no one else to assist the household in this capacity. Restrictions apply to the designation of the following individuals as authorized representatives:

- a. Local agency employees;
- b. Retailers authorized to accept SNAP benefits;
- c. Individuals disqualified for an intentional program violation;
- d. Homeless meal providers, for homeless recipients.
- e. Previously named representatives who knowingly provided false information about a household's circumstances or improperly used the household's SNAP benefits.

Local agency employees who certify households or who update the EBT administrative terminal or retailers who accept SNAP benefits may not act in any capacity as an authorized representative without a determination by the local agency director that no one else is available to serve. The agency must file the specific written approval of the local agency director in the case file.

Individuals who are disqualified for an intentional program violation may not act as authorized representatives during the disqualification period unless the disqualified individual is the only adult member of a household able to act on its behalf. The local agency must determine that no one else is available to serve. The local agency must determine separately whether the household needs such an individual to apply on behalf of the household, to obtain benefits, and to use the benefits for food for the household.

Example

A household has found an authorized representative to obtain its benefits each month but it has not been able to find anyone to purchase food regularly with the benefits. If the local agency is also unable to find anyone to purchase the food, the disqualified member may do so.

Homeless meal providers may not act as authorized representatives for homeless SNAP households.

4. Documentation and Control

The local agency must ensure that the household properly designate authorized representatives. The household's case file must contain the name of the authorized representative. A household may have any number of authorized representatives to apply on its behalf but may have only one representative to receive its benefits through EBT.

If households designate employers, such as those that employ migrant or seasonal farm workers, as authorized representatives or that a single authorized representative has access to a large number of benefit access devices or coupons, the local agency must exercise caution to assure that:

- a. The household has freely requested the assistance of the authorized representative;
- b. The household's circumstances are correctly represented; and
- c. The authorized representative is properly using the household's benefits.

The local agency may disqualify an authorized representative from serving as a representative for SNAP purposes for up to one year. In order for the agency to disqualify a representative, the agency must have evidence that an authorized representative misrepresented a household's circumstances, knowingly provided false information pertaining to the household, or improperly used SNAP benefits. The local agency must send a letter to the affected household and the authorized representative thirty days before the disqualification date.

- This letter must include at a minimum:
 - The proposed action;
 - The reason for the proposed action;
 - The household's right to request a fair hearing (Note: The authorized representative being disqualified may not request a hearing. Only the household may do so.);
 - The telephone of the office; and,
 - If possible, the name of the person to contact for additional information.

The provision to disqualify an authorized representative is not applicable in the case of drug and alcoholic treatment centers and group homes that act as the authorized representative for their residents.

5. Drug Addict/Alcoholic Treatment Centers (7 CFR 273.2(n)); 7 CFR 273.11)(e))

Narcotic drug addicts or alcoholics who regularly participate in a drug or alcoholic treatment program on a resident basis may elect to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The treatment center must be a private, nonprofit organization or institution or a publicly operated community mental health center, under Section 300x-21 et. seq. of U.S. Code Title 42 (formerly Part B of Title XIX of the Public Health Service Act). See Part VII.C.2.

Residents must apply and be certified through the use of an authorized representative who must be an employee of and designated by the treatment center. The resident household, however, should assist in completing the application and should sign the application along with the authorized representative, prior to certification, if possible.

The treatment center representative will receive an EBT card on the household's behalf. The center must spend the SNAP benefits for food prepared by and/or served to the addict/alcoholic. The household may not directly access the SNAP benefits in the EBT account while residing in the treatment center. See Part VI.E for additional information about residential treatment centers.

6. Group Living Arrangements

Residents of public or private nonprofit settings for blind or disabled individuals may elect to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. An appropriate agency of the state or locality must certify group living arrangements using regulations based on under Section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act.

Residents of group living arrangements may apply and be certified three ways:

- a. through the use of an authorized representative employed and designated by the facility;
- b. through the use of an authorized representative selected by the resident; or
- c. on their own behalf.

If residents want to apply for themselves, the facility must determine if they are physically and mentally capable of managing their affairs.

In a single facility, there may be a combination of application methods used. For example, the facility may have some residents using authorized representatives and some applying on their own behalf.

The local agency must determine the eligibility of residents of group living arrangements who apply through the use of the facility's authorized representative as one-person households. Household composition provisions of Part VI.A will determine household size if residents apply on their own behalf. See Part VI.E for additional information about group living arrangements.

I. CERTIFICATION NOTICES (7 CFR 273.10(g))

1. Initial and Reapplication

The local agency must provide applicants with a *Notice of Action* after the BPS makes an eligibility determination on each application but, no later than 30 days after the date of the initial application or reapplication. The *Notice of Action* will inform an applicant household that its application has been approved, denied, or is to be held pending. The BPS may not dispose of applications for failure to complete the interview earlier than the 30th day following the filing date. If the 30th day falls on a weekend or holiday, the worker must send the denial notice no earlier than the first business day after the 30th day.

2. Recertification

The local agency must provide households that have filed an application by the 15th of the last month of their certification period with a *Notice of Action* by the end of the current certification period. The local agency must provide households with a *Notice of Expiration* to initiate the recertification process. The local agency must provide households that have received a *Notice of Expiration* at the time of certification and have applied within the prescribed time frames, with a *Notice of Action* not later than 30 days after the date of the household's initial opportunity to obtain its last allotment. Part IV.C describes the recertification procedures.

See Part XXIV for a sample of forms and instructions.

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) requires local social services agencies offer each applicant for TANF, SNAP benefits, and Medicaid an opportunity to apply to register to vote at initial application and at each review of eligibility. Voter registration application services must also be provided any time a change of address is reported to the local agency in person. Local agency staff must provide the same degree of assistance in completing voter registration applications as is done in completing applications for assistance.

A. Prohibitions

Local social services agencies and agency staff are prohibited from making any statements or taking any action that:

1. seeks to influence customers' political preferences;
2. displays any political preference or party affiliation;
3. discourages individuals from applying to register to vote; or
4. leads individuals to believe that a decision to register or not to register has any impact on their eligibility for assistance or the benefit level that they are entitled to receive.

B. Voter Registration Services

Each local social services agency, including satellite offices, must provide the following services:

1. distribute voter registration application forms for completion by customers at the agency or to be taken for registration by mail;
2. assist customers in completing the voter registration application form unless such assistance is refused;
3. ensure that spaces of the voter registration application are completed, including identifying the locality name on the reverse side of the form;
4. complete the agency certification form;
5. make brochures about amendments to the Virginia constitution available for distribution; and
6. accept voter registration application forms for transmittal to the local general registrar.
 - a. Each completed registration application must be submitted to the local registrar every Friday or on the last working day before Friday if Friday is a holiday. Envelopes with completed registration forms must be marked with an "A" in the upper left corner and the number of registration forms in the envelope.

- b. Registration applications that are mailed to customers or that were obtained from the local agency must be forwarded to the registrar if the completed forms are returned to the agency.
- c. The voter registration application may be mailed to the State Board of Elections by customers at the expense of the customer.

Voter registration application services are not required to be offered when an individual indicates that he/she is currently registered to vote in the locality and there is a completed agency certification form in the customer's case record indicating the same, and the customer has not moved from the address maintained when the registration occurred.

C. Certification

Each customer must be provided the "Certification of Virginia Voter Registration Agency Certification" form at each application or review.

1. Customers who refuse to check the appropriate box on the certification form or refuse to sign the form will be considered to have declined the opportunity to register to vote.
2. The BPS must sign and date each certification form and complete the appropriate box.
3. Certification forms must be retained in the agency case record in accordance with records retention guidelines.
4. The bottom of the certification form must be completed when registration applications are mailed with applications for assistance and when an authorized representative files the application on behalf of the household.

D. Individuals Required to be Offered Registration Services

Voter registration services must be offered to an individual who is:

1. A member of the TANF or medical assistance unit or SNAP household;
2. 18 years of age or who will be 18 by the time of the next general election; and
3. Present in the office at the time of the interview or when a change of address is reported. (Note that a registration application must be sent upon request for mail-in purposes for address changes that are not reported in person.)

Individuals accompanying the customer to the local agency who is not a member of the assistance unit or household, including payees and authorized representatives, will not be offered voter registration services by the local agency. A registration application must be provided to the person upon request for mail-in purposes. When an authorized representative is applying on behalf of another, the local agency must offer a mail-in application and the bottom

of the certification form is to be completed accordingly.

The voter registration application must be mailed to an applicant with the application for assistance if a subsequent face-to-face interview will not be required. When an in-office interview is held, voter registration services must be provided at the time of the interview.

VIRGINIA COMBINED APPLICATION PROJECT

The Virginia Combined Application Project (VaCAP) is a partnership between the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This demonstration project streamlines the application process for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for elderly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients and increases their SNAP participation. It does not replace all SNAP eligibility criteria but streamlines certain criteria as defined in this appendix.

Eligible VaCAP participants are identified through a cross match of the State Data Exchange (SDX) and the current SNAP caseload. SDX information is also used by VDSS to update eligibility for SSI recipients monthly after approval for VaCAP. Applications and recertification applications are mailed monthly.

VDSS notifies applicants that they have the option to apply for and participate in the regular, ongoing SNAP, and have the case managed through the local department of social services (LDSS) according to standard policies and procedures.

VaCAP Eligible Household:

To be eligible for VaCAP, an individual must be identified through the SDX as one who:

- Receives SSI;
- Lives in Virginia;
- Is 65 years of age or older;
- Has any Marital Status other than "Married";
- Is not institutionalized;
- Meets Federal Living Arrangement A (FLA="A"); and
- Has no earned income.

In addition, the individual:

- Is not currently receiving SNAP; and
- Purchases and prepares food separately.

VaCAP Application Procedures:

VDSS will mail a simplified application to SSI recipients who meet the eligibility criteria and who are not currently participating in SNAP. Applicants must sign and return the application to the LDSS in the city or county of residence. If the applicant does not return the application within 30 days, a second application is mailed. If the second application is not returned, an application will be mailed at 12-month intervals until a total of five applications are mailed. Individuals may apply for VaCAP if it is determined they meet the VaCAP criteria but, did not receive a computer generated application because they had already received five applications, or an application had been mailed less than 12 months ago, or because they were participating in regular SNAP.

Upon receipt of the VaCAP application, the LDSS must screen the application to ensure:

- application is signed;
- the applicant is not already participating in SNAP (eligibility system inquiry); and
- the applicant is not disqualified from participating in SNAP (eDRS inquiry).

VaCAP applications are not screened for expedited processing nor screened for death and incarceration. Death and incarceration are routinely reported in the SDX data.

If shelter expenses are not marked on the application, the LDSS must process the application using the lower shelter expense.

VaCAP participants may request that their VaCAP case be closed in order to apply for regular SNAP benefits. Participants receiving regular SNAP benefits may request that their case be changed to VaCAP if it is determined they meet all of the VaCAP criteria except for not currently receiving SNAP.

VaCAP Interview Procedures:

Unless the applicant requests help with the application, there is no certification interview.

VaCAP Verification:

The SDX provides verification of eligibility factors so no further verification is needed. The applicant's declaration of shelter costs is used.

VaCAP Allotment:

The applicant's declaration of monthly shelter expenses will be used to determine the SNAP benefit amount.

- High benefit - \$157 - shelter expenses total \$500 or more
- Low benefit - \$87 - shelter expenses total \$499 or less

Eligibility begins the first day of the month an application is received. There is no proration of benefits based on the application date.

VaCAP Certification:

The certification period for cases will be 36 months.

VaCAP Change Reporting:

Households are not required to report changes. Updates through the SDX satisfy SNAP reporting requirements. If a VaCAP participant reports a change that impacts the household's eligibility for VaCAP or benefit amount, the LDSS must act on the change.

The LDSS worker must also evaluate continued VaCAP eligibility when an alert is received for the following changes reported by the SDX monthly updates:

- the participant moves to another Virginia address;
- a change in the mailing address of an Authorized Representative; and
- a change in the name of an Authorized Representative/payee.

Certain SDX monthly case updates will result in the automatic closure of the VaCAP case. Cases are closed if the SDX reports:

- the participant no longer receives SSI;
- the death of the participant;
- the participant is living in an institution;
- the participant is married;
- a change in the Federal Living Arrangement ;
- the participant has earned income; or
- the participant moved out of state

VaCAP Recertification:

VDSS will generate and mail a combined expiration notice and an application to recertify for VaCAP. VDSS will mail the recertification application to participants in the month before the certification period expires. Participants must complete the application and return it to the local department of social services for processing. Continued eligibility for VaCAP is determined using the same criteria established for the initial application for VaCAP.

There is no interview or additional verifications required.

Eligibility to Opt-Out of VaCAP

A VaCAP participant who wants to opt out of the project must request the case be closed. If the participant subsequently applies for regular SNAP and is found eligible, the participant will not receive a supplement for any month for which VaCAP benefits were received.

FAIR HEARINGS

Fair hearing requests for VaCAP cases are treated the same as all other requests.

QUALITY CONTROL (QC) REVIEWS

VaCAP cases are part of the QC sample for review and are considered in the completion rate. These cases are included in the State's payment error rate calculation. Quality Control identifies VaCAP cases in a state option field for evaluation purposes.

Elderly Simplified Application Project

This appendix describes the provisions of the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP). ESAP seeks to increase SNAP participation among elderly households by streamlining some of the processes.

ESAP is a demonstration project with the Food and Nutrition Service that permits ESAP to operate by waiving some federal regulations. While similar to the Virginia Combined Application Project (VaCAP) by avoiding some elements, ESAP does not provide set benefits amounts or require an interface with data matches to generate applications.

Unless specifically addressed in this appendix, all other SNAP provisions addressed in this manual will apply to ESAP households.

Eligible Households

ESAP applies to any household in which:

- All eligible household members are 60 years of age or older; and
- There is no earned income.

Application Procedures

Households may apply for ESAP using a simplified Virginia ESAP application or any Virginia SNAP application, including online.

Upon receipt of SNAP or ESAP applications, local departments must evaluate applications for ESAP eligibility. Households may opt out of having their cases converted to ESAP.

Local departments must screen ESAP applications for expedited processing.

Verification Requirements

To the extent possible, local departments must use available computer-matching systems to verify information to determine eligibility and benefit amounts for ESAP households. When possible, local departments must use computer-matching systems to verify:

- Gross nonexempt income
- Identity
- Social Security numbers
- Prisoner match
- Residency
- Immigration status
- Death match
- Legally obligated child support payments

Households must verify the elements above if the information is unclear or questionable. While Part III.F routinely requires secondary verification for some computer-matching systems, secondary verification will not routinely be required for ESAP households unless the information is questionable. Follow up with the household is required however.

Households must claim medical expenses that total a minimum of \$35 per month to qualify for the medical standard deduction. Households will need to verify the \$35 threshold only if the

information is questionable. Local departments must use the medical standard deduction for all ESAP households unless a household verifies medical expenses that exceed the medical standard.

Households must claim shelter expenses. Households will need to verify information only if the information is questionable. If households claim heating or cooling expenses, local departments may apply the utility standard.

Local departments must use the following systems to verify information:

- State Verification & Exchange System (SVES) – to verify income issued through the Social Security Administration (SSA), verify work quarters for immigration, establish prisoner status, confirm Social Security Number (SSN), and verify Medicare premiums.
- Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements Program (SAVE) – to confirm the immigration status. Households must claim to have an eligible immigration status on the application.
- Automated Program to Enforce Child Support (APECS) – to verify legally obligated child support payments made to establish an income exclusion.
- Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) – to access driver’s license information to establish identity or residency.
- State Online Query – Internet (SOLQ-I) – to verify income issued through the SSA and confirm the SSN.
- Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) – to check persons held in custody of DOC the previous month.
- Systems Partnering in a Demographic Repository (SPIDeR) – SPIDeR allows workers to collapse system requests for an individual or all household members into a single action.

Local departments must inquire the following systems at application and recertification:

- Virginia Lottery – (<https://www.valottery.com/winnersnews/latestwinners>) - an inquiry of winnings of \$5,000 or more.
- Electronic Disqualification Recipient System (eDRS) – an inquiry of disqualified recipients for an intentional program violation

Interview Requirements

Local departments must conduct an interview for an initial ESAP application or a reapplication.

Certification Period

The certification period for ESAP cases will be 36 months.

Reporting Requirements

ESAP households must report the following changes during the certification period:

- Changes to household composition;
- If a household member receives earned income during the certification period; and
- Lottery and gambling winnings of **\$4,500** or more.

During the initial certification interview, local departments must inform participants of the reporting requirements. Local departments must provide a Change Report to ESAP households when applications are approved and when households report changes.

Local departments must act on changes reported by ESAP households during the certification period, regardless of whether households are required to report the changes. Each household must receive a Notice of Action to reflect the impact of changes reported.

ESAP households are exempt from the interim report process.

Recertification/Renewal

The Virginia Case Management System (VaCMS) will generate and mail a combined expiration notice and recertification application to ESAP households in the month before the certification period expires. Participants must complete the application and return it to the local department for processing. Except as noted below, continued ESAP eligibility will be determined using criteria outlined for the initial application for ESAP.

At recertification, the certification interview will not routinely be required. Local departments must conduct an interview at recertification in the following instances:

- If the ESAP household requests an interview;
- Prior to closing or denying an ESAP recertification; or
- If household circumstances have changed or are questionable.

At recertification, local departments must inquire the data matches, noted in the verification section above, to re-verify income and changes in residency. Households must re-verify medical expenses if they exceed the medical standard deduction. Households that have the medical standard deduction applied will not need to re-verify medical expenses over the \$35 threshold unless the expenses are questionable.

Local departments must not deny an ESAP recertification application without first attempting to schedule a recertification interview.

Conversion from/to ESAP

When changes occur during the certification period that cause households to become ineligible for ESAP, local departments must not simply close the case. Workers must determine if households remain eligible for regular SNAP benefits. If cases remain eligible for SNAP benefits, workers must:

- Remove the ESAP Indicator in VaCMS.
- Notify the household of the change and the revised Change Reporting requirements.

The certification period will remain as previously established for ESAP eligibility. Households will be subject to the interim report process at the 12th- or 24th- month interval, as appropriate.

The processes noted here are appropriate if there is sufficient information known about the reported changes. If information is incomplete or unclear, procedures outlined in Part XIV.A.3.d. will apply.

During a SNAP recertification of a SNAP household that is eligible for ESAP or former ESAP households that became ineligible for ESAP, local departments must add these households to ESAP and inform the households of their new status, reporting requirements, and responsibilities. Conversion of these SNAP households must occur unless households opt to remain in SNAP or if there are immediate changes expected that would cause ESAP ineligibility.

Quality Control (QC) Reviews

ESAP cases are subject to QC review to determine if the eligibility determination and benefit level are correct. Active and negative samples must include ESAP cases and include the cases in the state's error rate calculations.

- The reviewer must first determine that the household meets the criteria to participate in ESAP as outlined in this appendix.
- If a household is incorrectly participating as ESAP, the reviewer must:
 - Review the case against SNAP standards as established in the Food and Nutrition Act and regulations, FNS-approved non-ESAP waivers, or State options.
 - If a household is correctly participating as ESAP, the reviewer must:
 - Review the case against the provisions this appendix III.
- To determine if a household is or is not correctly participating as ESAP under the rules of the project, the reviewer must:
 - Apply standard verification standards and procedures of all relevant circumstances for the period of time under review as specified in the federal QC Review Handbook