Food and Nutrition Services Processing Timeliness Best Practices and Processes Survey Report

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Executive Summary

North Carolina is one of three states selected to participate in a national SNAP Process Improvement Collaborative. In North Carolina, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) is referred as Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).

The SNAP Process Improvement Collaborative is a dynamic and interactive engagement among leaders in process improvement methods, subject matter experts in SNAP policy and operations, and a group of state and county teams that share the common goals of rapidly improving SNAP customer service and program access. This Collaborative is led by Insight Policy Research, Inc, and supported by USDA.

North Carolina's Collaborative focus is on improving FNS recertification timeliness through a series of rapid improvement Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles. The first cycle of this PDSA included compiling and reviewing four baseline months of timeliness for all 100 counties in both application and recertification processing. The second cycle identified 52 counties that met or exceeded 95% FNS application and recertification processing timeliness at least three of the four months. The third cycle was to issue a survey to the 52 counties to identify their best practices and processes in achieving at least 95% recertification timeliness. And the fourth cycle is to create a best practices summary report to be shared with all 100 county agencies. The survey, produced a response from 26 counties. The best practices summary report contains trends and stand-alone practices that may be helpful to all counties in identifying processes for increasing FNS recertification processing timeliness.

Items on the survey were worded as open-ended questions, and included the following topics:

- Assessment of if an interview is needed
- Mail-in recertifications
- Same-day processing of drop-off, mail-in, and faxed recertifications
- Customer education at intake/application
- Application and recertification processing timeliness

Note: The complete survey questionnaire is included later in this document for reference.

Methodology

The survey topics and questions were developed with input from the State SNAP Collaborative Team. The State Team also completed the survey in Survey Monkey to ensure the link and submission process worked accurately.

The final survey form asked specific as well as open-ended questions about processes and practices relating to FNS Recertification processing. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the survey administrator via Survey Monkey.

The survey administrator reviewed returned surveys and imported responses into Microsoft® Excel. Data analysis was completed using Excel and Word.

Note: The results reported can only be considered the processes of the responding agency. They cannot be generalized to represent the entire state.

Demographics

FNS Recertification Best Practices and Processes Survey
Responding Counties

Responding County Caseload/Impact:
Green: Most Impacted/Large County – 1
Blue: Medium Counties – 3
Yellow: Small Counties - 22

The Survey

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Best Practices and Processes Survey

The purpose of the survey was to learn what processes and best practices were implemented by agencies that have had consistent success in achieving 95% accuracy in FNS application and recertification timeliness. The information is being shared throughout the State to encourage and assist all counties to achieve and maintain this same FNS processing timeliness rate. Below are the questions that were included in the survey.

1. **Assessment of Whether Interview is Needed**

Please provide the following information regarding how your agency assesses if an interview is needed for FNS Recertifications.

- ❖ What steps are taken by your agency to evaluate if a customer is required to complete an interview at recertification?
- ❖ How does your agency monitor that accurate evidence is entered into NC FAST to ensure the correct notice is sent to customer for next review? For example, the DSS-2435R is sent if an interview is not needed, or the DSS-2435I is sent when an interview is needed.
- ❖ Regardless of whether an interview is required, does your agency conduct one at every review?

2. **Mail-In Recertifications**

Please provide the following information regarding your agency's mail-in FNS Recertification processes.

- ❖ Does your agency have a separate mail room?
- ❖ Who is responsible for sorting and scanning mail? For example, is this the responsibility of mail room staff, administrative staff, or caseworkers?
- ❖ How frequently is mail sorted and distributed within the agency?
- ❖ What is the priority of distributing mail daily? For example, are FNS recertifications distributed before returned mail to assist with timely processing?
- ❖ What is the current process for distributing mail to staff? For example, is mail scanned upon receipt and electronically sent to the worker, is it placed in a worker's mailbox, or is it hand delivered?
- ❖ What is the average time it takes for the customer to receive the review packet once it is mailed?

3. Same Day Processing of Drop Off, Mail-in, and Faxed Recertifications

Please provide the following information regarding your agency's commitment to processing FNS Recertifications the same day they are received.

- ❖ When an interview is required, does your agency make an effort to interview the customer at the time they drop off their recertification?
- ❖ When an interview is required, does your agency make an effort to interview the customer the same day a mail-in recertification is received?
- ❖ What methods are used to conduct interviews?
- ❖ If an interview is not required, is the recertification processed the same day all information is received?
- ❖ What percentage of recertifications are processed the same day?
- ❖ What tools/resources are used to locate verifications within your agency? If the verification is already known to the agency does the worker use that verification or is the customer required to provide all verification?

4. Customer Education at Intake/Application

Please provide the following information regarding methods your agency uses to educate customers at FNS Intake about requirements for FNS Recertifications.

- ❖ What processes has your agency implemented at intake to ensure the customer is knowledgeable about the recertification requirements? This may include explaining necessary paperwork, providing contact information for questions and informing whether or not an interview is required.
- ❖ Please describe the steps your agency takes to prevent churn. (Churn refers to situations such as when the customer fails to complete their recertification but then returns to apply again and they would have still been eligible had they returned their recertification timely.)

5. Application and Recertification Processing Timeliness

Please provide the following information regarding your agency's processes for ensuring FNS processing timeliness for both applications and recertifications.

- ❖ What best practices does your agency have in place to meet both application and recertification timeliness?

Assessment of if an Interview is Needed

Evaluating if an interview is required

- Review case notes and documentation - 16 counties/62%
- Refer to DSS-2435 - 11 counties/42%

Monitoring accurate evidence in NC FAST

- Events tab on PDC - 5 counties/19%
- Recertifications tab on PDC - 3 counties/12%
- Second party or QC reviews - 5 counties/19%

Mail-In Recertifications

14 counties have mail sorted, scanned and delivered by front desk, administrative, and mail room staff.

Who sorts, scans and delivers Mail in your Agency?

All mail is immediately scanned into our paperless system which is then tasked to the appropriate worker as soon as it is scanned. This enables the workers to receive mail within seconds of being scanned into the paperless system.
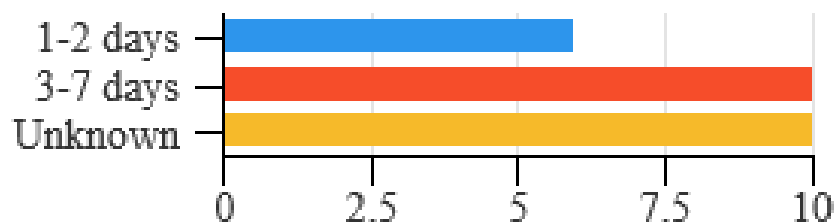
Beaufort County

14 Counties have a separate Mail Room.

Does your agency have a separate mail room?

How long does it take for agency mail to be received by customers?

1-2 days	(bar to ~6)
3-7 days	(bar to ~10)
Unknown	(bar to ~10)

0   2.5   5   7.5   10

Same Day Processing

Caldwell County

95% average same day processing

Warren County

Goal for same-day processing – 18 counties

Try to see (customers) same day because saves time – saves mail time, saves days required by 8650, saves time that might have to be spent on telephone attempts.

Jackson County

Assist customer in obtaining verification

Insurance companies   Tax Department
Work Number   landlord   laser fiche
Communication with Colleagues
Northwoods   NC FAST   Employers
Compass   front desk logs

How are interviews conducted?

Face-to-face

Phone

Home Visit

Does your agency conduct home visits with applicants?

Customer Education at Intake/Application

> *Awareness is Key*
>
> Cleveland County

20 counties explain the recertification process and the certification period in detail at intake/application.

Several Counties provide pamphlets, brochures and other informational documents, including fraud, FNS overview, Change form and Rights and Responsibilities.
Explain how EBT cards work.

> *Part of it is educating the client that you may still be eligible just because you have and a change.*
>
> Currituck County

Reducing Churn

11 Counties provide contact information for the on-going case manager and the agency.

2 Counties review all returned mail and update addresses in NC FAST

4 Counties remind the customer of their certification period at every contact

2 utilize an automated phone tree.

Jackson County: Created by IT on 16th of month, "if you are receiving this call, you have a review due this month for Food and Nutrition Services and it has not been received by the agency."

Macon County: Calls last number on file for each FNS case due for recertification to remind that recertification is due this month.

Overall Survey Results

What steps are taken by your agency to evaluate if a customer is required to complete an interview at recertification?

Response	Number of Agencies
Review case notes, documentation	16
Use DSS-2435	11
Keep list of recertifications due	1

How does your agency monitor that accurate evidence is entered into NC FAST to ensure the correct notice is sent to customer for next review?

Response	Number of Agencies
PDC Events tab in NC FAST	7
Second Party or QC Reviews	5
Recertifications tab on PDC in NC FAST	3
Reviews Case in NC FAST	2
Clerical staff enter opposite of prior review	1

Regardless of whether an interview is required, does your agency conduct one at every review?

Response	Number of Agencies
Yes	24
No	0

Does your agency have a separate mail room?

Response	Number of Agenies
Yes	14
No	8

Who is responsible for sorting and scanning mail?

Response	Number of Agenices
Administrative/Reception/Clerical Staff	19
Mail Room staff/clerk	10
Case Workers	2

How frequently is mail sorted and distributed within the agency?

Response	Number of Agenices
Once per day	10
Twice per day	6
More than twice per day	6

What is the priority of distributing mail daily? For example, are FNS recertifications distributed before returned mail to assist with timely processing?

Response	Number of Agenices
No priority	5
FNS recertifications	3
All FNS Mail	2
Late FNS recertifications	1

What is the current process for distributing mail to staff?

Response	Number of Agenices
Place in caseworker mailbox	15
Scan upon receipt	11
Send to caseworker electronically	7
Hand-deliver to caseworker	4
Sent electronically and hard copy to caseworker	3

What is the average time it takes for the customer to receive the review packet once it is mailed?

Response	Number of Agenices
1-3 days	11
4-7 days	5
Unknown	2

When an interview is required, does your agency make an effort to interview the customer at the time they drop off their recertification?

Response	Number of Agenices
Yes	18
No	7

When an interview is required, does your agency make an effort to interview the customer the same day a mail-in recertification is received?

Response	Number of Agenices
Yes	18
No	7

What methods are used to conduct interviews?

Response	Number of Agenices
Phone	25
Face-to-Face	21
Home Visit	1

If an interview is not required, is the recertification processed the same day all information is received?

Response	Number of Agenices
Yes	16
No	10

What percentage of recertifications are processed the same day?

Response	Number of Agenices
95%	2
70%	1
50%	2
15-25%	3
Unknown	18

What tools/resources are used to locate verifications within your agency?

Response	Number of Agenices
Other program caseworkers or case files	15
Document Management System (Northwoods/Compass, Laser Fische, Other)	11
NC FAST	6
OVS	5
Work Number	5
Front Desk Log	2
Contact employer, insurance companies, Tax department	1

If the verification is already known to the agency does the worker use that verification?

Response	Number of Agenices
Yes	26
No	0

What processes has your agency implemented at intake to ensure the customer is knowledgeable about the recertification requirements?

Response	Number of Agenices
Explain certification period	14
Explain process in-depth at intake	6
Provide and explain informational documents (fraud, FNS pamphlet, Rights and Responsibilities)	6
Explain that if recertify do NOT have to reapply	5
Inform will receive recertification in mail	5
Review Change Report Form/remind to report changes	4
Emphasize to complete, sign and return DSS-2435 before 15th of month	4
Explain EBT cards and how they work/EBT brochure provided	3

Please describe the steps your agency takes to prevent churn.

Response	Number of Agenices
Give customer contact information for case worker/agency	11
Client education	6
Remind of certification period at every contact	4
Call customer	4
Call/Phone Tree or Call Center	3
Assist customer in obtaining verifications	3
Review all returned mail to assure have current information	2
Update all phone number and address changes in NC FAST	2
Text customer	1
Re-mail returned mail following day	1
Random Customer Service Survey	1

What best practices does your agency have in place to meet both application and recertification timeliness?

Response
Same Day Practices   • Interview customers dropping off application   • Interview customers who drop off late recertification   • Goal for expedited cases   • Goal for all cases
Team Work Practices   • Redistribute work to ensure timely processing of applications an recertifications   • Teams cover for each other   • All staff assist with process changes   • Post monthly report of processed applications and recertifications to motivate workers
Supervisor Practices   • E-mail worker when case is due   • Spot check 4th and 25th day cases to determine if good cause exists   • E-mail worker when information is in agency and not reacted to within a business day   • Monitor worker tasks and e-mail worker if they get behind   • Works pending applications daily   • Allow case workers administrative/protected time   • Check report daily to ensure all cases due were completed   • Distribute ePASS applications daily and change case owner
NC FAST Practices   • Maintain case notes   • Ensure expedited cases are "flipped" appropriately   • Enter all applications and late recertifications same or following day, with no exceptions   • Ensure applications and recertifications are registered timely
Case Management Practices   • Review daily report of recertifications due   • Review daily report of applications due   • Call customers to remind that recertification is due or has not been received   • Case worker completes worksheet attesting they have exhausted all efforts in getting requested information from applicant   • Check cases day following completion   • Conduct home visits for applications   • Weekly status updates to supervisor for applications and recertifications due in the next 1 ½ weeks   • Case worker dedicated to processing late recertifications   • Review cases to ensure pending for mandatory information on 4th and 25th days