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Family Nutrition Programs

*Enhancing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
Program (SNAP) Certification:
SNAP Modernization Efforts*

Interim Report

Volume 1



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Department of
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Food and
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Service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Under funding from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), The Urban Institute is conducting a comprehensive study of state efforts to modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The goals of the study are to describe modernization efforts, large and small, undertaken in all the states; to identify successful modernization efforts across the country that may potentially be replicated; and to help avoid implementation pitfalls among states currently planning similar kinds of modernization initiatives. The study examines the relationship between these modernization efforts and program access, administrative cost, program integrity, and customer service. Although states and policymakers may define modernization in many ways, the study uses a broad definition of modernization with a focus on four types of efforts: (1) policy changes to modernize SNAP application, case management, and recertification procedures; (2) reengineering of administrative functions; (3) increased or enhanced use of technology; and (4) partnering arrangements with businesses and nonprofit organizations.

In order to document key features and outcomes associated with SNAP modernization, the study includes a three-phase data collection process: (1) initial site visits to four states; (2) a national survey of all states,¹ including a sample of local offices as well as partner organizations; and (3) in-depth case studies in 14 states. This interim report presents the findings from phase two of the project, the national survey, which focused on modernization efforts implemented *after January 1, 2000*. The survey, conducted from May 2008 to December 2008, included three separate web-based surveys instruments: the State Food Stamp Agency Survey, the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey, and the Partner Organization Survey.²

The interim report presents an inventory of state SNAP modernization efforts within the four broad categories of modernization, based on the survey responses. The report details states' modernization activities, including their timing, the motivations and operational aspects of implementation, the perceived outcomes, and overall experiences.

OVERVIEW

SNAP provides, through state-operated programs, targeted assistance for low-income individuals and families to purchase eligible food items for home consumption. Over the past decade, increased awareness of the importance of SNAP as a basic nutritional safety net, as well as a critical support for households transitioning to self-sufficiency, has led to a variety of federal and state efforts to increase program access and participation. At the same time, states have been focusing on ways to increase operational and administrative efficiency and program integrity. To

¹ The use of the word "states" in this report refers to all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

² One hundred percent of the 51 state agencies responded to the survey, 65 percent of the 150 local offices administered the survey responded, and 35 percent of 150 partner agencies responded.

meet these goals, states are modernizing their programs by making a variety of changes in policy, procedures, and organization that affect SNAP application, case management, and recertification processes.

Most states view SNAP modernization as a fluid process over a broad range of activities that are not easily pinpointed, classified, or even separated from the modernization of other mainstream benefit programs. State and local modernization efforts are often seen as a natural outgrowth of federal policies and regulations, state and local political and economic environments, the general structure and organization of program offices, and access to improved technology. One survey respondent noted, “The Food Stamp Program [*SNAP*] has been an ever-evolving program with technological advances occurring all along the way.... Modernization...is the natural evolution of the program.” It is clear that at both the state and local level, the majority of offices are approaching modernization activities from a broad perspective—not limited to SNAP operations—and with widely different levels of administrative flexibility and views of what constitutes modernization. Because modernization can be defined in many different ways by different entities, this study defines modernization in very broad terms—focusing not only on technological innovations but on policy and organizational changes that affect the way SNAP is delivered to clients.

To organize the modernization efforts being implemented across the country and to gain a sense of the context in which state programs operate, the report focuses on the following ten efforts within the four categories of modernization:

- Policy Changes
 - ◆ Customer Access Activities
 - Includes activities such as creating combined applications across programs, accepting client changes by fax, and providing flexible hours at local offices
 - ◆ State Options and FNS Policy Waivers
 - Includes policies such as expanding vehicle exemption criteria, expanding categorical eligibility, using combined application programs (CAPs), waiving face-to-face interviews at application or recertification
- Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions
 - Includes changes such as merging, consolidating, or closing offices; transferring or sharing of functions; and job specialization
- Technological Innovations
 - ◆ Call Centers
 - A centralized location where clients may call to obtain information about their case, to conduct interviews, or to submit changes to their case

- ◆ Electronic Applications
 - Allows clients to complete an application electronically through a secure web site, including signing and submitting the application, prescreening for benefits, applying for multiple programs, and checking benefit status
 - ◆ Paperless Systems
 - Electronic case files or document imaging
 - ◆ Data Brokering/Sharing
 - Allows staff in SNAP agencies to use technology to electronically exchange client data and documentation with one or more agencies
 - ◆ Biometric Identification
 - Fingerprint imaging, facial recognition, and retinal scanning
 - ◆ Other Technological Innovations
 - Includes innovations such as integrating multiple programs into the management information system (MIS), allowing workers to telecommute, or allowing clients to check account history or benefit status online
- Partnering Arrangements
- ◆ Information Sharing and Application Assistance
 - Includes activities such as developing and distributing flyers and informational materials; creating informational web sites; providing off-site prescreening and application assistance

SURVEY FINDINGS

The surveys asked respondents what key factors were driving modernization in their states and their reasons or goals for implementing specific modernization efforts. Respondents were then asked to provide additional detail about the modernization activities that were implemented³.

The top factor influencing the decision to modernize was the increase in staff caseloads. The majority of respondents reported that increased caseloads were the primary motivator for modernization. Economic downturns, state legislation, and staff turnover in local SNAP offices were also important factors prompting modernization. State and local respondents

³ Unless otherwise noted, the term “implemented” includes both pre- and post-2000 implementation.

agreed on most of the key factors affecting implementation, with a few exceptions: local offices were more likely to report that local labor market conditions were a key factor, while states more often reported that new governors and advocates were influential to modernization efforts.

Customer service, improved program access, and increased program participation were the primary reasons for implementing specific modernization efforts. States sought to improve access or increase participation through policy changes, organizational changes, call centers, electronic applications, and other technological innovations (i.e., kiosks, automated response units, and online account information). Some modernization efforts were implemented for a mix of reasons, both for efficiency and customer service. States sought to reduce administrative costs and simplify the process for workers through the use of call centers, paperless systems, organizational changes, and technological innovations.

Driven by these goals, states implemented numerous initiatives across the four modernization categories. By 2008, every state or almost every state implemented or piloted some type of customer access activities, technological innovations, and information sharing activities. About half of all states implemented organizational changes, electronic applications, paperless systems, and call centers. About a quarter of states implemented a CAP, data brokering, and biometric identification

1. Policy Changes

Policy changes encompass modernization initiatives that provide SNAP clients with more flexibility and reduce client burden in accessing program benefits. Policy changes often provide states with options to streamline their operations and reduce costs or redirect scarce resources. These changes include various efforts designed to improve customer access as well as state options and FNS policy waivers.

Every state implemented or planned to implement at least one customer access activity and most implemented multiple activities together. Customer access activities alter the ways in which clients may apply for and continue to receive SNAP benefits. Generally, these efforts allowed clients to gain access to SNAP in a number of new ways and through new methods that expanded access. In 2008, most states allowed clients to complete a combined application for several assistance programs at one time, to submit applications and recertifications by fax, and to take advantage of expanded office hours at SNAP offices. However, only about a third provided flexible office hours, outstationed SNAP workers in the community, or tracked and followed-up on applications collected by the local staff.

States widely implemented a range of policy options available from FNS that reduce client-reporting burdens. State policy options included simplifying or reducing the reporting requirements for SNAP clients, which resulted in clients only needing to report changes in income between reporting periods if their countable income rose above 130 percent of the poverty level. As of 2009, 48 states simplified reporting requirements for clients. States also had the option to lessen the reporting burden on clients by reducing change-reporting requirements. In 36 states, clients were only required to report changes if there was a change in their work or pay status, or if their earned or unearned income increased \$100 or more per month. All but three states also expanded the vehicle exemption policy for SNAP to one vehicle per household or all

vehicles owned by the household. In addition, 40 states expanded categorical eligibility for SNAP benefits—households were categorically eligible for SNAP if they received or were certified as eligible to receive benefits, which were at least 50 percent funded by TANF or Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds. Forty states also allowed a mandatory simplified standard utility allowance (SUA) that is used in place of actual utility costs.

States have also requested and received waivers to certain federal SNAP policies to improve program access. For example, federal law requires that states conduct face-to-face interviews at certification and at least once every 12 months with clients. As of 2009, 34 states received waivers for face-to-face interviews—21 waived the interview at initial certification and 34 waived the recertification interview. Waiving the face-to-face interview allows states to conduct the interviews over the telephone. The same information is collected during the same intervals and, if requested by the client, the state will provide face-to-face interviews. In addition, several states received or plan to apply for a CAP waiver. The CAP is a streamlined SNAP application process for certain individuals who apply for Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI). This process makes it easier for qualified SSI recipients to receive automatically SNAP benefits and relaxes many of the standard rules for these households, including eliminating the requirement to complete a full SNAP application, waiving face-to-face interviews, and extending recertification periods for up to three years. As of 2008, 12 states implemented a CAP and 9 states reported that they plan to do so.

2. Organizational Changes and Reengineering Administrative Functions

Organizational changes and reengineering administrative functions include modernization efforts that change the structure of SNAP agencies and the process for delivering benefits. Organizational changes involve transferring program functions or operations from one entity to another, merging and consolidating agencies or offices, or increasing job specialization of the local SNAP office staff.

The most commonly reported organizational changes were greater sharing of functions with community-based organizations and the closing or consolidation of local offices. Twenty-nine states reported that they implemented or plan to implement various organizational or administrative changes in their states. Twenty-one states implemented or piloted organizational changes after January 2000.

3. Technological Innovations

Technological innovations encompass a range of modernization efforts that use new technologies or update and expand old ones. These efforts include call centers, electronic applications, electronic case files and document imaging (“paperless” systems), and other technologically based initiatives.

Twenty-nine states implemented or planned to implement call centers in their states. A call center is a centralized location where clients may call and receive information through an automated system or from a knowledgeable SNAP employee. The functions of call centers vary widely by state. Call centers may enable clients to apply for assistance, submit changes to their case, recertify their case, check the status of their claim, ask questions about their case, or

schedule appointments. According to the state survey, of the 18 states that implemented call centers after 2000,⁴ half were statewide centers and half were only available in selected areas of the state. Most call centers allowed clients to report changes, answered general questions for clients, and provided case information. Few call centers completed initial application interviews and certified cases.

Most states (43) created or planned to create online tools for applying for SNAP. As of 2008, 22 states created web sites that allow applicants to complete an application electronically; however, the submission method for the application varied by state. Two states required applicants to print the application after it was completed and to send the hardcopy to their local office. Another six states allowed applicants to submit the application online, but they were required to provide a written signature before the application was processed. Fifteen states⁵ provided an “e-signature,” which allows applicants to electronically sign and submit the application.

These web sites generally had functions beyond simply filling out applications. Many sites allowed users to prescreen for SNAP eligibility, combine applications for multiple programs, and check the status of applications and benefits. Of the 22 states that had created tools, 18 were publicly accessible through the Internet; the others were only available at partner organizations or local offices. Sixteen of the states had tools that were available statewide, while the other six were restricted to selected areas in the state.

Only four states implemented biometric identification efforts and usually prior to 2000. All four of these states implemented fingerprint imaging and one of the four used facial recognition.

Every state implemented or planned to implement at least one additional technological innovation. Most states created online policy manuals and integrated their SNAP management information systems with other benefit systems, such as TANF and Medicaid. About two-thirds of states allowed clients to check their account history or benefit status online and implemented or planned to implement a paperless system (including electronic case files and/or document imaging). Fourteen states implemented or piloted data brokering/sharing, which allowed SNAP agencies to exchange client data electronically with one or more agencies.

4. Information Sharing and Application Assistance, and Partnering Arrangements

State agencies and local offices conduct many types of information sharing and application assistance activities to increase participation. These include distributing information and educational materials, conducting presentations in the community, providing off-site application

⁴ Three states implemented call centers prior to 2000, and eight states were planning, but had not yet implemented, call centers.

⁵ Illinois is included under both the “apply online and send hardcopy to the local office” and “apply online with e-signature” options. The state implemented the policy requiring applicants to send a hard copy of their application to the local office and they are piloting the e-signature.

assistance, conducting media campaigns, and developing informational hotlines for clients. Information sharing efforts may be carried out directly by the state and local agencies or through partnerships among SNAP offices, for-profits businesses, faith- and community-based organizations, and other governmental agencies. In addition, some states contract with private business or partner organizations for technologically related functions, such as installing and managing system hardware, programming systems, and providing technical support.

Forty-seven states conducted at least one information sharing and application assistance activity, with most states implementing several activities. According to the 2008 national survey, most states developed and distributed information and educational materials, developed web sites that provided information to the public, and conducted in-person outreach presentations in the community. About two-thirds of states posted SNAP staff in the community to provide off-site prescreening and application assistance to clients. A smaller number of states developed toll-free informational hotlines and conducted media, direct mail, and door-to-door outreach campaigns. Almost 95 percent of states reported using partner organizations to increase awareness about and access to SNAP. These partners included community nonprofit organizations, other government agencies, or private contractors, and they generally provided outreach activities, alternative sites for clients to apply for SNAP, or prescreening and application assistance.

Most states also contracted with or planned to contract with another organization to perform some SNAP functions related to technological innovations, information sharing, or customer access. In the state survey, 37 states indicated that they used contractors to develop, implement, or manage some aspects of their technological modernization effort, such as selecting and installing hardware and software, programming systems, and maintaining and supporting systems. Thirty-four states used contractors to conduct outreach to improve customer access. These contractors often provide translation services, application assistance, and informational materials. Very few states worked with outside contractors to carry out case management functions.

PATTERNS IN STATE MODERNIZATION ACTIVITIES

Further analysis of the state survey data identifies patterns in implementation of modernization activities across efforts, over time, and by various characteristics (such as caseload size, region, urban/rural).⁶ Several broad themes emerge from this analysis.

Of the 10 modernization efforts defined above, the majority of states implemented multiple efforts (four to five) together. Most implemented their efforts after January 2000, with the exception of customer access activities, data brokering, and organizational changes, which were often implemented earlier. In addition, there was a considerable amount of planning taking place across the states, with over 75 percent of states planning at least one future change.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, when discussing implementation, efforts implemented and piloted pre-2000 and post-2000 are included in the analysis. Planned efforts are generally not discussed.

States most often tended to implement some combination of electronic applications, paperless systems, call centers, and organizational changes in conjunction with each other. When analyzing the relationships between modernization efforts to determine if states tended to implement efforts in conjunction with each other, few patterns emerged. Because all or almost all of the states implemented customer access, technological innovations, and information sharing and application assistance, variation available for analysis was limited. Likewise, because so few states implemented biometric identification, CAPs, and data brokering, patterns did not materialize related to these efforts.

States located in the northern and southwest regions of the country, with larger SNAP caseloads and largely urban populations implemented more modernization efforts on average. The Mid Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, and Southwest regions of the country include states that implemented more efforts on average (about 6 of the efforts on average), while states in the Mountain Plains and Western regions implemented fewer efforts (less than five efforts on average). In general, the larger the caseload size, the more efforts implemented, with smaller caseload states implementing an average of four efforts and larger states implementing seven. In addition, analysis of population density shows that more urban states implement more efforts—most states that implemented six or more efforts were considered over 70 percent urban.

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF MODERNIZATION

States and local offices were asked to discuss the outcomes of modernization, as well as successes and challenges encountered.

Both state and local SNAP agencies rated their overall modernization initiatives very positively. Most respondents believed modernization improved clients' access to SNAP and customer satisfaction. Most states that assessed the impacts of modernization thought the efforts had a neutral impact on client fraud, error rates, and administrative cost savings. Few respondents rated the impacts of modernization efforts negatively, and many indicated that they did not know the effects of modernization, particularly on fraud, error rates, and administrative costs.

States tended to rate the effects of specific modernization efforts more positively than did local offices. When asked about opinions on the effects of the individual modernization efforts, at least half of the states rated customer access, CAPs, organizational changes, call centers, electronic applications, and information sharing as having strong positive impacts. Only CAPs and call centers were rated as having strong positive effects by a majority of local offices.

Resource availability and allocation were the most challenging aspects of modernization. Almost every state and three-quarters of local offices reported that limited or decreased staff resources were a challenge to implementation. Over 90 percent of states found controlling costs and dealing with unanticipated expenses to be challenging, while 72 percent of local offices reported limited funding to be challenging. Over two-thirds of both state and local offices reported struggling with competing priorities, possibly highlighting the difficulty of distributing scarce resources. A majority of both state and local offices struggled to train and hire staff, and reported that maintaining schedules and meeting deadlines was a challenge.

State and local offices also faced different challenges. In general, local offices had a harder time with technical problems (44 percent compared to 10 percent of states) and staff resistance to changes (46 percent compared to 18 percent of states). States, on the other hand, reported challenges with union and civil service regulations at much higher rates (63 percent compared to 18 percent).

Increased overall participation and participation of certain subgroups was the greatest success attributed to modernization efforts. About two-thirds of state offices and local offices reported success when asked about overall SNAP participation, with about 60 percent reporting success in increasing participation among working families. Most states reported success with increasing participation among elderly and disabled individuals; a slightly smaller number of local offices indicated similar successes.

State and local offices differed in their perception of staff satisfaction and workload changes. Compared with local offices, state offices more often reported staff satisfaction (53 percent versus 39 percent) and success in decreasing staff workload (35 percent versus 13 percent). Similarly, although only about a third of states reported success in reducing administrative costs, about twice as often as the share of local offices.

LESSON LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTING MODERNIZATION

States and local offices were asked to discuss the lessons they learned based on their experiences with the implementation of modernization activities. They were also asked to identify any federal laws or regulations that could be changed to help facilitate modernization efforts. Several themes emerged from these open-ended questions.

Many state and local respondents indicated that more planning was needed prior to implementing efforts and suggested more time was needed for the implementation process. In general, respondents reported that more time spent planning meant fewer problems for the rollout of a modernization effort. As one administrator reported, “do it right, not fast.” Many respondents indicated that modernization efforts took much longer than expected and cost much more than budgeted. Others stated that more staff input, as well as more client input, was needed during the planning and design phase of modernization. States also suggested that modernization plans be rolled out incrementally with tests and measurements included at every step. In regards to the latter point, however, state and local offices noted that they had difficulty determining methods of performance measurement for modernization efforts. Local offices, in particular, also called for increased staff training and need for better technology.

Both state and local offices mentioned the need for greater commitment to modernization efforts at all levels —from clients and local level staff to state, regional, and federal administrators. Respondents cited the need for more communication, oversight, planning, and flexibility in dealing with the entire process. In the words of a local respondent, “everyone has to be on board, from the commissioner to the eligibility worker, to the support staff.” Another administrator noted, “don’t be afraid to make changes as you roll out your improvements, be willing to continually look at your processes with an eye to making them better. Modernization is a process not a goal.” This was particularly true for technological

changes in some states; administrators noted that involving seasoned staff in planning technological innovations helped ensure less resistance and mistrust when the effort was finally rolled out.

With respect to federal policy, respondents suggested changes from FNS that could free up staff time, increase access for clients, and remove some of the barriers to various modernization initiatives. Both state and local offices asked for greater flexibility and access to all waivers and options, indicating that the current process was too restrictive and difficult to pursue. For these offices, requirements like documenting cost neutrality posed a significant obstacle to modernization. In addition, many states and local offices indicated a need for the overall simplification of SNAP policy, with many singling out the need for standardized medical deductions. Moreover, state and local offices found rules and regulations within the SNAP program, like verification requirements, to be too burdensome and inconsistent with other programs. This misalignment reportedly caused difficulties when trying to modernize SNAP programs administered with other benefit programs, like TANF and Medicaid. Some respondents also suggested that the current error rate calculations be reviewed, with one noting that there should be a grace period for error and timeliness rates after major modernization efforts are implemented.

NEXT STEPS

A number of issues related to the implementation and operation of modernization activities are not examined fully in this report, in part because some questions cannot be easily or thoroughly addressed within the confines of the web-based survey methodology. Many key issues raised through the analysis of the survey data will be explored in greater depth in the final project report, which will integrate data from all three phases of the study. In particular, qualitative data collected during the case study site visits to 14 states conducted in spring 2009 will yield richer and more nuanced information that will provide context, offer additional detail, and inform the survey results described here.

One topic that will be explored more fully in the final report is the rationale for choosing, and the perceived success of, the particular combinations of modernization efforts states most often implement. Why do many states implement some combination of electronic applications, paperless systems, call centers and organizational changes together and what are the ramifications of these choices? Another issue that will be examined is the timing of the implementation of modernization activities. Many of these efforts are being launched during a period of unprecedented growth in the SNAP caseload. What is the perceived effect of this caseload growth on measures of success for modernization activities? Are positive outcomes of modernization efforts being masked by the current economic conditions—large increases in caseloads, budget cutbacks, and staff shortages? Is modernization allowing states simply to keep pace with all of the demands associated with changes in economic conditions? Where would states be had they not modernized? How long does it take for the full benefits of modernization to be observed throughout the system? Analysis of FNS administrative data on caseload trends, administrative costs, and error rates, which will be included in the final report, should also shed light on potential outcomes and effects of modernization efforts.

In conclusion, this report provides interim findings based on national surveys, and does not present the more comprehensive analysis that will include both site-visit information and FNS administrative data. The survey responses provide a glimpse of the varied activities that might be undertaken in a particular modernization category; however, they do not provide all of the detail needed to understand fully every process. For example, based on the survey findings alone, two states with call centers that accept changes may look identical; however, in practice, the states could be very different. One might operate in a local office with one or two staff assigned to fielding calls as they come in, whereas the other could be an entire office with hundreds of staff whose only job is to use high-level technology to answer calls from all over the state. The site-visit phase of this study will provide more detailed information for 14 states and will build upon and enhance these survey findings.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In October 2006, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) contracted with The Urban Institute (UI) to conduct a comprehensive study of state efforts to modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.⁷ The study focuses on four types of modernization efforts: (1) policy changes to modernize SNAP application, case management, and recertification procedures; (2) reengineering of administrative functions; (3) increased or enhanced use of technology; and (4) partnering arrangements with businesses and nonprofit organizations.

To document key features and outcomes associated with SNAP modernization, this three-year study comprises the following three data collection activities: initial site visits to four states; a national survey of all states,⁸ including a sample of local offices as well as partner organizations; and extensive case studies in 14 states. This interim report presents the findings from phase two of the project, the national survey, conducted from May 2008 to December 2008.

A. Study Objectives

The goals of this study are to develop a comprehensive, national inventory of SNAP modernization efforts, both large and small, undertaken in all the states; identify successful modernization efforts across the country that can potentially be replicated; and help avoid implementation pitfalls among states currently planning similar kinds of modernization initiatives. The study examines the effects of these modernization efforts on four types of outcomes: program access, administrative cost, program integrity, and customer service. The study has seven objectives, described below.⁹

Objective 1: Provide a national description and comparison of state efforts to modernize SNAP

The survey is the basis for the project's national description and comparisons across states. The survey results document the initiatives undertaken by each state and the geographical scope of the initiatives within the states. The results of the county-level and partner surveys provide additional information about “on the ground” experiences related to modernization activities. An overview of state efforts is provided in chapter 4, section A.

⁷ The change, mandated by the “Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008”, took effect on October 1, 2008.

⁸ The use of the word “states” in this report refers to all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

⁹ While the survey and the findings presented in this interim report address each of the objectives to some degree, the survey was not designed to focus on all of the objectives—in particular, objectives 3, 4, 5, and 7—so they are not fully addressed in this report. The final report for the study will incorporate data collected in all phases of the study and will address all of these objectives.

Objective 2: Describe the factors that drive states to modernize their SNAP services

The surveys asked state and local officials about the reasons for implementing various modernization efforts. The surveys also inquired about the roles of governors, legislators, and local officials in initiating or resisting state modernization efforts, as well as agency budgets, the economic environment, and characteristics of SNAP participants. See chapter 4, section A.

Objective 3: Describe and compare the policy changes pursued as a part of SNAP modernization

State and local officials were asked about a limited number of policy options in the survey, including those concerning customer access and combined application programs (CAPs). The survey did not ask for detail about waivers requested and received or other policy options already documented by FNS; however, a general discussion of the range of state options and policy waivers available to states is provided in the report. State administrators, local administrators, and partners were also given the opportunity to suggest legislative or regulatory changes related to their experiences with modernization efforts. See chapter 4, section B.

Objective 4: Identify the ways that states reengineer administrative structure and organizational roles

The state and local surveys asked about organizational mergers, consolidation, and office closings at state and local levels of SNAP administration and about the transfer of functions, in either direction, between SNAP agencies and other governmental entities. See chapter 4, section C.

Objective 5: Describe and compare technology initiatives made to support SNAP modernization

The three surveys included a section on technological innovations, including computer system upgrades or modifications, document management, information sharing, application access and submission, reporting changes, recertification, and expanded uses of EBT. Three changes made possible by new technology—call centers, electronic applications, and biometric identification—were covered in detail in separate sections of the survey. See chapter 4, section D.

Objective 6: Describe and compare the nonprofit community organizations that states partner with to support SNAP modernization

Most of the 150 partner organizations surveyed were nonprofit community or faith-based organizations. As part of their surveys, state and local program administrators were asked to identify the types of nonprofits with whom they have partnered on modernization initiatives. A series of questions in the partner survey asked representatives of these organizations about their structure, services, funding, and clientele. See chapter 4, section E.

Objective 7: Document the relationships among SNAP modernization initiatives, stakeholder satisfaction, and program outcomes

State SNAP administrators, local administrators, and partner organizations were asked about their overall opinions on the impacts of modernization efforts, and about the effects of specific categories of initiatives, such as call centers and information sharing. See chapter 6.

B. Purpose and Organization of This Report

This report presents a detailed inventory of all state SNAP modernization initiatives encompassed within the broad categories of policy changes, reengineering of administrative functions, technology, and partnering arrangements. With respect to specific initiatives reported, this document describes timing and other operational aspects of implementation, reasons for implementation, perceived outcomes, and overall experience. This report also describes patterns that can be discerned regarding state characteristics and the types and timing of modernization activities undertaken. This is an interim report and is part of a large, multi-component study that will subsequently include analysis of administrative data and information collected from case study site visits.

A national survey was designed and conducted to provide a complete inventory for a point in time using consistent categories and definitions. This report relies primarily upon a survey of state SNAP directors (100 percent response rate). Findings from surveys of samples of local SNAP agencies and partner organizations are also included to provide additional context for understanding modernization initiatives and the implementation process. Responses were received from 98 local offices (65 percent response rate) and 53 partner organizations (35 percent response rate). See chapter 2 for more details.

The following chapter describes the survey methods and limitations. Chapter 3 provides the context for understanding state modernization efforts, including descriptions of the national picture of SNAP modernization, the four broad modernization categories as they are used in the survey and in this report, and the organizational settings for state and local SNAP administration. This chapter also discusses perceived barriers to SNAP participation and reasons states implemented modernization activities. Survey findings are described in chapter 4, including an overview and presentation of findings concerning policy changes, organizational changes and reengineering of administrative functions, technological innovations, and information sharing and partnering arrangements. Training and hiring of staff for modernization efforts as well as patterns in the types of states (by region, caseload size, and population density) that implement specific activities are also discussed. Chapter 5 presents further analysis of survey findings, describing scope and patterns in implementation of modernization activities across efforts, over time, and by other characteristics, such as state, region, setting, size, motivations and challenges, and state administrative characteristics. Respondent perceptions of impacts, successes, challenges, and lessons learned regarding modernization activities are discussed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 draws on the preceding chapters to summarize conclusions about state modernization efforts and describes the next steps planned for the study.

CHAPTER 2: SURVEY METHODS

The nationwide inventory of SNAP modernization efforts was conducted during May through December 2008. The inventory was administered through three separate surveys: the State Food Stamp Agency Survey, the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey, and the Partner Organization Survey. Each survey was available for completion via the Internet and included programmed skip patterns, automatically eliminating sections not applicable to the respondent. In addition, the surveys were available, upon request, in Microsoft Word, allowing respondents to review and complete surveys in an alternative format. Survey respondents received introductory letters from FNS and The Urban Institute as well as detailed instructions and a set of frequently asked questions by e-mail. The letter included a link to the web survey along with a unique and confidential user identification and password.

Survey procedures employed to maximize response rates included identifying a liaison for each state, developing a list of frequently asked questions that address anticipated areas of confusion, and having Urban Institute staff available by telephone and e-mail to address technical difficulties and questions from respondents. In addition, e-mail and telephone reminders were sent to respondents who had not submitted a completed survey within the 30-day survey timeframe. A minimum of three reminders were sent to each nonrespondent.

A. State Food Stamp Agency Survey

Prior to receiving the instructions and other materials related to completing the survey, state SNAP directors received an e-mail from the Urban Institute asking them to identify and provide contact information for local SNAP agencies that had implemented their own modernization initiatives. They were also asked to identify partner organizations and contractors involved in modernization activities at the state and local levels. After completion of these initial contacts, the State Food Stamp Agency Survey was administered to state SNAP directors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey achieved a response rate of 100 percent—all 51 state agencies completed it.

B. Local Food Stamp Agency Survey

One-hundred-fifty local SNAP agencies were selected to receive the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey. Using purposive sampling procedures, the local office sample included three local SNAP offices in each state. The first office in each state was selected by identifying the county with the highest SNAP caseload. If there was more than one local office in that county, input from state or county staff was solicited to identify the office best suited to participate in the survey. The additional two offices in each state were randomly selected from a list of local offices suggested by state agency staff, when available, or from a list of all counties in the state. Prior to receiving the instructions and other materials related to completing the survey, local agency respondents received an e-mail, similar to the e-mail sent to state agency respondents, asking them to identify partner organizations and contractors involved in their SNAP modernization efforts.

Ninety-eight local offices (65 percent) completed the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey, with at least one local office survey completed in each state. Completed surveys provided broad representation across state and locally administered programs. Nonrespondents showed no

noticeable pattern that differentiated them from those who responded (i.e., nonrespondents are not all from one region of the country, from large states, or from states with state-administered programs); therefore, the potential of nonrespondent bias appears low.

C. Partner Organization Survey

The Partner Organization Survey was administered to a sample of 150 agencies, including faith-based organizations (FBOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and for-profit contractors working with state or local SNAP agencies on their modernization initiatives. Because the study's objective was to develop an inventory, and not to make any statistical inferences, both purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were employed for narrowing lists of possible respondents. As noted above, respondents for the State Food Stamp Agency Survey and the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey were asked to provide the names and contact information for organizations partnering with them on modernization efforts. This list of more than 265 organizations was supplemented with agencies that had been previously identified through earlier phases of this study (primarily the phase 1 site visits) and additional organizations identified by FNS staff. In consultation with FNS staff, the decision was made to exclude all major for-profit vendors, such as IBM, Maximus, and Benefit Banks, in order to focus on partners whose activities involved direct contact with SNAP applicants and participants. In addition, all organizations for which e-mail information could not be located were excluded. The Urban Institute team identified 150 partner organizations from the final list of 226 through stratified sampling, choosing three partners per state, if available.

Fifty-three partners completed the Partner Organization Survey, a 35 percent response rate. Due to the relatively low response rate for this survey, it cannot be determined if the data are representative of overall partner experiences and it is not possible to discern if nonrespondents are systematically different from those who did respond. Only 55 percent of states were represented in the respondent population, in part because not all states work with partner organizations on their modernization activities. While these surveys are not necessarily representative of the overall experiences of all organizations partnering with state and local SNAP agencies, they do provide insight into the role FBOs, CBOs, and other agencies play in planning and implementing SNAP modernization initiatives at the state and local level.

The low response rate on the Partner Organization Survey was in part due to the difficulty of compiling an accurate sample population. Based on an analysis of the list of partner organizations submitted by state and local respondents, as well as the substance of the telephone calls and e-mails received from partner organizations selected for the study, it is apparent that there were several problems with the sample drawn for this survey. Multiple state and local respondents did not understand the initial request for partner organization contacts. For example, several of the identified partner agencies indicated that they had no current or past experience working with SNAP or the local SNAP agency. In addition, inaccurate or incomplete contact information was provided for a number of partner organizations. For partners that were accurately identified, the lack of a formal relationship with FNS or the Urban Institute affected response rates. Also, the types of organizations included in the Partner Organization Survey typically do not receive funding from FNS and may not be accustomed to completing information requests for FNS studies. Only 47 percent of Partner Organization Survey

respondents indicated that they received funding under their agreement with the state SNAP agency.

D. Survey Limitations

The National Inventory represents a point-in-time snapshot of SNAP modernization efforts nationwide. The inventory was administered in three waves: (1) state SNAP agencies from May to October 2008, (2) local SNAP offices from June to December 2008, and (3) partner organizations from August to November 2008. To narrow the spectrum of initiatives described and to provide a memorable reference point, survey respondents were asked detailed questions only on modernization efforts that were implemented after January 1, 2000. Several states implemented some efforts prior to January 1, 2000, and therefore did not provide detailed information about these activities on the surveys. As a result, many findings are limited to the subset of states that implemented the particular initiative after January 1, 2000. Moreover, although the surveys asked that states focus on post-2000 efforts, overview and opinion questions about modernization in general could have led respondents to think more broadly about their state's modernization efforts, including initiatives started before 2000. It is not clear to what extent survey respondents were able to remember accurately specific dates of implementation.

In addition, the surveys did not capture the timing of planned initiatives. For cross-state analysis, it was difficult to compare states without understanding at what point in the planning process a state was in—one may be in the beginning stages of planning, while another may be close to implementing certain efforts. The findings section of the report does discuss planned efforts, but survey data on this topic are not integrated into the analysis section.

Another limitation of the results is the substantive discrepancies between responses to the State Food Stamp Agency Survey and the Local Food Stamp Agency Survey within a single state. No discernible patterns are evident when examining the types of questions and answers where differences exist. Both state and locally administered programs show roughly the same degree of incongruity spread across a range of modernization efforts. In some cases, responses in the State and Local Surveys disagree as to when initiatives were implemented, what stage of the implementation process initiatives were in, or even if an initiative exists in the state. Possible explanations for the discrepancies include differences in the point in time at which the surveys were conducted, staff turnover, or perhaps differences in terminology; however, without further information, determining which information is accurate is impossible. Alternatively, the differences in responses may provide insight into the quality of communication between local and state SNAP offices.

Because state administrators are in a better position to know the entirety of a state's program and its terminology, and because the State Food Stamp Agency Survey garnered a 100 percent response rate, only state surveys are used to inventory their respective modernization efforts and to analyze the findings. Local survey data, on the other hand, are used when they provide the reader with a different perspective and greater detail on the implementation of the various modernization activities. Partner data are used in the same way, although more sparingly, due to the lack of representativeness and low response rate.

Another key survey issue is that it is unclear in locally administered states how the state offices responded to specific survey questions. In the state survey, states should have documented only the efforts implemented at the state level. The local offices should have included information on efforts they initiated and implemented, as well as the state-initiated efforts implemented in the local offices. However, review of the data suggests that state respondents in some locally administered states may not have answered questions based on only efforts implemented by the state. Some states may have included all efforts that some or all counties initiated, while others did not. It is impossible to determine from the survey data alone how prevalent this issue is, but it is important to keep this in mind.

In addition, respondents likely had differing views as to what constitutes a given modernization effort. For example, some states might have reported that they implemented electronic case files if staff had the ability to input information collected during an intake session directly into a computer. Other states might have defined electronic case files as a more comprehensive effort that eliminated the need for any paper case files. For most modernization efforts, determining how much a given effort varies across states based only on the survey data is difficult; however, information collected during the site visits to the 14 case study states for the final phase of the project will provide insight into this for the final report.

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND

This chapter provides an overview of the structure and organization of the survey and report, and gives details on state and local settings. Important information about the structure of the analysis and timing of modernization is discussed in the overview section, while the state and local context section provides details on various aspects of the administration of SNAP programs across the country. Discussions of perceived barriers to SNAP participation and reasons states identified for implementing modernization activities are also presented.

A. Overview

SNAP provides, through state-operated programs, assistance for low-income individuals and families to purchase eligible food items for home consumption. Over the past decade, increased awareness of the importance of SNAP as a basic nutritional safety net, as well as a critical tool in supporting employment, has led to federal and state efforts to enhance eligibility and increase program access and participation. At the same time, states have been focusing on ways to increase operational and administrative efficiency and program integrity. To meet these goals, states are modernizing their programs by making changes in policy, procedural, and organizational approaches to SNAP applications, case management, and recertifications.

To document and describe the various modernization efforts being implemented across the country and to gain a sense of the context in which state programs operate, this report addressed 10 distinct efforts included in the study's definition of modernization. These include customer access, CAP programs, organizational changes, call centers, electronic applications, paperless systems, data brokering, other technological innovations, biometric identification, and information sharing and partnering arrangements. As table 3.1 shows, for the analysis and reporting of survey findings in this report, these 10 types of modernization efforts are grouped

within the study's four broader categories of modernization: policy changes, organizational changes and reengineering of administrative functions, technological innovations, and partnering arrangements.¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all discussions of modernization activities in this report refer to the 10 modernization effort categories described in table 3.1.¹¹

For analysis purposes, certain types of modernization activities were combined to create the 10 groups of modernization efforts. Based on the total number of activities included in a particular grouping, a state had to report a specified number of activities for us to consider that it had implemented that type of modernization effort. For example, as shown on table 3.1, a state had to implement three or more smaller-scale activities, such as developing an online policy manual, accepting EBT at farmers' markets, and allowing workers to telecommute, to be considered as having implemented "other technological innovations." Fewer activities were required under the "customer access" and "information sharing efforts" groups, such as accepting faxed changes and developing toll-free hotlines. States that implemented two or more activities in these groups were considered to have implemented that effort. "Paperless system efforts" were considered implemented if a state implemented either document imaging or electronic case files. Large-scale organizational activities, such as closing or consolidating local offices, were given more weight. Implementation of only one of the activities qualified as an organizational change effort.

State, local, and partner SNAP offices were administered surveys with questions about modernization efforts implemented after January 1, 2000. By identifying a specific date, FNS hoped to focus the study, provide a memorable reference point, and narrow the broad definition of modernization to a specific time period for the survey respondents. However, in-person discussions with program administrators and information provided in the completed surveys indicate that states view SNAP modernization, even with a specified time-frame, as a fluid process over a broad range of activities that are not easily pinpointed, classified, or even separated from the modernization of other mainstream benefit programs. State and local modernization efforts are often seen as a natural outgrowth of activities and efforts that began prior to 2000, determined by federal policies and regulations, state and local political and economic environments, the general structure and organization of benefit offices, and access to improved technology. One survey respondent put it clearly, "The Food Stamp Program [*SNAP*] has been an ever-evolving program with technological advances occurring all along the way... Modernization is not just conducting telephone interviews, it is the natural evolution of the program."

¹⁰ For the analysis and reporting of survey findings, all information sharing activities (including activities conducted by SNAP agencies as well as partners) are included in the information sharing and partnering arrangements category.

¹¹ The partnering arrangements category is not included in the analysis.

Table 3.1: Modernization Efforts by Category

Modernization Effort	Modernization Activity
Policy Changes	
Customer access (any 2 or more)	Combined application
	Applications by mail
	Applications by fax
	Recertification by mail
	Recertification by fax
	Accept Changes by fax
	Flexible hours
	Outstationed SNAP worker
Track and follow up on applications	
CAP	CAP policy
Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions	
Organizational changes (any)	Merging or consolidation of state-level agencies
	Closing or consolidation of local offices
	Transferring of functions or organizational units from the state SNAP agency to another governmental entity
	Transferring of functions or organizational units to the state SNAP agency from another governmental entity
	Transferring functions from the state SNAP agency to CBOs
	Transferring of functions from the state SNAP agency to private-sector business
	Greater sharing of functions with CBOs
Increasing job specialization of the local SNAP staff	
Technological Innovations	
Call centers	Call centers
Electronic applications	Online tool
Paperless systems (any)	Electronic case files
	Document imaging
Data brokering/sharing	Data brokering/sharing
Other technological innovations (any 3 or more)	Integrated MIS
	Online policy manual
	Allow workers to telecommute
	Kiosks
	Accept changes through online tool
	Recertify by telephone using automated speech recognition or automated response units
	Accept changes by automated speech recognition or automated response units
	Allow clients to check account history or benefit status online
	Establish wireless point of service systems
	Develop online grocery ordering
Accept EBT at farmers' markets	
Biometric identification (any)	Fingerprint imaging
	Facial recognition
	Retinal scanning
Information Sharing and Partnering Arrangements	
Information sharing/ application assistance (any 2 or more) and partnering arrangements	Development of flyers, posters or other educational materials
	Distribution of flyers, etc
	Web sites
	Development of toll-free informational hotlines
	Media campaign
	Direct mail campaign
	Door-to-door outreach campaigns
	In-person outreach presentations at community sites
	Off-site application assistance or prescreening
	Partnering
	Contracting

Overall, the survey results paint a rich and varied picture of the administration and delivery of SNAP benefits and the implementation of modernization efforts. At both the state and local level, most offices approached modernization activities from a broad perspective—not limited to SNAP operations—and with widely different levels of administrative flexibility and views of what constitutes modernization. In some cases, states may not have viewed the changes they made to improve program efficiency as modernization activities. Because modernization can be defined in many different ways by different entities, this study defines it in broad terms—not just as technological innovations, but also as policy and organizational changes that affect the way SNAP is delivered to clients.

B. State and Local Context

To understand better the context in which the SNAP programs operate in each state, both the state and local surveys included questions regarding the organizational structure for SNAP administration and respondents' views on barriers to SNAP participation. This section describes the organizational setting and program responsibilities of the responding state and local agencies, as well as the perceived barriers to SNAP participation.

Office and Caseworker Benefit Administration Responsibilities

Rarely did state and local offices administer only SNAP. According to the state survey, most state agencies responsible for administering SNAP were responsible for administering multiple programs in addition to SNAP, and caseworkers were also required to determine eligibility and deliver benefits for multiple programs. The majority of states administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid/medical assistance, and child care subsidies in addition to SNAP. As table 3.2 shows, 47 of the 51 state SNAP agencies (92 percent) were housed in departments, bureaus, or agencies also responsible for TANF; 35 (69 percent) were administered together with Medicaid/medical assistance; and 32 (63 percent) also administered child care subsidies. In 23 states, all three programs were in the same agency as SNAP. Additional programs that were often administered with SNAP include Child Support (24 states), Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) (23 states), General Assistance (26 states), and energy assistance (24 states). Only six percent of state agencies only administered the SNAP program.

Local offices also tended to administer multiple programs. As table 3.2 shows, almost all local offices reported that they were responsible for administering TANF and 90 percent for administering Medicaid benefits, in addition to SNAP. Responsibility for child care (68 percent) and General Assistance programs (54 percent) was also common. No offices reported that they were responsible for SNAP only.

Table 3.2: Percent of SNAP State and Local Agencies Responsible for Administering Various Additional Assistance Programs

Assistance Programs	Percent of States	Percent of Local Offices
TANF	92	97
Medicaid/medical assistance	69	90
Child Support	47	33
SSI	45	34
State-funded food assistance for noncitizens	20	27
General Assistance	51	54
Job Service/Wagner-Peyser	6	11
Child care	63	68
Energy assistance	47	47
Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)	8	6
Workforce Investment Act (WIA)	2	3
None (only SNAP)	6	0

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (state) =51, N (local offices)=98

SNAP caseworkers also had a wide range of program responsibilities. As shown in table 3.3, 90 percent of the states SNAP administrators indicated that caseworkers were responsible for delivering TANF benefits and 82 percent for providing Medicaid/medical assistance, in addition to SNAP. Only two states reported that their SNAP caseworkers worked solely with SNAP cases. Additional caseworker responsibilities included General Assistance (25), child care (19), and SSI (13); 16 states reported that their caseworkers' responsibilities vary from office to office.

Table 3.3: Percent of States in which SNAP Caseworkers are Responsible for Administering Additional Assistance Programs

Assistance Programs	Percent of States
TANF	90
Medicaid/medical assistance	82
Child Support	2
SSI	25
State-funded food assistance for noncitizens	12
General Assistance	49
Job Service/Wagner-Peyser	2
Child care	37
Energy assistance	22
WIC	0
WIA	2
Varies by office	31 ^a
None (caseload is SNAP-only)	4

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Several states indicated both ‘varies by office’ and that specific programs, such as TANF, were administered by caseworkers. It is likely that specific programs (e.g., TANF) are always administered by SNAP workers in each office while administration of other programs (e.g., SSI) may vary.

Note: N=51

Administrative Responsibilities

States varied in their approach to program administration and in how much discretion and flexibility they gave local offices in administering SNAP. The survey asked about overall administration of SNAP as well as the flexibility afforded to local offices in implementing certification, recertification, reporting, and case maintenance/case management procedures. As shown in table 3.4, the majority of state SNAP programs (39) were administered at the state level. Twelve states reported that SNAP was locally administered—individual county/local SNAP offices made day-to-day operational decisions, although policy decisions were still generally made at the state level.

The state or local administrators also determined the appropriate number of local offices required to provide services. According to the state surveys, the number of local offices in each state varied significantly, ranging from zero offices in Vermont¹² to 380 offices in California, a locally administered state. In addition, 39 percent of local office respondents reported that they had out-stationed workers to take and process applications at other locations in the community. Note, however, that the number of local offices is just one indicator of coverage for service provision and does not reflect between- or within-state variation in distances to local offices or the ratio of staff to clients.

¹² Vermont’s state survey indicated they have no local offices, but responses to subsequent survey questions do address local office flexibility. This may be a result of differences in terminology—the state’s web site lists 12 *district* offices for their 3SquaresVT program, which administers SNAP benefits.

Table 3.4: Administration and Number of SNAP Offices

State	Entity responsible for administering SNAP	Number of SNAP offices available to clients
Alabama	State	70
Alaska	State	17
Arizona	State	86
Arkansas	State	83
California	County	380
Colorado	County	90
Connecticut	State	12
Delaware	State	18
D.C.	State	7
Florida	State	97
Georgia	State	170
Hawaii	State	45
Idaho	State	27
Illinois	State	115
Indiana	State	92
Iowa	State	99
Kansas	State	45
Kentucky	State	120
Louisiana	State	63
Maine	State	16
Maryland	State	43
Massachusetts	State	26
Michigan	State	82
Minnesota	County	87
Mississippi	State	82
Missouri	State	124
Montana	State	44
Nebraska	State	63
Nevada	State	15
New Hampshire	State	12
New Jersey	County	32
New Mexico	County	34
New York	County	58
North Carolina	County	100
North Dakota	County	51
Ohio	County	108
Oklahoma	State	90
Oregon	State	147
Pennsylvania	State	101
Rhode Island	State	5
South Carolina	County	46
South Dakota	State	66
Tennessee	State	97
Texas	State	311
Utah	State	35
Vermont	State	0
Virginia	County	120
Washington	State	65
West Virginia	State	54
Wisconsin	County	79
Wyoming	State	29
Total	--	3858

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N=51; Vermont's state survey indicates they have no local offices, however the state's web site lists 12 *district* offices for their 3SquaresVT program, which administers SNAP benefits.

Although several states allow local offices to administer programs and determine the number of offices in each county, all states indicated that primary responsibility for making decisions about SNAP policies with respect to certification, recertification, and reporting rests at the state level. States, however, reported more local discretion for ongoing case management, with 18 states indicating that the county or local office has primary responsibility for those decisions.

That being said, local offices in the majority of states have at least some measure of flexibility in administering certification, recertification, reporting, and case management procedures and decisions. Of the four categories, respondents reported the highest levels of local office flexibility for case management procedures—37 percent of states reported high or very high levels; 32 percent of states reported low or very low levels; and only 6 percent reported no flexibility at all. As shown in table 3.5, states reported much lower levels of local flexibility for the other categories, with only around 10 percent of states reporting high levels of flexibility in determining certification procedures, recertification procedures, and reporting procedures.

County-administered states tended to report more local office flexibility for all types of procedures. Over 50 percent of county-administered states felt that local offices had medium to high flexibility across all procedures, whereas state-administered states reported much less flexibility. However, both types of states reported high flexibility in local offices for implementing case maintenance procedures. In addition, although 50 percent of county-administered states indicated local offices had medium to high flexibility for reporting procedures, 33 percent indicated they have no flexibility.

The relationship between states’ perceptions of local office flexibility and the implementation of specific modernization efforts were examined, but no definitive patterns or findings emerged. States that implemented an electronic application were slightly more likely to indicate that local offices had high to very high flexibility in case maintenance and management procedures, but overall the findings were inconclusive.

Table 3.5: Percent of States Indicating the Level of Flexibility Local Offices have in Administering SNAP Procedures

Procedures	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low	None
Certification procedures	2	10	24	20	27	18
Recertification procedures	2	12	22	22	27	16
Reporting procedures	2	6	16	16	33	27
Case maintenance/ management procedures	12	25	25	12	20	6

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=51

Barriers to SNAP Participation

The surveys also asked a number of questions designed to capture state, local, and partner views on specific barriers to accessing benefits and participating in SNAP in their respective jurisdictions. Although these are barriers to client participation in the states and not specifically

to modernizing the system, many of these participation barriers could contribute to the need for modernizing and to shaping the design of specific modernization activities.

Overall, states did not feel that any of the identified barriers strongly interfered with SNAP participation. Most states reported that each identified barrier had either a somewhat strong or weak negative effect on SNAP participation. Table 3.6 provides more detail on the state and local office perceptions of barriers to SNAP participation. Local offices were less likely to report strong or somewhat strong obstacles. About half indicated that language barriers, distrust of government, time required for the application process, perceived poor treatment at local offices, and stigma were weak barriers.

Overall, partner respondents reported more strong barriers to SNAP participation. A majority of those respondents reported that each identified barrier was either a strong or somewhat strong obstacle.

Table 3.6: Percent of Respondents Indicating the Degree of Perceived Barriers to Participation

Barriers	Percent of States Indicating Degree				Percent of Local Offices Indicating Degree				Percent of Partners Indicating Degree			
	Strong barrier	Somewhat strong barrier	Weak barrier	Not a barrier	Strong barrier	Somewhat strong barrier	Weak barrier	Not a barrier	Strong barrier	Somewhat strong barrier	Weak barrier	Not a barrier
Lack of knowledge or misinformation about eligibility rules	2	33	63	2	5	34	43	18	39	43	16	2
Language barriers	0	25	61	14	9	13	48	30	21	43	30	5
Distrust of SNAP office/government programs	0	35	53	12	5	20	55	21	34	39	23	4
Long/confusing application	6	25	55	14	8	27	39	25	32	39	23	5
Amount of documentation or verification required	4	51	39	6	16	38	35	11	41	45	11	4
Amount of time required for the application process	0	47	39	14	13	22	54	12	32	48	14	5
Waiting times at local SNAP offices	8	29	49	14	3	18	46	33	36	39	21	4
Perceived poor treatment at local offices	2	35	49	14	1	11	50	38	36	36	21	7
Local SNAP office hours of operation	0	14	67	20	0	5	42	53	14	45	32	9
Transportation to local SNAP offices	6	39	45	10	12	24	46	19	32	50	14	4
Stigma	8	41	43	8	7	28	50	15	25	43	29	4

Source: 2008 State/Local/Partner Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states)=51, N (local offices)=98, N(partner organizations)=53.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 percent and 102 percent for respective surveys.

C. Reasons for Implementing Modernization

States were asked why they implemented or planned to implement each of the modernization efforts. For most initiatives, states indicated that improving customer service, program access, and participation were the primary reasons for implementation. Some efforts, however, were clearly focused on reducing workloads for staff, reducing overall administrative costs, and increasing program integrity. Others were implemented for a mix of reasons, to improve both efficiency and customer service. The following sections summarize the reasons states identified for implementing modernization efforts. The efforts are discussed in terms of client-focused reasons and administration-focused reasons. See volume II for more detail on reasons for implementation by specific effort.

1. Client-Focused Reasons for Implementation

As is shown in table 3.7, improving access to SNAP played a prominent role in states' decisions to implement a majority of the modernization efforts.¹³ Customer access efforts, CAPs, organizational changes, call centers, electronic applications, information sharing, and even some technological innovations (such as kiosks, automated response units, and online account information), were designed to improve access or participation for clients, and often specifically for working families, the disabled, and the elderly. The vast majority of states cited the following client-focused reasons for implementing these efforts:

- **Simplifying the process for clients** played a role in states' decisions to implement customer access initiatives like combined applications (87 percent) and technological initiatives like kiosks in local offices (60 percent);
- **Increasing program participation** played a role in states' decisions to implement CAPs (80 percent), electronic applications (79 percent), and information sharing initiatives (84 percent):
 - i. **Increasing program participation for working families** was a reason states decided to implement electronic applications (70 percent) and information sharing initiatives (65 percent);
 - ii. **Increasing program participation for the elderly** was a factor in states' decisions to implement CAPs (95 percent) and information sharing initiatives (70 percent); and
 - iii. **Increasing program participation for the disabled** played a role in states' decisions to implement CAPs (80 percent) and information sharing initiatives (65 percent);

¹³ For percentage breakdowns on reasons states and local offices chose to implement each modernization effort, see volume II: Additional Data Tables 2–10.

- **Improving customer service** led states to implement CAPs (80 percent), call centers (85 percent), electronic applications (79 percent), and information sharing initiatives (74 percent);
- **Improving program access** played a role in states' decisions to implement CAPs (90 percent), electronic applications (79 percent), and information sharing initiatives (84 percent).

Immigrant participation was targeted less often by states, although a majority saw immigrant participation as a primary reason for implementation of customer access and information sharing measures.

Table 3.7: Reasons for Implementation Indicated by a Majority of States Implementing or Planning a Given Modernization Effort

Reasons for Implementation	Customer access	CAP	Organizational changes	Call centers	Electronic applications	Technological innovations	Paperless system	Data brokering/sharing	Biometric identification	Information sharing
N =	40	20	27	26	43	50	34	18	2	43
Client Focused Reasons										
Simplify process for clients	✓					✓				
Improve customer service		✓		✓	✓					✓
Improve program access	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Increase overall program participation	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Increase participation of working families	✓		✓		✓					✓
Increase participation of the disabled	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Increase participation of the elderly	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Increase participation of immigrants	✓									✓
Administration Focused Reasons										
Decrease staff workload			✓	✓			✓			
Simplify process for workers	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Improve application processing time	✓		✓			✓				
Align with other public benefits programs			✓							
Reduce administrative costs			✓							
Decrease fraud									✓	
Decrease error rates						✓	✓			

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: “✓” indicates that over 50% of states implementing or planning a given modernization effort considered a reason to have played a role in their decision to implement that effort.

The N includes those states planning to implement a given effort.

2. Administrative-Focused Reasons for Implementation

Administrative and efficiency concerns led states to implement certain efforts, although efficiency goals were not always separate from more client-focused concerns such as improving access and program participation. For example, in addition to increasing program participation, call centers were implemented to decrease workload and to simplify the process for staff. Similarly, some customer access activities were designed to simplify the process for workers as well as increase access for clients. Clearly, for some initiatives, states viewed customer service and efficiency as closely related.

As shown in table 3.7, certain efforts, however, focused primarily on administrative savings and improvements for staff. Paperless systems, document imaging, and various organizational changes and technological innovations were implemented specifically to reduce administrative costs and the complexity and amount of staff workload. For these efforts, access issues were of secondary importance to the decision making process of the majority of states, if they were considered at all. The following provides more detail on specific state responses:

- **Decreasing staff workload** played a role in states' decisions to implement document imaging (64 percent) and call centers (77 percent)
- **Simplifying the process for workers** was a reason states implemented paperless system (74 percent), integrate the SNAP MIS with other program systems (80 percent), and create online policy manuals (81 percent)
- **Reducing administrative costs** was a factor in states' decisions to merge or consolidate state agencies (80 percent) and to integrate the SNAP MIS with other program systems (53 percent)

Few states identified decreasing staff workload, simplifying the process for staff, reducing fraud, or reducing error rates as reasons for implementing organizational changes, and very few initiatives were chosen primarily to decrease fraud or improve accuracy rates. The two states that implemented biometric identification after 2000 were the only states to indicate that reducing fraud was the main reason for implementing an effort.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey findings presented in the following sections first provide an overview of state efforts, followed by a discussion of each of the activities states have implemented or plan to implement within four broad categories: (1) policy changes; (2) reengineering of administrative structures and organizational roles; (3) technological innovation; and (4) information sharing and partnering arrangements. Each section presents detailed information on the modernization efforts states are conducting and identifies general trends.¹⁴ Relationships between individual efforts and

¹⁴ Analysis within the four main categories of modernization was conducted to determine if specific activities were more likely to be implemented together. However, no meaningful patterns appeared—with the exception of paperless systems, which is discussed below.

the states' caseload size, region, and population density are also included in this chapter. Summary tables describing the number of states implementing individual efforts are also included here. See volume II for detailed state-by-state tables on modernization activities.

In most discussions of modernization efforts in this section, the number of states that planned efforts, implemented efforts pre-2000, and implemented efforts post-2000 will be identified separately. However, when no distinction is made, the term “implemented” includes both pre- and post-2000 implementation.

A. Overview of State Efforts to Modernize SNAP and Timing of Modernization Efforts

This section presents an overview of state modernization efforts, with highlights of specific efforts. More detailed descriptions of each general category of modernization activity are provided in sections B, C, D, and E. State, local, and partner perspectives on key factors influencing implementation of modernization efforts are also discussed.

1. State Modernization Efforts

States have implemented numerous modernization efforts across the four modernization categories. Although modernization is an evolving process that has been taking place over a number of years, the focus of this discussion is on initiatives implemented or planned after 2000. While most states implemented their efforts after 2000, some states did implement efforts prior to 2000—in particular, customer access activities and technological innovations.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of state modernization efforts. The number of states (both before and after 2000) implementing or planning to implement each effort is shown. Every state or almost every state implemented or piloted customer access (51), technological innovation (48), and information sharing (44). Some states implemented organizational changes (25), electronic applications (22), paperless systems (28), and call centers (21).¹⁵ Just a few states implemented a combined application programs (CAPs) (12), data brokering (14), and biometric identification (4). The following are key findings by modernization effort:

- Customer Access—Nearly every state provided combined applications, accepted applications by mail or fax, and accepted recertification by mail or fax. In all of these efforts, about half of the states implemented the policies prior to January 2000. A majority of states also provided flexible business hours at local offices and outstation SNAP workers.
- CAPs—Less than half of the states had or planned to implement CAPs. All CAPs were implemented after 2000. Of the states implementing CAPs, 10 required participants to be SSI recipients living alone or preparing food alone, 3 required participants to be over the age of 65, and 2 allowed couples to participate.

¹⁵ Number in parentheses indicates number of states that implemented required number of activities to be considered as having implemented that effort. See chapter 3, section A.

- **Organizational Changes**—The majority of the changes were implemented after 2000. The most common activity was greater sharing of functions of the SNAP offices with CBOs (19 states), followed by closing or consolidating local offices (16 states).
- **Call Centers**—Over half of the states had call centers, with the majority implemented after 2000.
- **Electronic Applications**—Almost every state had an online tool or was planning to create one. (Twenty-two states had implemented one). Most allowed clients to submit their applications electronically via the online tool and most allowed e-signatures. In addition, all of the state web sites included multiple assistance programs and most only required one application for all programs.
- **Technological Innovations**—Nearly every state had created an online policy manual. A majority of states had also integrated their MIS systems across programs or agencies, created electronic case files, implemented document imaging, and allowed clients to check account history or benefit status online.
- **Biometric Identification**—Only four states required biometric identification and two of those implemented their efforts prior to 2000.
- **Information Sharing**—SNAP offices in almost all states did some type of information sharing in the community or worked with partners who shared information. Generally, these activities involved developing education materials and flyers, distributing this information, and creating informational web sites. To a lesser degree, states created informational hotlines and conducting media campaigns. Most information sharing activity occurred after 2000.

Table 4.1: Number of States Implementing Modernization Activities by Category

Modernization Effort	Modernization Activity	Number of States			
		Planned	Implemented or piloted post 2000	Pre-2000	Total
Policy Changes					
Customer access	Combined application	3	16	27	46
	Application by mail	0	21	30	51
	Application by fax	0	26	21	47
	Recertification by mail	1	24	23	48
	Recertification by fax	1	27	15	42
	Accept changes by fax	0	28	19	47
	Flexible hours	3	20	13	36
	Outstationed SNAP worker	0	19	11	30
	Track and follow up on applications	0	14	7	21
CAPs	CAPs	9	12	0	21

Table 4.1: Number of States Implementing Modernization Activities by Category (Cont'd)

Modernization Effort	Modernization Activity	Number of States			
		Planned	Implemented or piloted post 2000	Pre-2000	Total
Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions					
Organizational changes	Merging or consolidation of state-level agencies	1	4	5	10
	Closing or consolidation of local offices	2	11	3	16
	Transferring of functions from the state SNAP agency to another governmental entity	0	0	1	1
	Transferring of functions to the state SNAP agency from another governmental entity	3	0	0	3
	Transferring of functions from the state SNAP agency to CBOs	3	6	0	9
	Transferring of functions from the state SNAP agency to private-sector business	1	2	0	3
	Greater sharing of functions with CBOs	5	13	1	19
	Increasing job specialization of the local SNAP staff	4	3	0	7
Technological Innovations					
Call centers	Call centers	8	18	3	29
Electronic applications	Electronic applications	21	22	0	43
Paperless system	Electronic case files	2	25	7	34
	Document imaging	15	18	1	34
Data brokering /sharing	Data brokering/sharing	13	5	9	27
Technological innovations	Integrated MIS	6	9	22	37
	Online policy manual	2	30	16	48
	Allow workers to telecommute	2	5	2	9
	Kiosks	11	9	0	20
	Accept changes through online tool	14	0	7	21
	Recertify by telephone using automated speech recognition or automated response units	5	2	0	7
	Accept changes by automated speech recognition or automated response units	4	3	0	7
	Allow clients to check account history or benefit status online	15	14	1	30
	Establish wireless point of service systems	4	5	1	10
	Develop online grocery ordering	1	0	1	2
Accept EBT at farmers' markets	4	39	3	46	
Biometric identification	Fingerprint imaging	0	2	2 ^a	4
	Facial recognition	0	1	0	1
	Retinal scanning	0	0	0 ^a	0
Information Sharing and Partnering Arrangements					
Information sharing/ application assistance and partnering arrangements	Development of flyers, posters, other educational/informational	4	27	7	38
	Distribution of flyers and materials	3	29	5	37
	Web sites	3	26	8	37
	Development of toll-free informational hotlines	0	19	8	27
	Media campaign	3	16	1	20
	Direct mail campaign	0	9	0	9
	Door-to-door outreach campaigns	2	4	0	6
	In-person outreach presentations at community sites	1	30	5	36
	Off-site application assistance or prescreening	3	28	3	34
	Partnering	--	--	--	43
	Contracting for customer access	--	--	--	30
	Contracting for technology	--	--	--	37
Contracting for information sharing	--	--	--	22	

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^aIllinois did implement biometric identification—both fingerprint imaging and retinal scanning—but later discontinued the policy. It is not included here.

Note: N=51

2. Key Factors that Prompted Implementation of Modernization

Survey respondents were asked several questions about key factors that motivated them to implement modernization efforts.¹⁶ As shown in table 4.2, the majority of state and local office respondents agreed that the top factor influencing modernization was staff caseloads in the local SNAP offices. The state, local, and partner offices also agreed that economic downturns, state legislation, and staff turnover in local SNAP offices were the other top factors affecting decisions to implement modernization efforts.

States and local offices had similar views on most of the key factors affecting modernization decisions. The percentage of states and local offices selecting each factor were almost identical, with the exception of three factors. Almost a third of local offices identified local labor market conditions as a key factor affecting modernization, while only 14 percent of states considered this to be the case. In addition, twice as many states as local offices reported that new governors influenced modernization efforts. Finally, almost three times as many states as local offices reported that advocacy groups played a major role in shaping modernization efforts. Partner responses hovered above local and state office responses on the effects of a new governor and on the power of advocates, with the majority of partner respondents indicating that advocates played a key role in influencing implementation of modernization activities.

Table 4.2: Percent of Respondents Reporting that Key Factors Affected Modernization Efforts

Key Factors	Percent of states	Percent of local offices	Percent of partner respondents
Staff caseloads in local SNAP offices	67	71	40
Economic downturn	59	56	49
State legislation	51	43	37
Staff turnover in local SNAP offices	51	41	12
Decrease in budget for SNAP administration	35	32	14
Advocates	27	10	67
State programs	24	24	35
New governor	24	12	30
Economic growth	20	22	18
Local labor market conditions	14	31	37

Source: 2008 State/Local/Partner Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states)=51, N (local offices)= 98, N(partner organizations)=53

B. Policy Changes

Policy changes encompass those modernization initiatives that provide SNAP clients with more flexibility and new options for accessing program benefits. These changes include various efforts

¹⁶ The survey also asked more detailed questions about reasons for implementing the individual modernization efforts. Because responses were similar for each modernization activity, these detailed results on motivations are discussed at the end of the chapter in section F.

designed to improve customer access detailed below as well as state options and FNS policy waivers, such as implementing a combined application program (CAP) with the Social Security Administration. The following sections describe the policy changes that states have implemented in their SNAP agencies.

1. Customer Access Activities

Customer access activities alter the ways in which clients may apply for and continue to receive SNAP benefits. Generally, these efforts allow clients to gain access to the SNAP in a number of new ways and through new methods that expand access. These activities include allowing clients to complete a combined application for several assistance programs at one time, to submit applications and recertifications by fax, and to take advantage of expanded office hours at SNAP offices. The following section identifies states that have implemented customer access activities.

Every state implemented or planned to implement at least one customer access activity. Most states implemented almost all of the customer access activities listed in table 4.3, although only about a third provided flexible office hours, outstationed SNAP workers in the community, or tracked and followed up on applications collected. Eleven states implemented all of their efforts prior to January 2000. Only six states were in the planning stages for these initiatives, and those states combined their planned efforts with several previously implemented efforts. Table 4.3 provides more detail on the status of the customer access initiatives, as reported in the state survey.

Table 4.3: Number of States Conducting Customer Access Activities by Status

Customer Access Activities	Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
			Implemented	Piloted	
Create a combined application for various social service programs	3	27	16	0	46
Accept applications by mail	0	30	21	0	51
Accept applications by fax	0	21	26	0	47
Recertify cases by mail	1	23	24	0	48
Recertify cases by fax	1	15	26	0	42
Accept changes by fax	0	19	28	0	47
Provide flexible office hours	3	13	19	1	36
Provide outstationed SNAP workers	0	11	17	2	30
Track and follow up on applications	0	7	13	1	21

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=51

2. State Options and FNS Policy Waivers¹⁷

This section discusses the range of the policy options and waivers available to states. States were not required to take the policy options or apply for waivers; however, these options and waivers provided states with the flexibility to improve the efficiency of the program and reduce barriers to access for clients. Most of the available policy options were created or expanded under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 and the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, but states have always had the opportunity to apply to FNS for policy waivers. Table 4.4 provides a sample of state options and waivers by state. This is not a comprehensive inventory of all policy choices but a sample of the kinds of state options and waivers available.

States had an array of policy options available to them, including simplifying or reducing the reporting requirements for SNAP clients, which resulted in clients only needing to report changes in income between reporting periods if their countable income rose above 130 percent of the poverty level. As of 2009, 48 states had simplified reporting. States also had the option to lessen the reporting burden on clients by reducing change reporting requirements. In 36 states, clients were only required to report changes if there was a change in their work or pay status, or if their earned or unearned income increased \$100 or more per month. All but three states also expanded the vehicle exemption policy for SNAP to one vehicle per household or all vehicles owned by the household. In addition, 40 states expanded categorical eligibility for SNAP benefits—households that are receiving or certified as eligible to receive benefits or services that are at least 50 percent funded by TANF or maintenance of effort (MOE) funds are categorically eligible for SNAP—and had a mandatory simplified standard utility allowance (SUA) that is used in place of actual utility costs.

¹⁷With the exception of the CAP waiver, questions about state policy options and FNS policy waivers were not included in the survey to avoid duplication of information collected by FNS and to reduce the length of the survey. Information described in this section (excluding CAP data) was collected by FNS. Data as of June 2009 are included for state policy options and policy waivers.

Table 4.4: State Options and Policy Waivers as of June 2009

State	State Options					State Waivers		
	Reporting requirements	Change reporting options	Vehicle exclusions	Expanded categorical eligibility	Simplified standard utility allowance	Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview		Combined application projects
						Initial certification	Recertification	
Alabama	✓		All		✓			
Alaska	✓	Status	One per household	✓	✓			
Arizona	✓	Other	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Arkansas	✓	Other	One per household				✓	
California		\$100 earned	All		✓	✓ ^a	✓ ^a	
Colorado	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓			
Connecticut	✓		All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Delaware	✓		All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
D.C.	✓	\$100 earned	All		✓			
Florida	✓		All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Georgia	✓		All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hawaii	✓	Other	All				✓	
Idaho	✓	\$100 earned	One per household	✓	✓			Planned
Illinois	✓	\$100 earned	All		✓		✓	
Indiana	✓	Status	All			✓	✓	
Iowa	✓		One per household		✓			
Kansas	✓		All	✓	✓			
Kentucky	✓		All	✓	✓			✓
Louisiana	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓		✓	✓
Maine	✓		One per household	✓	✓			
Maryland	✓		All	✓	✓	✓	✓	Planned
Massachusetts	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓			✓	✓
Michigan	✓ ^b	Status	All	✓	✓			Planned
Minnesota	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓				
Mississippi	✓		All					✓
Missouri	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓			
Montana	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓			
Nebraska	✓	Status	Up to \$4,650	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nevada	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
New Hampshire	✓	\$100 earned or unearned	One per household	✓	✓	✓	✓	
New Jersey	✓	Other	All		✓	✓	✓	Planned
New Mexico	✓	Status & \$100 earned	All	✓	✓		✓	Planned

Table 4.4: State Options and Policy Waivers as of June 2009 (Continued)

State	State Options					State Waivers		
	Reporting requirements	Change reporting options	Vehicle exclusions	Expanded categorical eligibility	Simplified standard utility allowance	Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview		Combined application projects
						Initial certification	Recertification	
New York	✓	\$100 earned or unearned	One per household	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Carolina	✓	\$100 earned or unearned	All	✓	✓		✓	✓
North Dakota	✓		All	✓	✓			
Ohio	✓ ^b	Status	All	✓	✓		✓ ^a	
Oklahoma	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓		✓	
Oregon	✓ ^c	\$100 earned	Up to \$4,650	✓	✓		✓ ^a	
Pennsylvania	✓	\$100 earned	One per household	✓	✓		✓	✓
Rhode Island	✓	\$100 earned	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	
South Carolina	✓		All	✓			✓	✓
South Dakota		\$100 earned	One per household	✓	✓		✓	Planned
Tennessee	✓	Other	All	✓		✓	✓	
Texas	✓	Status	Up to \$4,650	✓		✓	✓	✓
Utah	✓	Status	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	Planned
Vermont	✓ ^b	Other	One per household	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Virginia	✓		All	✓		✓	✓	✓
Washington	✓	Other	All	✓		✓	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓		All	✓	✓			Planned
Wisconsin	✓ ^c	\$100 unearned	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	Planned
Wyoming		Status	One per household		✓			
Total	48	36	51	40	40	21	34	21

Source: SNAP State Options Report, Eight Edition. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. June 2009.

^a Applies to select regions within state.

^b Limited to earned income households.

^c Simplified or monthly reporting is required, depending on household type.

States also had the opportunity to apply to FNS to request waivers to certain federal policies. For example, federal law requires that states conduct face-to-face interviews at

certification and at least once every 12 months with clients. Thirty-four states had authorization to waive the face-to-face interview—21 waived the interview at initial certification and 34 waived the recertification interview. Waiving the face-to-face interview allowed states to conduct the interviews over the telephone. The same information was collected during the same intervals and, if requested by the client, the state provided face-to-face interviews.

In addition, several states received or planned to apply for a CAP waiver, a streamlined SNAP application process for certain individuals who apply for SSI. This process made it easier for qualified SSI recipients to receive automatically SNAP benefits and relaxed many of the standard rules for these households, including eliminating the requirement to complete an application, waiving face-to-face interviews, and extending recertification periods for up to three years. Twenty-one states reported that they have implemented or planned to implement CAPs; twelve of these states implemented CAPs, as shown in table 4.4. Of the 12 states with CAPs, 10 enrolled only SSI recipients who lived alone or prepared food alone. Two states allowed couples to receive benefits and three states required CAP participants to be over age 65.

States have discretion to structure their CAPs in various ways. All of these states waived face-to-face interviews for CAP recipients—contact was made by phone or mail. In addition, 75 percent of the states had standardized benefit amounts, with 67 percent providing higher benefits to CAP recipients than they would receive under standard SNAP rules. In addition, 58 percent of the states automatically certified the SNAP eligibility of SSI recipients based on Social Security Administration (SSA) data—the client was not required to complete a separate SNAP application. Eighty-three percent of states only required recertification of CAP cases every three years and 17 percent of states did not include CAP cases in their error rate calculations.

C. Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

State efforts to make organizational changes and reengineer administrative functions incorporated modernization efforts that changed the ways in which SNAP agencies were structured and how they delivered services. Most often these organizational changes involved transferring program functions or operations from one entity to another, merging and consolidating agencies or offices, or increasing job specialization of the local SNAP office staff. The following section identifies which states implemented organizational changes and discusses why they chose to make those changes.

Twenty-nine states implemented or planned to implement various organizational or operational changes in their states. Two of those states implemented all of their changes prior to January 2000. An additional four states were in the planning stages and had not implemented any organizational changes. Another two states implemented changes prior to 2000 and planned to implement new changes but had not implemented any since 2000.

Of the 21 states implementing or piloting organizational changes after 2000, the majority implemented greater sharing of functions with CBOs or closed or consolidated local offices. No states had transferred functions to the state SNAP agency from another governmental entity but three states planned to do so. Table 4.5 provides more detail on the status of key organizational changes, as reported in the state survey.

Table 4.5: Number of States Conducting Organizational Change Activities by Status

Organizational Change Activities		Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
				Implemented	Piloted	
Merging or consolidation of state-level agencies		1	5	4	0	10
Closing or consolidation of local offices		2	3	11	0	16
Transferring of functions or organizational units: ^a	from the state SNAP agency to another governmental entity	0	1	0	0	1
	to the state SNAP agency from another governmental entity	3	0	0	0	3
	from the state SNAP agency to CBOs	3	0	2	4	9
	from the state SNAP agency to private-sector business	1	0	2	0	3
Greater sharing of functions with CBOs ^b		5	1	7	6	19
Increase job specialization of the local SNAP staff		4	0	2	3	9

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Transferring functions or organizational units indicates that any responsibility for the specific functions or organizations that are transferred are taken over by the entity that is indicated in the table and the original group conducting those functions no longer completes the work.

^b Greater sharing differs from transferring functions in that if the SNAP agency is sharing the functions, they still complete some aspect of the work, whereas they no longer have responsibility for the functions that are transferred.

Note: N=29

D. Technological Innovations

Technological innovations encompassed a range of modernization efforts that used new technologies or updated and expanded old ones. These activities included implementation of call centers; electronic applications; electronic case files and document imaging (referred to as “paperless” systems); and various other technologically based initiatives. The following sections describe the technological innovations states implemented in their SNAP agencies.

1. Call Centers

A call center is a centralized location where clients may call and receive information through an automated system or from a knowledgeable SNAP employee. The functions of call centers vary widely by state. Call centers may enable clients to apply for assistance, submit changes to their case, recertify their case, check the status of their claim, ask questions about their case, or schedule appointments. The following section identifies which states have established call centers and what functions the call centers perform.

Table 4.6: Call Center Locations and Area Served

State	Area of operation	One center serves the entire state	Multiple call centers, each serving one or more counties	Multiple call centers, each serving a single county	Other
Arizona	Statewide	✓			
California	Selected areas			✓	
D.C.	Statewide	✓			
Florida	Statewide		✓		
Indiana	Selected areas		✓		
Iowa	Statewide	✓			
Massachusetts	Selected areas				One pilot call center serving one particular region
Michigan	Selected areas			✓	
Nevada ^a	Statewide				
Ohio	Selected areas		✓		
Pennsylvania	Statewide		✓		
South Carolina	Selected areas	✓			
Tennessee	Statewide				Multiple centers serving the entire state
Texas	Selected areas		✓		
Utah	Selected areas		✓		
Washington	Statewide		✓		
West Virginia	Statewide		✓		
Wisconsin	Selected areas			✓	

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Nevada did not respond to the survey questions related to location of the call center.

Call centers served many functions and provided varied services. The most frequently reported call center functions were allowing clients to report changes over the phone, answering general questions for clients, and providing information about the client's cases. Table 4.7 provides more detail on the functions of call centers by state.

Table 4.7: Functions of Call Center Efforts by State

States	Answer general questions	Provide application assistance	Conduct initial application interview/certification	Process application for call center clients	Schedule appointments	Provide information about case	Return client calls	Accept client changes	Process recertification	Process alerts for office
Arizona	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
California	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
D.C.	✓	✓				✓		✓		
Florida	✓	✓				✓		✓		
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iowa	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Michigan								✓		
Nevada	✓					✓		✓		
Ohio ^a										
Pennsylvania	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		
South Carolina	✓					✓		✓		✓
Tennessee	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Texas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Utah	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Washington	✓			✓		✓		✓		
West Virginia	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Wisconsin	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a The functions of the call centers vary by county.

The survey asked states about the use of call centers. These were based on the number of calls received in November 2007, and, of those calls received, the proportion in which clients reported changes, asked general questions, and asked for information about their case. The responses are shown in table 4.8. Overall, most states did not track this information or did not know the information at the time of the survey. However, of the states that reported the information, the range in the number of calls is wide. Iowa and D.C. reported modest numbers, 1,851 and 12,597 respectively, while Florida reported receiving almost 865,000 calls in one month. The other states ranged from 160,000 to 180,000. The majority of calls were to report changes and the remaining calls were fairly evenly divided between asking general questions and inquiring about their cases.

Table 4.8: Average Number of Calls and Reason for Calls at Call Centers

State ^a	Average number of calls your call center received during the month of November 2007	Of the calls received during the month, what proportion of the calls:		
		Were clients reporting changes (%)	Were clients asking general questions (%)	Were clients asking about their cases or status (%)
Arizona	163,580 ^b	48	17	28
D.C.	12,597	DK	DK	DK
Florida	864,573	13	43	44
Indiana	180,000	DK	DK	DK
Iowa	1,851	38	15	35
Texas	162,000	DK	DK	DK
West Virginia	DK	80	10	10

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a This is the subset of states with call centers that were able to provide data on the average number of calls.

^b 55,957 calls received by agent and 107,774 calls received by an interactive voice response system (IVR).

Note: 'DK' indicates that the state did not know the number.

2. Electronic Applications

Many states have developed web sites through which clients may complete a variety of application and case management functions. For the states with web sites, all created a SNAP application that is accessible electronically; however, the web sites generally had other functions, including prescreening for SNAP benefits, completing and submitting SNAP applications, completing combined applications for multiple programs, and checking the status of applications and benefits. The following section describes which states implemented online tools and how those tools work.

As shown in the map below, forty-three states created or planned to create online tools for applying for SNAP. Almost half (21) were in the planning stages, while 22 states had online tools available (four of which were piloted). Of those, 18 were publically accessible through the Internet; the others were only available through partner organizations or local offices. Sixteen of the states had tools available statewide, while the other six were restricted to selected regions in the state. All of those six states planned to expand the tools.

required one application for all programs. Finally, 11 states, with 5 more in the planning stage, allowed clients to check the status of their applications online. Table 4.9 provides more detail on state practices.

Table 4.9: Number of States Conducting Electronic Application Activities by Status

Electronic Applications Functions	Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
			Implemented	Piloted	
Apply online and send hardcopy to FS office	0	0	2	0	2
Apply and submit online—no e-signature (must sign and send)	0	0	6	0	6
Apply and submit online with e-signature	5	0	14	1	20
Apply for multiple programs on site, multiple applications	2	0	1	0	3
Apply for multiple programs on site, one application	5	0	15	0	20
Check status of application	5	0	10	1	16

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=22

3. Overview of Other Technological Innovations

Each state implemented or planned to implement at least one of the technological innovations listed below. Most states implemented many of these activities, not just one or two. Table 4.10 provides more detail on the status of the technological innovations, as reported in the state survey.

Table 4.10: Number of States Conducting Technological Innovation Activities by Status

Technological Innovation Activities	Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
			Implemented	Piloted	
Technology for Workers					
Integrate SNAP MIS with other programs' systems	6	22	9	0	37
Online policy manual	2	16	30	0	48
Allow workers to telecommute	2	2	4	1	9
Technology for Clients					
Kiosks for prescreening and application tools in local offices and/or in the community	11	0	6	3	20
Allow clients to check account history or benefit status online	15	1	14	0	30
Accept changes by auto speech recognition systems	4	0	3	0	7
Recertify by phone using auto speech recognition system	5	0	2	0	7
Establish wireless point of service systems	4	1	3	2	10
Develop online grocery ordering	1	1	0	0	2
Accept EBT at farmers' markets	4	3	23	16	46
Accept client changes through online tool	14	0	7	0	21

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

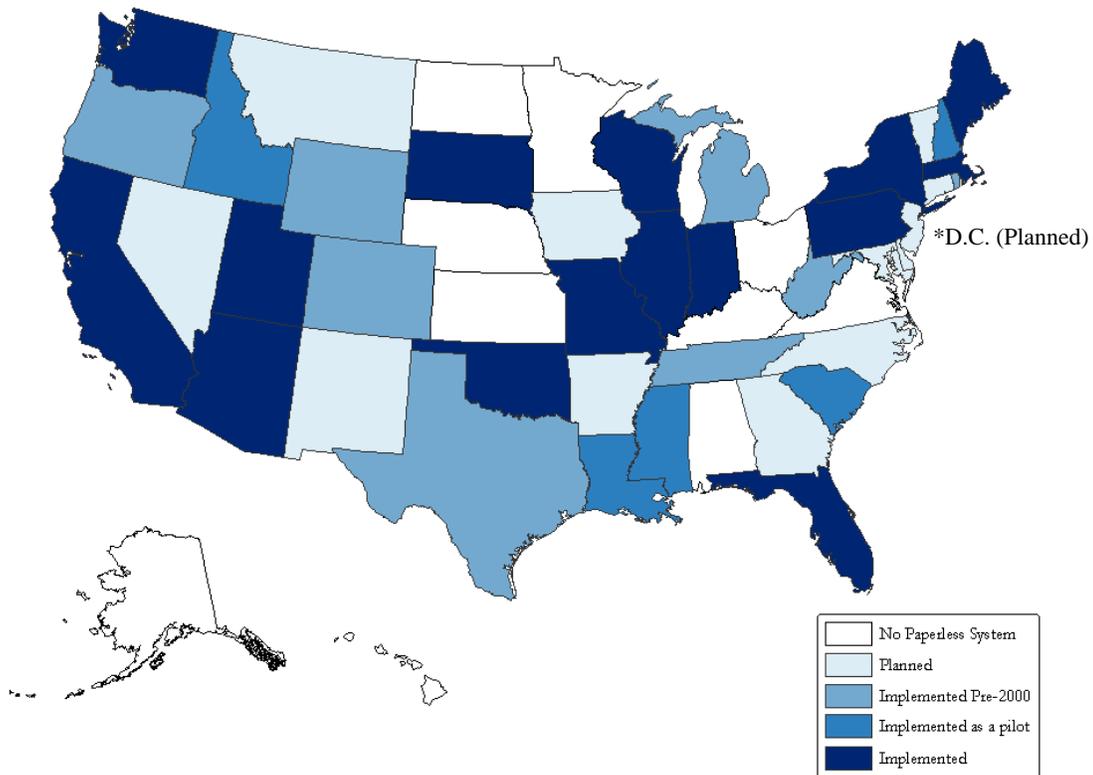
Notes: N=51

4. Paperless Systems

Paperless systems efforts included implementation of document imaging or electronic case files. The extent to which a state went “paperless” varied widely, ranging from fully digitalized case files, applications, and documentation, to having created electronic case note files that case managers could key in digitally during an interview. Using only the survey data, the sophistication or comprehensiveness of the effort beyond the status (either fully implemented or piloted) is not known.

As shown in the map below, 41 states had either implemented, implemented as a pilot, planned, or implemented pre-2000 a paperless system—23 were implemented or piloted after 2000. Of those 41, 34 states implemented or planned to implement electronic case files. Seven of those implemented the effort prior to 2000 and two states were planning to implement it. Two states were piloting programs. In addition, 34 states developed or planned to develop document imaging. One state implemented the effort prior to 2000 and 15 states were planning to implement it. Seven states were piloting projects.

Figure 4.3: Paperless System by Implementation Status



Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: Paperless systems include states that developed electronic case files or document imaging.

6. Fingerprint Imaging and Other Biometric Identification Methods

Biometric identification methods include fingerprint imaging, facial recognition, and retinal scanning. Only four states (AZ, CA, NY, and TX)¹⁹ implemented biometric identification initiatives—all implemented fingerprint imaging and one implemented facial recognition. Two of these states implemented efforts prior to January 2000.

E. Information Sharing and Partnering Arrangements

State and local information sharing efforts, along with other modernization initiatives, are often implemented through partnerships between SNAP offices and nonprofits, for-profits, or other governmental, faith-based, or community-based organizations. This section describes states' information-sharing efforts and then discusses the various partnering and contracting arrangements states established with outside organizations to conduct various activities.

1. Information Sharing Efforts

State agencies and local offices conduct many types of information-sharing activities to provide accurate information about SNAP to the public and to increase participation. Information-sharing efforts may be carried out directly by the state and local agencies or by partner agencies working in conjunction with the state. This section provides information on several types of efforts conducted by the agencies themselves. Activities conducted with partners are discussed in a later section.

Forty-seven states implemented or planned to implement at least one information-sharing activity, although most states implemented several activities. Several states implemented activities prior to 2000, but only three implemented all of their information-sharing initiatives prior to January 2000. In addition, 10 states were in the planning stages with some initiatives and all but one of the states were combining the planned efforts with several previously implemented efforts.

Table 4.11 provides more detail on the status of information-sharing initiatives, as reported in the state survey. The majority of states were involved in developing and distributing information and educational materials, with 38 states developing materials and 37 distributing materials. An equal number of states reported that they had developed web sites providing information to the public and had staff who conducted in-person outreach presentations in the community. About two-thirds of states provided off-site prescreening and application assistance for clients. A smaller number of states developed toll-free informational hotlines and conducted media, direct mail, and door-to-door outreach campaigns.

¹⁹ Illinois did implement biometric identification but later discontinued the policy.

Table 4.11: Number of States Conducting Information-Sharing Activities by Status

Information-Sharing Activities	Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
			Implemented	Piloted	
Development of flyers, posters, or educational/informational materials	4	7	27	0	38
Distribution of flyers or other materials	3	5	29	0	37
Informational web site	3	8	26	0	37
Development of toll-free informational hotlines	0	8	19	0	27
Media campaign	3	1	16	0	20
Direct mail campaign	0	0	9	0	9
Door-to-door outreach campaigns	2	0	4	0	6
In-person outreach presentations at community sites	1	5	29	1	36
Off-site application assistance or prescreening	3	3	28	0	34

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=47

2. Partnering and Contracting Arrangements

Information sharing, as well as customer access activities and technological innovations, often were conducted with the assistance of partners at the state or local level. Almost 95 percent of states reported some type of partnering arrangement with an outside organization. Arrangements included paid contracts with partners, unpaid contracts, grants, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), memorandums of agreement (MOAs), and oral agreements. This section briefly discusses the basic characteristics of the organizations that responded to the partner organization survey and details specific partnering arrangements reported by states. Finally, the section includes information on the types of functions states contract to outside organizations.

Partner Survey Respondents

Partner survey respondents, while not necessarily representative of the broader population of partners with which state and local offices collaborate, provided insight into the types of partner organizations that provided assistance in conducting various modernization activities.²⁰

The majority (58 percent) of partners that responded to the survey considered themselves CBOs, while far fewer were FBOs (8 percent), for-profits (3 percent), or some other type of nonprofit (18 percent). Another 10 percent described themselves as local government agencies. These partner organizations overwhelmingly operated in select areas in their states, with only 23 percent of the respondents reporting that they operated statewide. The size of these organizations varied widely, ranging from 1 to 16,000 full-time employees. On average, partner respondents reported around 380 full-time equivalent staff (FTEs), with a median of 35 FTEs.

Respondent organizations served many functions and generally provided more than one type of service relevant to SNAP. On average, respondents indicated that they provided around 5 of the 13 services presented in the survey. A large majority of partner survey respondents

²⁰ See chapter 2.D for more detail about the limitations of the partner survey sample.

provided information and referral services (70 percent) or outreach and application assistance (66 percent). Slightly fewer respondents provided general supportive services (53 percent), food assistance (52 percent), financial assistance (37 percent), or nutrition education (35 percent). Services were targeted toward working families (82 percent of respondents) and vulnerable populations, including the elderly (63 percent), the disabled (57 percent), immigrants (60 percent), and the homeless (66 percent). Only 8 percent of respondents primarily served government agencies.

Primary funding sources for partners were grants from foundations (65 percent) and federal contracts and grants (63 percent). Most partner organizations also reported state government contracts and grants as a primary source of funding, as well as contributions and general community fundraising. Almost a third of respondents reported using service fees as a primary source of funds.

Partners Involved in SNAP Customer Access and Information Sharing Activities

State survey respondents indicated that they frequently worked with partners to increase awareness about and access to SNAP. Overall, 43 states collaborated with such partners as community nonprofit organizations, other government agencies, and private contractors to conduct either customer access or information sharing activities. Generally, partners conducted information sharing efforts, but they also served as alternative sites for clients to apply for SNAP, provided application assistance, or tracked and conducted follow-up activities with clients who needed additional attention after the initial assistance with the application process.

According to the state surveys, 41 states used partners to conduct customer access activities. More than half of the states indicated that they worked with partners with whom they had experience or who had a good reputation. Only 8 states recruited partners through a competitive bid process; 14 received unsolicited proposals from partners. Staff in partner organizations received training in almost every state, mostly by SNAP agency staff or other skilled partner organizations. About half of the states paid partners through written agreements.

Table 4.12 provides information on the use of partners for customer access efforts. Most states used partners to conduct information sharing activities and application assistance. Twenty-one states used partners for tracking and following up with clients and for providing alternative locations to apply for benefits. CBOs were the most common partners for all four types of activities. Of the government program partners, state SNAP agencies partnered with the Medicaid and TANF programs most often, depending on the activity. About 30 percent of states worked with private contractors or vendors for partnering on customer access activities.

Table 4.12: Percent of States Using Various Types of Partners by Customer Access Activity

Category of Partner	Type of Partner	Information sharing (N = 39)	Application assistance (N= 36)	Track and follow up (N = 21)	Alternative location to apply for SNAP (N = 21)
Nonprofits	CBO	82	83	57	85
	FBO	33	13	29	30
	National nonprofit	13	8	10	9
Other government programs	WIC	38	14	10	21
	WIA	15	8	10	9
	Medicaid/medical assistance	51	56	48	33
	Child support	15	8	5	6
	TANF	46	47	43	18
	Energy assistance	36	19	19	15
Private business or vendors		25	31	29	30

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

States also frequently worked with partner organizations to reach out to the community and increase awareness about SNAP. Partners were often community nonprofits or other government agencies and were typically involved with many types of information sharing, including creating and distributing materials, developing informational web sites, and providing application assistance to clients. According to the state survey, 34 states used partners to coordinate and implement information sharing activities, usually selecting partners with whom they had prior experience or who had a good reputation in the community. Only seven states recruited partners through a competitive bid process, and eight received unsolicited proposals.

Almost all of the states working with partners recruited them to develop and distribute information to the public and to conduct in-person presentations at community locations. Twenty-eight states also relied on partners to conduct off-site prescreening and application assistance. Many states also worked with partners to create informational web sites, hotlines, and media campaigns.

CBOs were consistently the partner selected most often for all activities. Thirty-three to 100 percent of the states worked with these organizations, depending on the activity. To a lesser degree, states also used faith-based and national organizations for information sharing. Other governmental agencies played a lesser role in SNAP information sharing activities, with only about 10 to 20 percent of states selecting these organizations, depending on the activity. Table 4.13 provides more information on the use of partners for these activities.

Table 4.13: Percent of States Using Various Types of Partners by Information Sharing Activity

Information Sharing Activities	Nonprofits or For-Profits				Other Government Programs			
	Community-based organizations	Faith-based organizations	National organizations	For-profit organizations	WIC	TANF	Medicaid/medical assistance	Child support
Development of flyers, posters or other educational/informational materials (N = 27)	44	15	19	19	19	19	19	7
Distribution of flyers, posters or other informational materials (N = 29)	76	31	21	24	34	31	24	17
Development of informational web sites (N = 26)	35	8	15	15	15	31	27	12
Development of toll-free informational hotlines (N = 19)	37	11	11	11	16	21	21	11
Media campaign (N = 16)	44	13	25	25	19	13	13	6
Direct-mail campaign (N = 9)	33	22	11	11	22	11	11	11
Door-to-door outreach campaigns (N = 4)	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
In-person outreach presentations at community sites (N = 30)	60	30	23	17	13	10	10	7
Off-site application assistance or prescreening (N = 28)	71	25	11	21	18	18	14	7

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Contracted Functions

States were asked about SNAP functions that were contracted to outside entities. The following section discusses the types of functions states contracted to outside organizations within the broader categories of technological initiatives, information sharing, and customer access.

According to the state survey, 46 states contracted or planned to contract with another organization to perform some SNAP functions related to technological innovations, information sharing, or customer access. For technological initiatives, states frequently contracted with partners who had expertise in developing, using, or managing technology. Thirty-seven states used contractors to develop, implement, and manage aspects of their technological initiatives. As shown in table 4.14, most states employed partners for designing technological innovations, such as selecting and installing hardware and software, programming systems, and maintaining and supporting systems.

Table 4.14: Technological Functions Contracted Out to Partners by State

State	Needs assessment	Design	Selection and installation of hardware	Selection and installation of software	System programming	Training	System maintenance and support	Data management	Document imaging operations
Alaska	✓	✓				✓			
Arkansas		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
California	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colorado	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
D.C.			✓			✓			
Florida					✓		✓		
Georgia		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Hawaii		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Idaho	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Illinois		✓		✓			✓		
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Maine		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Maryland		✓			✓		✓		
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Minnesota		✓							
Mississippi		✓					✓		
Nebraska	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
New Jersey	✓	✓	✓						✓
New Mexico							✓		
New York		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Dakota		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Ohio		✓					✓		
Oregon							✓		
Pennsylvania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Rhode Island		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tennessee		✓							
Texas		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Utah		✓			✓				
Vermont			✓						✓
Virginia		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
West Virginia		✓			✓		✓	✓	
Wisconsin		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Wyoming		✓					✓		
Total	11	30	21	20	23	13	26	13	12

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: Connecticut and Delaware contracted out technological functions but were unable to name those functions specifically.

Thirty-four states used contractors to conduct information sharing activities and customer access initiatives. Very few states worked with outside contractors to carry out case management

functions or to operate call centers, but a high proportion of states contracted out information sharing activities and translation efforts. Table 4.15 provides more detail on the types of information sharing and customer access functions states contracted to outside entities.

Table 4.15: Number of States Contracting Information Sharing and Customer Access Functions to Outside Entities by Status

Contracting Activities	Planned	Implemented pre-2000	Post-2000		Total
			Implemented	Piloted	
Information sharing activities	0	3	18	1	22
Prescreening activities	0	0	10	0	10
Application assistance	0	2	11	1	14
Submitting application/documents	0	0	8	1	9
Tracking and follow-up of applications	0	0	4	0	4
Interpretation/translation	0	5	17	0	22
Out-stationed workers	0	0	5	0	5
Operating call centers	0	0	3	0	3
Case management	1	0	1	0	2

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=34

F. Training and Hiring Staff for all Modernization Efforts

Both state and local survey respondents were asked about training procedures and the incidence of hiring new staff for certain modernization efforts. The local surveys contained more questions related to training and hiring procedures and thus provided more detailed information on these topics.

Increased training needs and changing staff levels

Implementation of modernization efforts increased the need for staff training in some local SNAP offices. Forty-six percent of the local offices in states that implemented organizational and administrative changes indicated that the changes increased the number of staff trainings. Electronic applications similarly increased training needs for 43 percent of local respondents in states implementing an online tool. Forty-seven percent of local offices in states implementing technological innovations experienced a need for increased training. However, training needs increased for only 29 percent of local offices in states implementing a call center.

A majority of SNAP offices indicated that they provided specific training for various modernization initiatives, mostly conducted by state and local SNAP staff. Sixty-nine percent of local offices in states implementing organizational and administrative changes received training, predominantly from state or local staff, with only about 10 percent receiving training from partner organizations or contractors. Eighty percent of state agencies and 88 percent of local offices implementing a technological innovation provided training to staff, mostly conducted by state-level staff (56 percent). About a third of the local offices also provided training to community partner organizations on new technological innovations. In addition, 13 of the 32

states that used contractors to implement technological changes contracted out the training in part or entirely.

Survey respondents were also asked about changes in staffing due to specific modernization efforts.²¹ In states with administrative or organizational changes, 14 percent of the local offices reported that the changes eliminated positions, and 21 percent reported that they created new positions. At the state level, only 4 percent of states eliminated positions and 4 percent created positions—these states reported that over 3,000 jobs were eliminated at the state and local levels, while 25 positions were created. In addition, about 50 percent of local offices in states that implemented call centers reported hiring contractor staff or new county or state staff to conduct the call center work, while 82 percent of offices either shifted current staff to the call center or supplemented new staff with current staff.

For some partner organizations responding to the survey, partnering arrangements with the SNAP office required hiring additional staff, although not at high rates for most initiatives. Overall, about 20 percent of partners assisting with the certification and recertification processes reported hiring additional staff. About 17 percent hired staff for customer access partnerships, 8 percent for providing assistance with electronic applications, 25 percent for call center partnerships, and 15 percent for information sharing partnerships.²²

The challenge of training and hiring staff

Training and hiring staff is an important aspect of planning and implementing a modernization effort. Overall, most survey respondents found training and hiring staff to be an obstacle to modernization, with over 60 percent of both state and local office respondents reporting staff training as very or somewhat challenging and over 55 percent of both types of respondents reporting that hiring staff was difficult. Moreover, close to 70 percent of states and 54 percent of local offices surveyed identified limited time for training staff and for planning and testing modernization plans during the rollout of initiatives as a key challenge.

G. Patterns in Types of States that Implemented Modernization by Effort

The following section describes the patterns observed in the types of states that implemented modernization by specific efforts. It focuses on identifying relationships for efforts implemented after 2000, but analysis was conducted for all states with efforts, including those that implemented efforts before 2000. Noteworthy variations in these patterns are described.

For analysis purposes, three measures—region of the country, SNAP caseload size, and population density—were used to describe and categorize states that implemented modernization efforts. The following describes the measures used:

²¹ Staffing questions were only asked for those modernization efforts that would typically require more or less staff to implement.

²² Only four partners reportedly collaborated with their local SNAP agency on call centers.

- **SNAP Caseload Size**—Using FNS SNAP caseload data, states were grouped into small, medium, and large caseload states. Small caseload states (17 total) are those with caseloads of fewer than 200,000 individuals; medium caseload states (21 total) are those with caseloads between 200,000 and 750,000 individuals; and large caseload states (13 total) are those with over 750,000 individuals. The groupings were selected based on natural breaks in the number of states with particular caseload sizes.
- **Region**—Using FNS’s categories for U.S. regions, states were grouped into one of seven regions—Mid Atlantic, Midwest, Mountain Plains, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and West.
- **Rural Population Percentage**—Using Census data on population density, states were grouped into three categories based on the degree to which the state was considered rural. The least rural states (18 total) are those with rural populations of 17 percent or less of the total population; moderately rural states (15 total) have rural populations of 17–31 percent of the total population; and the most rural states (18 total) have more than 31 percent of the population living in rural areas. The groupings were determined based on natural breaks in the number of states with particular population densities.

States with caseloads under 200,000 were primarily in the most rural states, whereas large caseload states were either in the least rural or the moderately rural category. Mid-Atlantic states tended to be in the least rural category, as did the Northeastern and Western states. The Midwestern and Southeastern states were moderately rural for the most part, whereas the Southwestern and Mountain Plains region states were generally the most rural. In general, the Mountain Plains region tended to have small caseloads, as did the Northeastern and Western states, even though the latter two tended to be the least rural.

Modernization Efforts by State SNAP Caseload Size

As table 4.16 shows, most modernization efforts were implemented in states with medium to large SNAP caseloads. States with medium-sized caseloads claimed the highest proportion of implemented efforts. Paperless systems and organizational changes, however, were more likely to be implemented in states with the highest number of caseloads.

When including the states that implemented their efforts before 2000, there are few changes to the overall distribution of initiatives. However, many states implementing call centers before 2000 tended to have larger caseloads, which shifted the overall majority of call center states from medium to high caseloads.

Table 4.16: Percent of States Implementing Modernization Efforts by SNAP Caseload Size

Caseload	N	Organizational change	Customer access	Call center	Electronic application	Technological innovation	Data brokering/sharing	Paperless system	Biometric identification	CAP	Information sharing
N		21	33	18	22	28	5	23	2	12	39
Small Caseload	17	33	30	17	27	25	40	26	0	0	31
Medium Caseload	21	29	39	44	41	43	40	35	50	50	44
Large Caseload	13	38	30	39	32	32	20	39	50	50	26
Total	51	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

Modernization Efforts by Region of the Country

In all, modernization efforts were fairly evenly distributed across the seven U.S. regions, with the exception of a few efforts. Low implementation rates were evident in the Southwest for customer access initiatives, the Northeast and Southwest for call centers, and the Mid Atlantic for paperless systems.

Data brokering initiatives were implemented most often in the Mountain Plains region, although efforts were also reported in the Midwest, Northeast, and the Southwest. While every region in the country had at least one state that implemented an electronic application, the highest number of electronic applications—around 27 percent of the total—were implemented in the Mid Atlantic, followed by the Mountain Plains region and the Northeast, each with 18 percent. Only one state in the Southwest reported an electronic application.

When including pre-2000 initiatives, distributions by region did not significantly change, with the exception of data brokering efforts, which became more evenly distributed across the seven regions.

Table 4.17: Percent of States Implementing Modernization Efforts by Region of the Country

Region of the Country	N	Organizational change	Customer access	Call center	Electronic application	Technological innovation	Data brokering/sharing	Paperless system	Biometric identification	CAP	Information sharing
N		21	33	18	22	28	5	23	2	12	39
Mid Atlantic	7	10	15	17	27	14	0	4	0	17	18
Midwest	6	19	15	22	14	11	20	17	0	0	13
Mountain Plains	10	14	15	11	18	14	40	13	0	0	15
Northeast	7	19	15	6	18	18	20	22	0	17	18
Southeast	8	10	18	17	9	21	0	13	0	42	13
Southwest	5	10	6	6	5	11	20	13	0	17	10
West	8	19	15	22	9	11	0	17	100	8	13
Total	51	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

Modernization Efforts by Population Density

Population density displayed a clearer pattern across modernization efforts. As shown in table 4.18, efforts were most likely to be implemented in states with the lowest rural population. Almost 60 percent of the states with systems electronic applications were states with the least rural population, while far fewer—18 percent and 23 percent—were states with either medium or high rural populations. In addition, e-signatures for electronic applications were much more likely to be implemented in highly urban states, with close to 70 percent of applications in the least rural states using e-signatures. States with the least rural populations were also the most likely to implement other technological innovations and paperless.

For some efforts, the pattern was less clear. Data brokering was equally likely in the least and the most rural states, and customer access efforts were at a slightly higher proportion in the most rural states. Information sharing efforts were most likely to be implemented in the least rural states, although only slightly more so than in the more rural states

Pre-2000 efforts were not notably different in their distribution, with the exception of data brokering initiatives, which were more highly skewed toward states with the least rural populations.

Table 4.18: Percent of States Implementing Modernization Efforts by Rural Level of State

Rural Level of State	N	Organizational change	Customer access	Call center	Electronic application	Technological innovation	Data brokering/sharing	Paperless system	Biometric identification	CAP	Information sharing
N		21	33	18	22	28	5	23	2	12	39
Least Rural	18	57	33	56	59	43	40	48	100	58	38
Moderately Rural	15	24	30	33	18	25	20	26	0	25	26
Mostly Rural	18	19	36	11	23	32	40	26	0	17	36
Total	51	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Using the state survey data and the findings discussed in chapter 4, chapter 5 describes patterns in implementation of modernization activities across efforts, over time, and by various characteristics. For the purpose of analysis, the ten modernization efforts, grouped within the four broad modernization categories, as defined in table 3.1, are used here. Unless otherwise noted, when discussing implementation, efforts implemented and piloted before 2000 and after 2000 are included in the analysis. Planned efforts are generally not discussed.

The chapter includes four sections: overall scope and pattern of modernization efforts; modernization efforts by region, setting, and size; motivations and challenges; and state administrative characteristics, including local program integration.

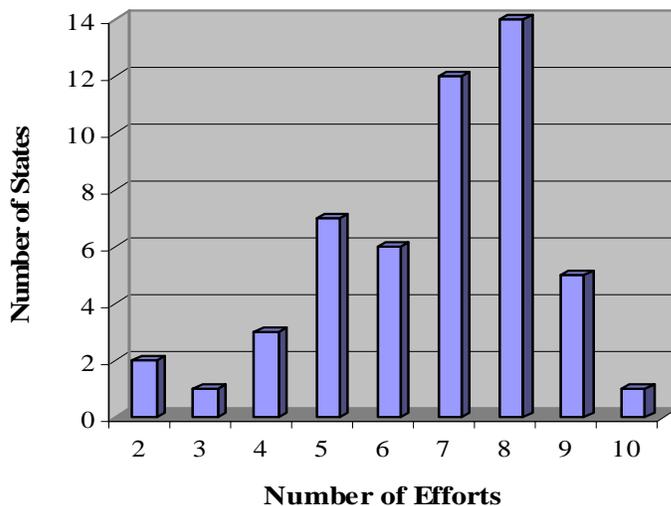
A. Overall scope and pattern of modernization efforts

The following section describes the number and types of efforts states implemented, with analysis of the timing of implementation. A discussion of the patterns observed for combining implementation of multiple modernization efforts is also included.

1. Overall Counts and Timing of Implementation

A simple analysis of the total number of efforts states implemented (both before and after 2000) and planned shows that every state implemented or planned at least 2 of the 10 efforts, with one state, Texas, implementing all 10 efforts. Figure 5.1 also shows that the majority of states implemented or planned to implement seven or eight of the initiatives.

Figure 5.1: Number of Modernization Efforts States Implemented or Planned across All Years

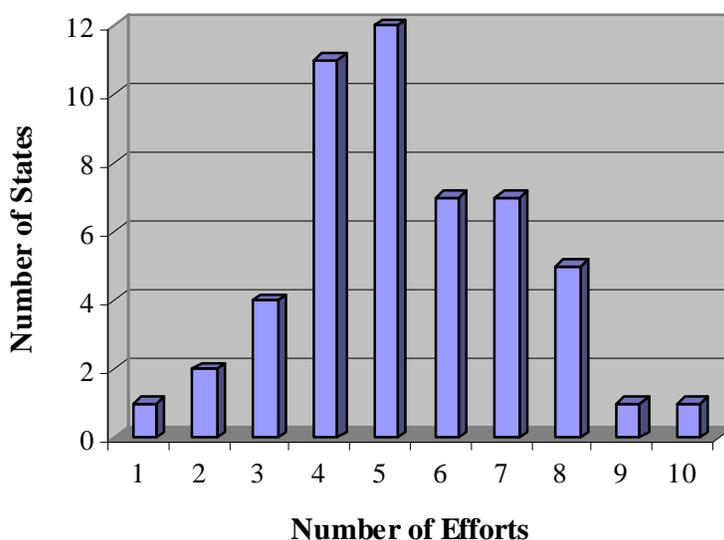


Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=51

Further analysis is warranted due to this seemingly high level of effort and the ambiguity of the term “planned”—some planned efforts will be very close to completion, while others are just being discussed as options for the future. Figure 5.2 eliminates planned efforts and shows only the number of efforts states had already implemented, both before and after 2000. There is a clear shift between the two figures; the majority of states moved from seven or eight efforts in figure 5.1 to four or five efforts in figure 5.2. There are still states at the extremes: Hawaii implemented only one effort; Florida implemented nine; and Texas implemented ten efforts.

Figure 5.2: Number of Modernization Efforts States Implemented Across All Years



Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

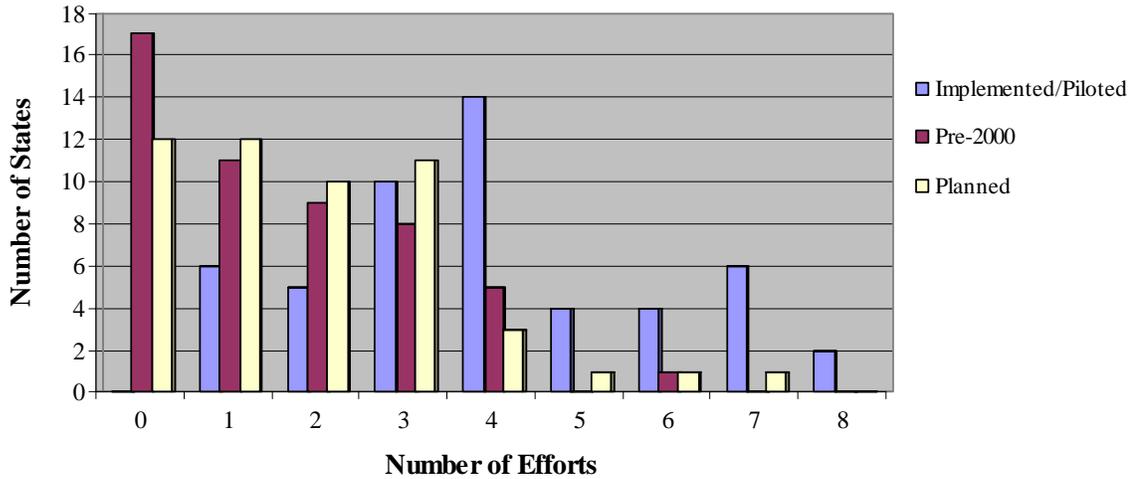
Note: N=51

To further identify the timing of the implementation, figure 5.3 presents separately the number of efforts that states implemented before and after 2000 and then the number that they planned to implement. It appears that the early implementers undertook fewer efforts than those that implemented later. About two-thirds of states implemented at least one effort prior to 2000, with most of these states implementing one to three efforts. One notable exception—Illinois—implemented six efforts prior to 2000. The efforts most commonly implemented prior to 2000 were data brokering (64 percent of states implementing the effort), customer access (59 percent of states implementing the effort), and organizational changes (32 percent of states implementing the effort). No states implemented CAPs or electronic applications prior to 2000, and few implemented call centers.

The majority of states implementing efforts after 2000 implemented three or four modernization activities. Every state implemented at least one effort and two states implemented eight efforts, the maximum number implemented after 2000. In addition, those states that were planning efforts tended to be fairly evenly distributed across one to three efforts, with a small number of states planning five to seven efforts. These are all states that have already implemented three or four efforts—D.C., New Mexico, and Vermont.

Note that the groupings in figure 5.3 are not mutually exclusive; for example, a single state could have implemented two efforts before 2000, implemented two efforts after 2000, and planned two efforts. In this example, the state implemented or planned six efforts overall and would be represented as a “2” in each of the three colored bars in the figure.

Figure 5.3: Number of Modernization Efforts States Implemented or Planned to Implement



Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=51 (per color)

2. Patterns in implementation

This section discusses the relationships between modernization efforts and any patterns in the implementation of efforts.²³ There are two methods of grouping efforts to determine if states tended to implement specific efforts in conjunction with others. First, the percent of states that implemented two efforts was calculated (table 5.1). As discussed in chapter 4, all or most states implemented customer access (51 states), technological innovations (48 states), and information sharing (44 states), so those efforts are likely to be implemented with all of the other efforts. In addition, few states implemented biometric identification (4 states), CAPs (12 states), and data brokering (14 states), so it is not surprising that the table shows fewer states implementing these efforts in conjunction with other efforts. Focusing on the remaining efforts, the following combinations emerge:

- 31 percent of states implemented electronic applications and paperless systems;
- 27 percent of states implemented electronic applications and organizational changes;
- 27 percent of states implemented electronic applications and call centers;
- 29 percent of states implemented paperless systems and organizational changes;
- 31 percent of states implemented paperless systems and call centers; and
- 29 percent of states implemented organizational changes and call centers.

²³ This analysis includes efforts implemented before and after 2000. Data on planned efforts are not included.

Table 5.1: Percent of States Implementing Two Modernization Efforts Together

Modernization Effort	N	CAP	Call center	Electronic application	Data brokering	Paperless systems	Biometric identification	Customer access	Organizational changes	Technology	Information sharing
N		12	21	22	14	28	5 ¹	51	25	48	44
CAP	12	24	12	14	6	18	4	24	12	24	22
Call center	21	12	41	27	12	31	8	41	29	39	35
Electronic application	22	14	27	43	10	31	8	43	27	41	41
Data brokering/sharing	14	6	12	10	27	20	2	27	16	27	25
Paperless systems	28	18	31	31	20	55	10	55	29	55	47
Biometric identification	5 ^a	4	8	8	2	10	10	10	8	10	8
Customer access	51	24	41	43	27	55	10	100	49	94	86
Organizational changes	25	12	29	27	16	29	8	49	49	47	43
Technology	48	24	39	41	27	55	10	94	47	94	82
Information sharing	44	22	35	41	25	47	8	86	43	82	86

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Illinois is included here, although its biometric effort has since been discontinued.

Note: The percentages in the table are calculated based on the number of states implementing each effort as a proportion of the total number of states (i.e., 12 percent of all states implemented both call centers and CAP programs). The shaded cells indicate 100 percent of the states implementing that effort. This percentage is the maximum number of states that could implement other efforts, so the closer the other cells in the column/row are to the shaded percentage, the more likely they are to implement efforts together.

It appears that some combination of electronic applications, paperless systems, call centers, and organizational changes were most likely to be implemented in conjunction with each other. To look more closely at this, the four combinations of efforts with a high percentage of states implementing them were analyzed against all other efforts (table 5.2). This provides information on the various combinations of these efforts that states implement. Of the states that implemented both electronic applications and paperless systems, over 80 percent also implemented call centers and close to 70 percent implemented organizational changes. Table 5.2 also shows that for the states that implemented organizational changes and call centers, 67 percent also implemented electronic applications and paperless systems. In addition, although they are implemented by fewer states, about 30 to 40 percent of states implement CAPs and data brokering across all of the groupings.

Table 5.2: Percent of States that Implemented Various Combinations of Efforts and One Additional Modernization Effort

Efforts Implemented Together	CAP	Call center	Electronic application	Data brokering	Paperless systems	Biometric identification	Customer access	Organizational changes	Technology	Information sharing
Electronic application and paperless systems (N = 16)	38	81	—	31	—	25	100	69	100	94
Call center and paperless systems (N = 16)	38	—	81	38	—	25	100	63	100	88
Paperless systems and organizational changes (N = 15)	40	67	73	40	—	27	100	—	100	87
Organizational changes and call center (N = 15)	27	—	67	27	67	20	100	—	93	80

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

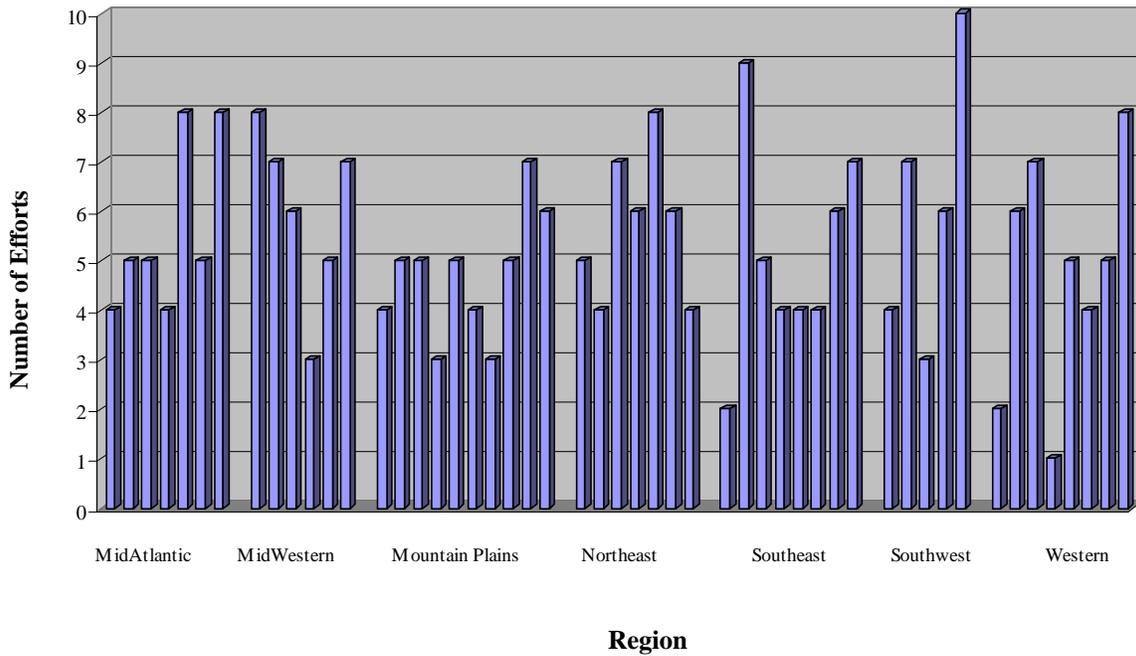
A broader analysis of groupings found mixed results. Three groups of efforts were created based on themes, and the data were analyzed to determine how many states implemented all of the efforts included for each theme. The themes were “cost savings,” which included organizational changes, call centers, and paperless systems; “customer access,” which included customer access, call centers, electronic applications, and information sharing; and “managing workloads,” which included organizational changes, CAPs, call centers, paperless systems, and data brokering. This analysis found that 10 states implemented cost savings efforts, 13 states implemented customer access efforts, and only two states implemented all of the efforts under managing workloads. The managing workloads group is so small because few states were implementing CAPs and data brokering.

B. Modernization efforts by region, setting, and size

This section analyzes how the region of the country, caseload size, and population density of states affect the number or kinds of efforts implemented. A discussion of patterns that emerge along these factors, as well as the timing of the implementation, is also included.

Figure 5.4 displays the number of efforts states implemented by region, with each bar representing a state. Overall, the Mid Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, and Southwest regions include states that tended to implement more than the average number of efforts. The Mountain Plains and Western regions include states that tended to implement few efforts. With the exception of the Mountain Plains region, every region includes at least one state that implemented eight or more efforts, and the Southeastern and Western regions include the states that implemented the fewest efforts.

Figure 5.4: Number of Modernization Efforts States Implemented by Region



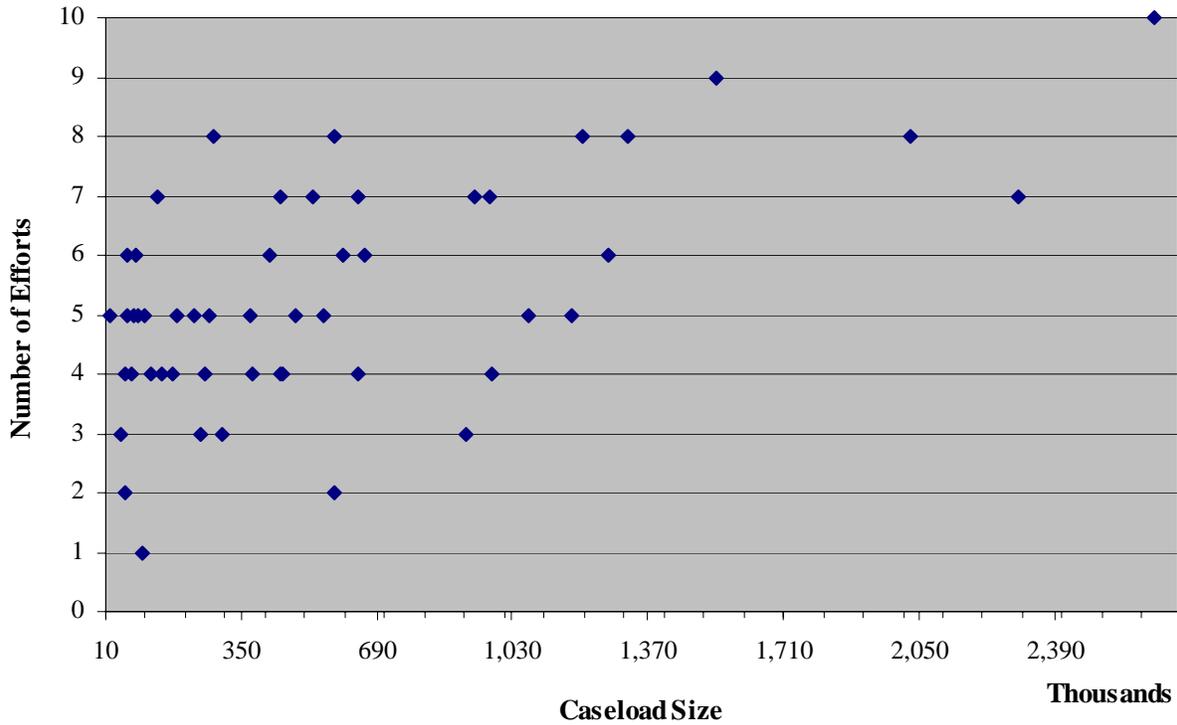
Average number of efforts: Mid Atlantic, 5.6; Midwest, 6.0; Mountain Plains, 4.7; Northeast, 5.7; Southeast, 5.1; Southwest, 6.0; West, 4.8.

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Note: N=51

In general, the larger the state caseload size, the more efforts were implemented. On average, small caseload states implemented four efforts, medium states implemented five, and larger states implemented seven. Figure 5.5 shows the number of efforts each state implemented by their SNAP caseload size. The small caseload states tended to be clustered around four to five efforts, whereas the medium and large caseload states were more varied.

Figure 5.5: Number of Modernization Efforts Implemented by SNAP Caseload Size in Each State



be more difficult to implement in locally administered states. The only efforts for which more locally administered states implemented the activities were CAPs and biometric identification, and both of these efforts were reported by only a small number of states.

C. Motivations and Challenges

This section describes how perceived barriers to SNAP participation and the reported reasons for modernizing SNAP are related to the types of efforts states implemented. Table 5.3 shows the percent of states that identify various barriers by the type of modernization efforts implemented.²⁵ Most states reported that barriers to participation were weak or did not exist in their states, but for those that reported stronger barriers, the data analysis revealed some patterns. In 43 percent of the states that implemented data brokering and paperless systems, states indicated that the amount of documentation or verification required was considered a strong barrier to participation, indicating that such barriers were associated with efforts to reduce documentation burdens. The findings also show that states that implemented call centers were more likely to feel that stigma was a barrier. This could be an attempt in those states to alleviate some of the stigma associated with visiting the local offices and requiring significant face-to-face contact, which can be intimidating for some clients. The data showed a similar finding for states that indicated perceived poor treatment at local offices was a barrier to participation. Over 50 percent of states with call centers indicated that perceived poor treatment was a barrier. Again, implementation of call centers could alleviate the need to go to the local offices. It could reduce the traffic in local offices, perhaps improving the atmosphere for those who continue to receive services at the local office.

Table 5.3 also shows some counterintuitive results for those states that reported that the amount of time required to complete the application process was a barrier to participation. In these states, CAPs, call centers, data brokering, and paperless systems were all implemented less frequently than in those states that indicated this as a weak barrier or not a barrier. These efforts could have reduced processing time, yet states concerned about the time required for the application process were less likely to implement them. The states that indicated that the length of time was a strong barrier did, however, implement electronic applications more frequently than the others. Although this could improve the application processing time, it can also create more applications for caseworkers—including from individuals not eligible for benefits—as well as less-complete applications. Therefore, in practice, electronic applications could also increase processing time.

²⁵ Customer access, technological innovations, and information sharing are not included in the table. Because of the high percentage of states implementing these efforts, there was little or no variation in the results.

Table 5.3: Percent of States Indicating the Strength of Barriers by Modernization Effort

Barriers to Participation	N	CAP	Call center	Electronic application	Data brokering	Paperless systems	Biometric identification	Organizational changes
N		12	21	22	14	28	5 ^a	25
<i>Amount of documentation or verification required</i>								
Strong/somewhat strong barrier	28	50	57	64	43	43	60	56
Weak barrier	20	42	38	36	50	54	40	40
Not a barrier at all	3	8	5	0	7	4	0	4
<i>Stigma</i>								
Strong/somewhat strong barrier	25	25	52	41	43	54	40	40
Weak barrier	22	75	38	50	50	43	60	52
Not a barrier at all	4	0	10	9	7	4	0	8
<i>Amount of time required for the application process</i>								
Strong/somewhat strong barrier	24	42	48	55	43	39	60	52
Weak barrier	20	33	38	36	36	46	40	36
Not a barrier at all	7	25	14	9	21	14	0	12
<i>Perceived poor treatment at local offices</i>								
Strong/somewhat strong barrier	19	25	52	41	29	32	60	36
Weak barrier	25	50	38	41	64	57	40	56
Not a barrier at all	7	25	10	18	7	11	0	8

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Illinois is included here, although its biometric effort has since been discontinued.

Notes: N=51.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

An analysis of barriers by region was also conducted. For the barriers with the most variation, over half of the states in the Mid Atlantic, Mountain Plains, and Northeast regions indicated that the amount of documentation required was a barrier. A majority of states in the Mid Atlantic and Midwest regions indicated the amount of time it takes to complete the applications was a barrier, and more than half the states in the Midwest and Mountain Plains regions cited stigma as a barrier. Although lack of transportation to local offices was not a strong barrier overall, 70 percent of Western states indicated this was a barrier for their clients, while 50 percent of Midwestern and Mountain Plains states identified it as a barrier.

Table 5.4 shows the key reasons states identified for modernizing their SNAP program by the efforts the states implemented.²⁶ Of the states implementing the various efforts, the majority indicated that staff caseload size and staff turnover in the local offices were key reasons for

²⁶ Customer access, technological innovations, and information sharing are not included in the table. Because of the high percentage of states implementing the efforts, there was little or no variation in the results.

implementing modernization efforts. Table 5.4 also shows that economic downturn was an important reason to implement many modernization efforts. In addition, over half of the states that implemented data brokering indicated that state legislation was a key factor in the decision to modernize, and about half of states that implemented organizational changes agreed that a decrease in their program administration budgets was an important consideration.

Table 5.4: Percent of States Reporting the Reasons for Modernization by Effort

Key Reason for Implementation	N	CAP	Call center	Electronic application	Data brokering	Paperless systems	Biometric identification	Organizational changes
N		12	21	22	14	28	5 ^a	25
<i>Staff caseloads in local SNAP offices</i>								
No	17	25	19	32	29	32	20	16
Yes	34	75	81	68	71	68	80	84
<i>Economic downturn</i>								
No	21	67	48	45	50	50	40	40
Yes	30	33	52	55	50	50	60	60
<i>State legislation</i>								
No	25	50	52	55	43	50	40	52
Yes	26	50	48	45	57	50	60	48
<i>Staff turnover in local SNAP offices</i>								
No	25	42	38	45	29	46	20	24
Yes	26	58	62	55	71	54	80	76
<i>Decrease in budget for SNAP Program administration</i>								
No	33	58	57	55	71	64	60	48
Yes	18	42	43	45	29	36	40	52
<i>Advocates</i>								
No	37	50	57	59	71	61	20	60
Yes	14	50	43	41	29	39	80	40
<i>New governor</i>								
No	39	83	67	73	79	71	20	72
Yes	12	17	33	27	21	29	80	28

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service

^a Illinois is included here, although its biometric effort has since been discontinued.

Notes: N=51. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

Analyzing the key reasons for implementing modernization activities by region does not reveal a lot of variation—most regions include states that agree that the economic downturn, state legislation, and staff caseloads in the local offices were reasons for modernizing. However, it appears that the Mid Atlantic and Southeast have fewer states affected by state legislation, and the Mountain Plains region has fewer states citing caseloads as a reason for modernization. Interestingly, all states in the Southwest region indicated that staff turnover was a key reason for

modernization, and almost 60 percent of states in the Northeast region felt that decreased budgets and staff turnover were important motivations for modernization.

D. Administrative characteristics, including program integration at the local level

This section analyzes the relationship between the number and type of additional assistance programs agencies administer—beyond SNAP—and the types of efforts states implemented. The number of programs local offices administer in conjunction with SNAP could affect the number of modernization activities they are able to implement—either if they administer few additional programs or if they administer many.

An analysis of the number of additional assistance programs local offices administer by the modernization efforts implemented in the state showed that comparatively few efforts were implemented in the 14 percent of states that administered only one or two other assistance programs. Table 5.5 shows that across all efforts, the majority were implemented in states where local offices administered three to five additional assistance programs. Fifty to 60 percent of states that implemented call centers, electronic applications, data brokering, paperless systems, customer access, technological innovations, and information sharing administered between three and five additional assistance programs together in their local offices. For several efforts—CAPs, electronic applications, biometric identification, and organizational changes—between 25 and 40 percent of states administered six additional programs at the local level. Beyond those activities, few efforts were implemented for the states that administered six to eight additional programs. An analysis of the number of additional programs that caseworkers manage and that are included in the same MIS showed similar patterns.

Table 5.5: Percent of Local Offices Administering Other Assistance Programs, by Modernization Effort

Number of Additional Assistance Programs Administered by Local Offices	N	CAP	Call center	Electronic application	Data brokering	Paperless systems	Biometric identification	Customer access	Organizational changes	Technological innovations	Information sharing
N		12	21	22	14	28	5 ^a	51	25	48	44
0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	2
1	2	17	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	4	2
2	3	17	14	9	14	7	20	6	12	6	7
3	8	17	29	18	14	25	20	16	24	17	16
4	9	25	19	27	7	11	20	18	12	17	20
5	11	0	14	18	29	21	0	22	12	23	20
6	9	25	19	27	14	25	40	18	32	17	16
7	4	0	0	0	7	0	0	8	8	6	9
8	3	0	5	0	14	7	0	6	0	6	7

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

^a Illinois is included here, although its biometric effort has since been discontinued.

Notes: N=51. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

Analysis based on the type of additional programs administered together did not reveal any notable patterns. It appears that the majority of states implementing most modernization efforts administered TANF and Medicaid programs as well as SNAP. The only point of interest is that the majority of the states with CAPs did not administer or conduct case management for the SSI program. This finding should be interpreted cautiously since only 12 states implemented CAPs, but it may indicate that administration of the SSI program is not crucial to implementing a CAP.

CHAPTER 6: PERCEIVED IMPACTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

This section discusses the perceived impacts of the various modernization efforts and the lessons states and local agencies have learned. The surveys asked the state and local offices to provide their overall opinions of the modernization efforts and their perceptions of the impacts of each individual effort. In addition, for many efforts, local offices were asked their opinion on the overall impact of each effort on their staff and clients. The partner surveys posed similar questions about modernization activities. Partner survey data are included when they offer additional perspective or detail. The last section of the chapter summarizes the challenges and successes of modernization and any lessons learned.

A. Overall Perceived Impacts of Modernization Efforts

Generally, both the states and local offices viewed their modernization efforts positively. The majority of respondents agreed that modernization efforts have a strong or somewhat strong positive impact on both clients' access to SNAP and customer satisfaction. Most of the states and local offices felt that the efforts had a neutral impact on client fraud, error rates, and administrative cost savings. Few respondents rated the impacts of modernization efforts negatively, although many indicated that they did not know the impacts on fraud, error rates, and administrative costs. Table 6.1 provides additional details about the perceived impacts of modernization efforts.

Partner survey views on customer satisfaction differed greatly from those of both state and local offices—many partners rated the effects of modernization on customer services as strongly or somewhat negative. About one-third of partner respondents also rated the impact on client access as somewhat or strongly negative.²⁷

²⁷ See chapter 2.D for more detail about the limitations of the partner survey sample.

Table 6.1: Percent of States and Local Offices and Partners Reporting Perceived Impacts of Overall Modernization Efforts across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Strongly positive			Somewhat positive			Neutral			Somewhat negative			Strongly negative			Do Not Know		
	State	Local	Partner	State	Local	Partner	State	Local	Partner	State	Local	Partner	State	Local	Partner	State	Local	Partner
Increased clients' access to the SNAP	53	29	33	39	43	28	4	15	8	0	1	14	2	2	2	2	10	15
Decreased fraud	6	11	12	10	33	12	55	34	26	0	4	4	0	3	2	29	15	44
Decreased error rates	14	3	20	29	15	16	37	36	16	6	5	12	0	2	6	14	39	30
Administrative cost savings	12	3	12	14	17	16	31	44	24	6	7	2	2	3	4	35	26	42
Increased customer satisfaction	35	27	26	51	38	14	6	14	10	0	9	14	2	2	18	6	10	18

Source: 2008 State/Local/Partner Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 51, N (local offices) = 93, N (partner organizations) = 52. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

B. Perceived Effects of Specific Modernization Efforts

Although state and local office staff tended to rate overall modernization highly, when asked about each individual effort, the results were quite different. As presented in table 6.2, overall, the states rated modernization efforts much higher than the local offices. For six of the eight efforts, at least 50 percent of the states rated the efforts as strongly positive, while 50 percent of local offices only rated two of the efforts as strongly positive.²⁸ In some cases the range is quite large. Ninety-two percent of states believed that CAPs had a strongly positive impact, whereas 54 percent of local offices did. In addition, 57 percent of states reported that electronic applications had a strongly positive effect, but only 26 percent of local agencies agreed. Also, the local offices rated modernization efforts as neutral more often than the states did.

Table 6.2: Percent of States and Local Offices Indicating Perceived Assessment of Modernization

Modernization Effort	Survey (N)	Strongly positive	Somewhat positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Strongly negative
Customer access	State (42)	52	43	5	0	0
	Local (80)	38	43	15	5	0
CAP	State (12)	92	8	0	0	0
	Local (26)	54	19	23	4	0
Organizational/operational changes	State (50)	50	32	16	2	0
	Local (21)	29	29	38	5	0
Call centers	State (18)	50	33	11	6	0
	Local (34)	53	24	9	15	0
Electronic applications	State (23)	57	35	9	0	0
	Local (70)	26	31	31	9	3
Technological innovations	State (50)	48	32	18	2	0
	Local (85)	34	28	29	6	2
Biometric identification	State (2)	0	50	50	0	0
	Local (7)	0	29	57	0	14
Information sharing	State (42)	55	41	5	0	0
	Local (75)	36	43	19	1	1

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

None of the states rated any modernization efforts as strongly negative, and states rarely rated any as somewhat negative. However, the local offices used these ratings more often, and almost a third of locals rated call centers as somewhat negative and biometrics as strongly negative. Over 10 percent of local offices also rated electronic applications as somewhat or strongly negative, whereas no states rated them negatively.

²⁸ Note that the survey was organized into 8 broad modernization efforts, instead of the 10 discussed in this report—paperless systems and data brokering were included as activities under technological innovations in the survey. The questions about perceived effects were asked about overall efforts, not by specific activity. Therefore, the perceived effects of paperless systems and data brokering are included in the perceptions of technological innovations overall.

1. Perceived Effects of Customer Access Activities

For customer access activities, the states tended to rate individual outcomes slightly more positively than the local offices, but overall the states and the local respondents generally agreed that this effort had a positive impact. A majority of respondents agreed that participation increased due to these efforts. In addition, the majority (67 percent of states and 54 percent of locals) felt that participation among working families increased and that customer satisfaction also increased. Overall, respondents reported that there was no change in fraud or error rates or that they did not know the effect on error rates. A quarter of states and a third of local offices also thought that customer access efforts increased administrative costs. Table 6.3 provides more detail on perceived impacts of customer access activities across outcomes.

Table 6.3: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Customer Access Activities across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	76	56	0	0	10	23	14	21
Participation of working families	67	54	0	0	2	20	31	26
Participation of the elderly	38	41	0	0	29	29	33	30
Participation of the disabled	38	40	0	0	26	30	36	30
Participation of immigrants	33	26	0	0	21	25	45	49
Administrative costs	24	33	10	5	36	29	31	34
Customer satisfaction	64	59	0	3	14	15	21	24
Fraud	2	5	7	1	48	34	43	60
Error rates	9	8	30	19	33	39	26	35

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 42, N (local offices) = 80.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

2. Perceived Effects of CAPs

For the 12 states that have implemented CAPs, the respondents agreed that CAPs had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the various outcomes. In fact, every state and 65 percent of local offices felt that the CAPs increased overall participation, and similar numbers believe that participation among the elderly and disabled increased. Eighty-three percent of states and 58 percent of locals also agreed that the programs increased customer satisfaction. Most respondents felt there was no change or that they could not assess the change in administrative costs, fraud, and error rates. A quarter of states felt that CAPs decreased administrative costs, while about 20 percent of local offices thought the program increased costs. Table 6.4 provides more detail on perceived impacts of CAPs across outcomes.

Table 6.4: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of CAPs across various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	100	65	0	0	0	27	0	8
Participation of the elderly	92	62	0	0	0	31	8	8
Participation of the disabled	92	65	0	0	8	27	0	8
Participation of immigrants	17	12	0	0	25	35	58	54
Administrative costs	8	19	25	15	25	31	42	35
Customer satisfaction	83	58	0	4	17	15	0	23
Fraud	0	4	8	12	42	39	50	46
Error rates	0	4	25	27	42	27	33	42

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (state) = 12, N (local offices) = 26.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

3. Perceived Effects of Organizational Changes

Overall, states were more likely to rate the outcomes of organizational changes positively than were local respondents. On average, states thought organizational changes increased participation (70 percent) and customer satisfaction (46 percent); far fewer local offices agreed. In addition, a quarter of local offices believed that these changes increased administrative costs, whereas only 14 percent of states believed costs increased. Some local offices also thought that the organizational changes decreased participation, particularly among working families—no states thought participation decreased. Also note that, for many of the outcomes, a large portion of the respondents did not have an opinion or did not know about the effects of the efforts, particularly for participation of immigrants, and effects on fraud and error rates. Table 6.5 provides more detail on perceived impacts of organizational changes across outcomes.

Table 6.5: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Organizational Changes across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	70	48	0	5	16	33	14	14
Participation of working	46	43	0	10	18	29	36	19
Participation of the elderly	38	29	0	5	27	43	35	24
Participation of the disabled	33	24	0	5	29	43	39	29
Participation of immigrants	29	29	0	5	27	33	44	33
Administrative costs	14	24	12	10	40	29	34	38
Customer satisfaction	46	38	2	14	28	24	24	24
Fraud	2	5	10	10	43	33	45	52
Error rates	8	5	20	10	32	38	40	48

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 50, N (local offices) = 51.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

The local office survey asked the respondents about the effects of organizational changes on their office staff and clients. Local offices were fairly evenly split between those who felt that the organizational changes caused more burdens on staff and those who felt that they did not. About half of the local offices report that organizational changes increased the volume of work for staff and required more interaction with staff from other programs and agencies. More respondents indicated that these changes required more contact with clients, increased the amount of paperwork, and increased the need for additional training than reported a decrease. About a quarter of the respondents did, however, believe that the effort decreased contact with clients and the amount of required paperwork. See table 6.6 for more detail.

Table 6.6: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Organizational Changes on Staff Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Contact with clients	39	29	28	4
Overall volume of work	57	4	37	2
Level of difficulty of work	28	10	61	2
Amount of paperwork	38	24	36	2
Training needs	45	4	49	2
Interaction with staff of other programs/agencies	49	10	39	2

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 51.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

Local office staff were also asked about the impact of organizational changes on SNAP clients. As shown in table 6.7, the majority of local offices assessed the impacts on clients much

more positively than they did the impact on staff. For example, 65 percent of the respondents thought that overall access to the SNAP increased; 52 percent agreed that client office visits decreased; and 46 percent believed that waiting times at the program offices decreased.

Table 6.7: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Organizational Changes on Client Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Visits to a program office	19	52	25	4
Waiting times at program office	23	46	29	2
Telephone response time	27	25	44	4
Overall access to SNAP	65	6	27	2
Understanding of SNAP requirements	39	10	44	8

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 52. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

4. Perceived Effects of Call Centers

Overall, states and local offices did not know how call centers affected outcomes. About half of the respondents chose “do not know” for most of the outcome measures.

For those respondents who did evaluate the outcomes, most rated the call centers positively. About a third of respondents felt that call centers increased overall participation and participation among working families. In addition, 61 percent of states and 44 percent of local offices thought that call centers increased customer satisfaction. However, the state and local offices did differ on administrative costs, fraud, and error rates. Compared to their state counterparts, the local office respondents were more likely to report that call centers increase administrative costs and that fraud and error rates increased. Table 6.8 provides more detail on perceived impacts of call centers across outcomes.

Table 6.8: Percent of State and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Call Centers across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	33	38	0	3	17	38	50	21
Participation of working families	39	44	0	0	11	29	50	27
Participation of the elderly	17	21	0	6	22	32	61	41
Participation of the disabled	17	24	0	3	22	35	61	38
Participation of immigrants	17	15	0	3	17	35	67	47
Administrative costs	11	29	17	9	22	21	50	41
Customer satisfaction	61	44	0	18	11	27	28	12
Fraud	0	12	11	3	44	29	44	56
Error rates	0	9	33	18	28	32	39	41

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 18, N (local offices) = 34. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

When asked if and how call centers affected office staff, at least half reported no impact for most outcomes. As shown in table 6.9, the other half found that call centers had a mostly positive impact on staff. About half of the offices agreed that the call centers decreased the level of contact with clients and increased the ability of staff to respond quickly to client requests.

Table 6.9: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Call Centers on Staff Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Contact with clients	12	53	35	0
Overall volume of work	15	24	50	12
Level of difficulty of work	15	3	77	6
Amount of paperwork	6	38	53	3
Ability to respond quickly to client	56	9	32	3
Training needs	29	0	59	12

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 34. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

5. Perceived Effects of Electronic Applications

As table 6.10 shows, for the majority of outcomes, both the states and local offices either did not know if electronic applications affected the outcomes, or they felt that the electronic tools did not result in any change in the outcomes. The local offices were more likely than the states to indicate that electronic applications had no effect on outcomes.

The remainder of respondents generally felt that electronic applications increased overall participation (52 percent of states and 43 percent of local respondents)—particularly among working families—and customer satisfaction (57 percent of states and 40 percent of local respondents). As with other efforts, the local offices (19 percent of local respondents) felt the tools increased administrative costs, while no states responded in this way. In addition, a few local offices thought that the effort increased fraud and error rates; however, the majority of states and local offices agreed that there was no change on these outcomes.

Table 6.10: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Electronic Applications across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	52	43	0	0	22	40	26	17
Participation of working families	52	39	0	0	13	39	35	23
Participation of the elderly	22	16	0	3	30	57	48	24
Participation of the disabled	17	16	0	1	30	54	52	29
Participation of immigrants	17	13	0	1	30	51	52	34
Administrative costs	0	19	13	9	39	36	48	37
Customer satisfaction	57	40	0	3	13	37	30	20
Fraud	0	6	4	1	39	44	57	49
Error rates	0	6	9	9	30	53	61	33

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 23, N (local offices) = 70. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

The local survey asked the respondents what impact they felt electronic applications had on their office staff and clients (table 6.11). Overall, the vast majority of local offices agreed that the effort had no impact on staff, across all outcomes. Fifty to 70 percent of offices indicated there was no change for the staff due to the electronic applications. The remaining respondents were fairly split on the impacts. Thirty-seven percent felt that the application increased the overall work for staff, 20 percent indicated that interactions with community partners increased, and 30 percent of offices noted that staff training needed to increase. On the other hand, 21 percent of offices noted that the amount of time required with clients decreased and 26 percent found an increase in the speed with which clients were served.

Table 6.11: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Electronic Applications on Staff Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Contact with clients	17	23	47	13
Overall amount of time spent with clients	6	21	60	13
Speed with which clients can be served	26	13	49	13
Overall volume of work	37	0	50	13
Level of difficulty of work	14	6	67	13
Amount of paperwork	14	17	56	13
Training needs	30	0	54	16
Interaction with staff of other programs/agencies	9	4	71	16
Interaction with staff of community partners	20	1	63	16

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 70. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

The local offices were also asked about the impact of electronic applications on SNAP clients. Table 6.12 shows that the majority of local offices felt that the impacts on clients were more positive than the impacts on staff. Sixty percent of the respondents thought that overall access to the SNAP increased, 43 percent agreed that client visits decreased, and 37 percent believed that waiting times at the program offices decreased. The efforts also increased the number of locations at which one could apply for SNAP. Seventy percent of the offices agreed that there was no change to the paperwork and documentation that clients were required to bring to the office.

Table 6.12: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Electronic Applications on Client Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Visits to a program office	6	43	37	14
Waiting times at program office	7	37	40	16
Locations at which to apply for SNAP	47	1	36	16
Overall access to SNAP	60	0	27	13
Paperwork/documentation that client must bring to the office	6	9	70	16

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 70. Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

6. Perceived Effects of Technological Innovations

About 60 percent of respondents felt that technological innovations had no effect on outcomes or they did not know how the technology affected the outcomes (table 6.13). The remaining states and local offices agreed that the innovations increased participation overall and among specific groups, particularly working families. Fifty-two percent of states and 44 percent of local offices also agreed that customer satisfaction increased due to technological innovations. The local offices, however, were more critical of the costs of innovations. Almost a third of local respondents thought the efforts increased administrative costs, and about a tenth of offices thought fraud and error rates increased, whereas only 12 percent of states felt that innovations increased costs and almost none believed that fraud and error rates increased. About one-quarter of the states felt that the efforts decreased administrative costs, while only 9 percent of local offices were of this opinion.

Table 6.13: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Technological Innovations across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	48	42	0	4	14	38	38	17
Participation of working families	38	45	0	2	12	31	50	22
Participation of the elderly	28	28	0	5	16	38	56	29
Participation of the disabled	20	26	0	4	18	38	62	33
Participation of immigrants	24	18	0	2	18	38	58	42
Administrative costs	12	31	26	9	16	19	46	41
Customer satisfaction	52	44	0	14	12	27	36	15
Fraud	0	9	12	7	36	37	52	47
Error rates	2	13	18	18	34	40	46	29

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 50, N (local offices) = 85.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

The local survey asked the respondents how they thought technological innovations affected their office staff. These results are shown in table 6.14. About 40 percent of the offices thought that there was no change for the staff across the outcomes. The remaining offices were split as to the level of burden the technological efforts placed on their staff. Around 40 percent of offices felt that the overall volume of work, the level of difficulty of work, and the staff training needs increased due to the efforts. However, a similar percentage of offices agreed that the ability to respond quickly to client requests and the ability to complete work accurately increased.

Table 6.14: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Technological Innovations on Staff Activities

Outcomes	Increased	Decreased	No Change	Do Not Know
Contact with clients	22	21	44	13
Overall volume of work	42	11	38	9
Level of difficulty of work	35	12	44	9
Amount of paperwork	18	26	45	12
Ability to respond quickly to client requests or inquiries	44	14	34	8
Ability to complete work accurately	35	11	45	9
Training needs	47	2	41	9
Interactions with partner agencies or CBOs	20	4	42	34
Overall job satisfaction	22	17	45	17

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 85.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 percent and 102 percent.

7. Perceived Effects of Biometric Identification Initiatives

Only two states and seven local offices are conducting these initiatives. Both of the states felt that biometric identification efforts decreased fraud; however, only 14 percent of local offices agreed. The majority of states and local offices did not know how the effort affected outcomes or did not believe that there was an impact. One state and two local offices did feel that this effort increased administrative costs.

The local survey asked the respondents how they thought biometric identification efforts affected their office staff and clients. Overall, the seven local offices responding to these questions felt these efforts had a fairly negative impact on staff. Two to three local offices agree that contact with clients, overall amount of time spent with clients, overall volume of work, level of difficulty of work, amount of paperwork, and required interaction with other program/agency staff all increased due to biometric identification efforts. They also felt that the speed with which clients were served decreased and the level of training staff needed because of these efforts increased.

The local offices were also asked about the impact of biometric identification initiatives on SNAP clients. Although five of the seven offices did not believe overall access to the SNAP or the amount of required paperwork and documentation changed due to the effort, four offices believed that the number of visits to the offices increased and five reported that wait times at offices increased.

8. Perceived Effects of Information Sharing Activities

As table 6.15 shows, over half of the respondents felt that information sharing activities did not change the outcomes or that they did not know how information sharing affected the outcomes. The remaining respondents overwhelmingly felt that information sharing increased participation both overall and among specific groups. Over 70 percent of states and about 50 percent of local offices also thought that information sharing increased customer satisfaction. About a quarter of

respondents believed, however, that information sharing increased administrative costs. In addition, about 10 percent of states thought that information sharing increased their error rates.

Table 6.15: Percent of States and Local Offices Reporting Perceived Impacts of Information Sharing Efforts across Various Outcomes

Outcomes	Increased		Decreased		No Change		Do Not Know	
	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Overall participation	79	60	0	0	5	19	17	21
Participation of working families	52	44	0	0	5	19	43	37
Participation of the elderly	48	37	0	0	12	27	41	36
Participation of the disabled	48	33	0	0	7	27	45	40
Participation of immigrants	43	28	0	0	5	27	52	45
Administrative costs	26	23	2	5	38	25	33	47
Customer satisfaction	71	49	0	4	7	17	21	29
Fraud	2	3	2	3	43	41	52	53
Error rates	10	5	12	12	38	40	41	43

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 42, N (local offices) = 75.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent for respective surveys.

C. Analysis of Perceptions

Analysis was conducted to determine if the variation in the perceived effects of modernization, particularly among the local office respondents, could be explained by the available functions of the efforts, the amount of training available to staff, or by the level of partnering.²⁹ In most cases, the number of observations by category were too small to provide significant results; however, a few findings emerged.

In some cases, states that implemented efforts with a greater number of, or more sophisticated, functions tended to rate modernization efforts more positively. For instance, states implementing electronic applications indicated that modernization had a positive effect on client access about 10 percent more often when the state had also implemented an e-signature function. Those states also rated customer satisfaction positively almost 25 percent more often. Although only about half of local offices indicated that electronic applications had a positive effect overall, those local offices with e-signature indicated that electronic applications had a positive effect 15 percent more often than those states without it. In addition, local offices with call centers that provide more services, including case management functions, rated client access to SNAP over 30 percent higher than those with change centers only, and 20 percent higher than states with no call center at all. Overall, local offices with case management-type call centers indicated that call centers were a positive modernization effort 15 percent more often.

²⁹ The timing of the implementation of efforts and the administration of the program (state versus local) were also analyzed, but due to limited data, no patterns emerged.

Some of the variation in perceived affects of modernization may also be explained by the level of training available to state, local, and partner organization staff. States in which staff were trained on new technological changes rated modernization as having positive effects on customer satisfaction almost 25 percent more often than those states that did not provide training. They also indicated that modernization had a positive effect on fraud reduction and client access about 20 percent more often. States that provided training to partner organization staff and volunteers also indicated that modernization had a positive effect on administrative cost savings over 30 percent more often than those states that did provide such training; local offices also rated savings as positive about 15 percent more than local offices that did not provide training to partners. In addition, local offices in states that trained staff on new technological changes rated technological innovations as positive overall over 40 percent more often than offices in states that did not train.

States that contracted, particularly for technological innovations, and partnered with outside entities viewed modernization more positively for some outcomes. States that hired contractors to implement technological changes rated overall technological innovations as positive 10 percent more often than states without contractors. States with technology contractors also indicated that modernization had a positive effect on error rates twice as often as states without contractors. In addition, states that use partners for customer access or information sharing activities indicated 30 percent more often that modernization had a positive effect on administrative cost savings. Local offices that use these types of partners indicated almost 20 percent more often that modernization had a positive effect on customer service.

Although these findings are not conclusive, they do provide some insights into the variation in perceived effects of modernization, particularly between the state and local offices.

D. Overall Responses to Modernization

The surveys asked respondents several questions about their overall experiences with the modernization efforts they implemented. They were asked to rate the degree to which various issues were more or less challenging to the implementation of their efforts. They were also asked about their successes across various outcomes. Finally, the state and local offices were asked to provide the three most important lessons they learned from their modernization efforts. This section presents challenges, successes, and lessons as reported in the state and local office surveys.

1. Challenges to Modernization

Both the state and local office surveys asked respondents to indicate their greatest challenges to implementing modernization efforts in their state or county. It is clear that both a lack of resources and the process of resource allocation were the most challenging aspects of modernization for most respondents. As shown in table 6.16 and table 6.17, almost every state (98 percent) and 77 percent of local offices reported that limited or decreased staff resources was a challenge to implementing modernization efforts. In addition, 91 percent of states found controlling costs and dealing with unanticipated expenses to be challenging, while 72 percent of local offices reported limited funds were a challenge. About 70 percent of both state and local

offices reportedly struggled with competing priorities, possibly highlighting the difficulty of distributing scarce resources.

State and local offices, however, did differ on a number of issues. In general, local offices had a harder time with technical problems (44 percent as compared to 10 percent of states) and staff resistance (46 percent as compared to 18 percent of states). States, on the other hand, reported challenges with union and civil service regulations at much higher rates, and found obtaining waiver approval to be a difficult task. A majority of both state and local offices reportedly struggled to train and hire staff, and both states (76 percent) and local offices (57 percent) found maintaining schedules and meeting deadlines to be a challenge.

Table 6.16: Percent of States Reporting Various Challenges to Implementing Modernization Efforts

Types of Challenges	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Not too challenging	Not challenging at all	Not applicable
Unanticipated costs/controlling costs	73	18	4	2	4
Maintaining schedule/meeting deadlines	39	37	12	2	10
Limited time for roll-out (planning, testing, and training staff)/unrealistic timeline	26	45	12	4	14
Competing priorities	29	39	6	6	20
Limited or decreased staff resources	69	29	0	0	2
Reorganizing/restructuring local office staff	63	26	6	0	6
Hiring staff	18	39	22	2	20
Training staff	31	29	18	6	16
Union rules and civil service regulations	22	41	16	6	16
Staff resistance	8	10	26	16	41
Limited support from administrators/lack of leadership	6	41	37	4	12
Limited project/contract oversight	6	8	26	39	22
Working with vendors/contractors	2	20	22	28	29
Not enough buy-in from CBOs	6	20	29	20	26
Training community based partners	0	6	29	28	37
Technical problems	0	10	22	29	39
Upgrading legacy/existing computer systems	12	31	20	4	33
Obtaining waiver approval	41	28	10	4	18
Controlling error rates	4	16	37	14	29
Controlling fraud	12	33	18	14	24
Maintaining client access	4	14	33	18	31

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 51.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

Table 6.17: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Various Challenges to Implementing Modernization Efforts

Types of Challenges	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Not too challenging	Not challenging at all	Not applicable
Limited financial resources/cost	45	27	7	4	17
Unanticipated costs/controlling costs	23	31	15	6	25
Maintaining schedule/meeting deadlines	22	35	16	9	18
Limited time for roll-out	23	31	23	5	18
Competing priorities	44	31	9	4	12
Limited or decreased staff resources	53	24	7	3	13
Reorganizing/restructuring local office staff	23	31	14	4	28
Hiring staff	28	28	14	5	25
Training staff	27	39	14	8	13
Union rules and civil service regulations	8	10	20	20	42
Staff resistance	14	32	28	7	19
Limited support from administrators	4	12	18	40	27
Limited project/contract oversight	5	9	19	20	47
Working with vendors	3	17	18	15	48
Not enough buy-in from community based organizations	4	9	14	33	40
Training community based partners	4	13	15	23	46
Technical problems	17	27	24	8	24
Upgrading legacy systems	28	24	10	10	27
Obtaining waiver approval	7	18	7	9	58
Controlling error rates	22	39	14	10	16
Controlling fraud	12	30	19	14	26
Maintaining client access	8	23	22	23	24

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 96.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

2. Successes in Modernization

In addition to challenges, state and local offices were asked to identify their perceived successes with modernization efforts thus far. It is clear for state and local offices that the increased overall participation and participation of certain subgroups was the greatest success attributed to modernization efforts. As shown in table 6.18 and table 6.19, 76 percent of state offices and 65 percent of local offices reported some success when asked about overall SNAP participation, with about 60 percent of state and local offices reporting success in increasing participation among working families. A majority of states reported success with increasing participation among elderly (55 percent) and disabled (53 percent) individuals; and just under a majority of local offices indicated similar successes. Immigrant participation, however, was reported as a success less often, but this is likely due to the number of state and local offices reporting that they did not consider immigrant participation to be applicable to their programs.

State and local offices did differ in their perception of staff satisfaction and administrative cost savings. State offices reported higher rates of success with staff satisfaction (53 percent) than local offices (39 percent) and much higher perceptions of success in decreasing staff workload (35 percent vs. 13 percent). Similarly, the proportion of states that found success in reducing administrative costs was twice as high as that of local offices.

Table 6.18: Percent of States Reporting Various Successes with Implementing Modernization Efforts

Types of Successes	Very successful	Somewhat successful	Not too successful	Not successful at all	Too soon to tell	Not applicable
Increased overall participation	35	41	0	2	16	6
Increased participation of working families	24	35	2	2	24	14
Increased participation of the elderly	14	41	4	2	28	12
Increased participation of the disabled	10	43	2	2	28	16
Increased participation of immigrants	14	26	2	2	33	24
Increased participation of other special populations,	2	6	0	2	22	69
Decreased error rates	18	22	22	4	18	18
Increased administrative savings	4	26	14	4	28	26
Decreased staff workload	4	31	10	14	20	22
Increased customer satisfaction	22	45	6	22	0	6
Increased staff satisfaction	6	47	14	4	20	10
Decreased application processing time	8	35	16	2	20	20
Reduced staff turnover	2	4	28	8	24	35

Source: 2008 State Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 51.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

Table 6.19: Percent of Local Offices Reporting Various Successes with Implementing Modernization Efforts

Types of Successes	Very successful	Somewhat successful	Not too successful	Not successful at all	Too soon to tell	Not applicable
Increased overall participation	25	40	6	3	16	10
Increased participation of working families	15	43	7	1	18	17
Increased participation of the elderly	16	31	14	7	17	16
Increased participation of the disabled	14	30	18	4	19	16
Increased participation of immigrants	12	22	12	1	17	38
Increased participation of other special populations	4	3	2	0	14	77
Decreased error rates	8	29	22	7	19	15
Increased administrative savings	2	13	20	9	18	39
Decreased staff workload	1	12	20	35	14	19
Increased customer satisfaction	20	41	9	6	14	10
Increased staff satisfaction	4	35	21	15	15	10
Reduced staff turnover	2	12	21	26	14	26
Decreased application processing time	6	26	24	13	9	22

Source: 2008 Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N = 96.

Due to rounding, the sum of table rows or columns will be between 98 and 102 percent.

3. Lessons Learned

State and local offices were asked to give three brief statements summarizing lessons learned about the implementation of their modernization efforts. They were also asked to identify any federal laws or regulations that could be changed to help facilitate modernization efforts. This section discusses their responses, first presenting overall lessons learned, and then describing their suggestions on ways FNS might assist with modernization efforts. From their responses, common themes were identified and are presented in tables 6.20 and 6.21.

In terms of lessons learned, 36 percent of those states that provided a response felt that more planning was needed prior to implementing efforts and 26 percent suggested more time was needed for the implementation process. In general, respondents reported that more time spent planning meant less problems for the roll-out of a modernization effort. As one administrator reported, “do it right, not fast.” Another respondent explained the downside of implementing too quickly:

“Our electronic application was implemented very quickly as we were consolidating offices and we needed the availability of the online application. As a result it is

cumbersome to complete...consumers and caseworkers do not like to process online applications as they look and feel totally different than our paper application. If we had had more time, we would have programmed an online application that enters info [sic] provided by the applicant into a PDF version of our paper application. And we would have key data that would be automatically entered into our eligibility system. Right now there is no interface between the two.”

Many survey respondents indicated that modernization efforts took much longer than expected and, as was the case for 23 percent of respondents, cost much more than budgeted. Others (31 percent) made clear that more staff input was needed during the planning and design phase of modernization, as well as more client input (18 percent). States also suggested that modernization plans be rolled out in increments with tests and measurements included at every step. In regards to the latter point, however, state and local offices noted that they had difficulty determining methods of performance measurement for modernization efforts.

Table 6.20: State and Local Office’s Lessons on Implementation of Modernization Efforts

Lessons	State	Local offices
Need More Time	28	14
Need More Money	23	13
Need More Planning	36	20
Needs More Client Input and Buy-In	18	33
Needs More Staff Input and Buy-In	31	46
Roll out in Increments	13	1
Run Tests/Pilots	10	4
Be Flexible	5	11
More Training	5	16
Include Measurements	13	5
Top Level Support	21	5
Need Help From Partners	5	4
Close oversight	5	5
Learn From Other States	8	4
Technology Needs	10	31

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 39, N (local offices) = 80.

Local office respondents reported similar lessons, but often with different emphasis. As shown in table 6.20, a larger percentage of local respondents felt planning should be a focus and that it should include more client input (33 percent) and input from local level staff (46 percent), particularly the “front-line” staff. In the words of one local administrator, “Involve field staff in work groups to develop plans. They are the experts on the day-to-day operations of the local offices and will help ensure that practical plans are made. It will also help assure ‘buy-in’ on the part of more front-line staff because the changes will be viewed as a joint effort of field staff and the state office, rather than an administrative mandate for change.” Moreover, a much higher percentage of local respondents called for increased staff trainings—16 percent as compared to 5 percent of states.

Increased need for technology was mentioned by 31 percent of local administrators. Respondents indicated that modernization often outpaced the available technology in local offices, strained their budgets, and often did not “mesh” with existing legacy systems. They reported that more resources and attention were needed to ensure that local offices had the equipment needed to implement state plans. Along those lines, state and local offices also mentioned the need for greater training, often for new technological efforts. Indeed, new technology can require different and unique staffing needs.

In all, both state and local offices mentioned broadly the need for greater commitment at all levels for modernization efforts—from clients and local level staff to state, regional, and federal administrators. Respondents cited the need for more communication, oversight, planning, and flexibility in dealing with the entire process. In the words of a local respondent, “everyone has to be on board, from the commissioner to the eligibility worker, to the support staff.” Another administrator noted, “don’t be afraid to make changes as you roll out your improvements, be willing to continually look at your processes with an eye to making them better. Modernization is a process, not a goal.” This was particularly true for technological changes in some states; administrators noted that involving seasoned staff in the planning of technological innovations helped ensure there was less resistance and mistrust when the effort was finally rolled out.

As mentioned, state and local offices were also asked about changes to laws or regulations that affect SNAP modernization. Table 6.21 displays the seven categories that states and local offices both identified. At the time of the survey, the most commonly discussed policy was the waiver of face-to-face interviews. Thirty-one percent of states called for more availability of waivers, especially for those clients who “are not error prone,” and some requested that face-to-face interviews be eliminated entirely. Thirteen percent of the local offices that responded mentioned waivers of the face-to-face interview, with one respondent noting, “Telephone interviews are generally shorter, more convenient to the household (especially with the high price of gas—they don’t need to make an extra trip in), and provide the same level of service.” Around 14 percent of both state and local offices responded more broadly, asking for greater flexibility and access to all waivers and options, claiming they currently were too restrictive and difficult to pursue. For these offices, requirements like cost neutrality posed a barrier to modernizing.

Thirty-three percent of local offices and 14 percent of states that responded saw a need for the overall simplification of SNAP policy, with many singling out the need for standardized medical deductions. State and local offices found rules and regulations within the SNAP program, like verification requirements, to be too burdensome and inconsistent with other programs. This misalignment reportedly caused difficulties when trying to modernize SNAP programs administered with other benefit programs, such as TANF and Medicaid.

A smaller proportion of state offices and a slightly larger proportion of local offices requested that able-bodied adults without dependent children (ABAWD) requirements be eliminated and minimum benefits be increased. ABAWD requirements, as one respondent noted, were too punitive, and “data used to determine whether a location falls under the ABAWD provisions are too outdated for the current situation in the community.” Respondents noted that minimum benefits were a particularly strong deterrent, as well, with one stating, “This minimum

is almost universally interpreted as a *maximum*, as in ‘Why should I bother to apply when I'm only going to get \$10?’ It is the single most damaging barrier to participation in the FS program.”

Table 6.21: State and Local Suggested Policy Changes for Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes	State	Local offices
Waive face-to-face interviews	31	13
Simplify policy	14	33
Align policy with other programs	10	13
Relax rules, requirements, and verifications	21	18
Make waivers and options easier	14	13
Eliminate ABAWD requirements	3	6
Increase minimum benefit	3	11

Source: 2008 State/Local Food Stamp Agency Survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Notes: N (states) = 29, N (local offices) = 54.

A number of state and local comments did not overlap but still warrant mention. One state noted that “signature requirements from customers need a broader definition to keep pace with today’s technology,” and another found that the requirement that applicants only need to submit a name, address, and signature for identification caused trouble for states trying to screen out duplicate online applications. Two state respondents found that a lack of administrative funds often made modernization initiatives difficult, as more clients meant more work for staff but they saw little or nothing in terms of increased administrative funding. One respondent put it clearly: “The no. 1 problem for us is getting administrative funds. It would help if USDA could give some amount of compensation for the increase in administrative cost relative to the number of new caseloads [*sic*] we bring on.”

For local offices, two respondents asked that the acceptable error rate be reviewed, given the current program requirements, with one noting that there should be a grace period for error and timeliness rates after major modernization efforts are implemented. Others reported that they wished they had the technology to integrate their electronic application into their MIS system and that partners had the ability to conduct eligibility interviews and to make an eligibility determination.

In summary, state and local offices requested changes from FNS that could free up staff time through what they saw as more efficient processes, increase access for clients through less restrictive policies, and remove of some of the barriers to various modernization initiatives.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

Over the past decade, increased awareness of the importance of SNAP as a basic safety net, as well as a critical work support, has led to a variety of efforts to expand eligibility, increase program access, and reengineer SNAP. At the same time, states have implemented changes to increase operational and administrative efficiency and program integrity. Taken together, these efforts represent an evolving modernization process that has included implementing policy

changes to simplify SNAP, restructuring administrative functions, using technology in ways that facilitate access, and developing new organizational responsibilities and relationships. Some efforts have been facilitated by changes in federal SNAP policy, such as allowing states to waive face-to-face interviews under particular circumstances, while others have been prompted by advances in technology and cross-agency initiatives in state government, such as document imaging and electronic applications. The survey administered by the Urban Institute to state agencies, local offices, and partner organizations provides the first comprehensive inventory of state modernization activities, including states' motivations for their efforts and their experiences to date.

Although there is no consensus on how to define SNAP modernization and states may not always view their changes and choice as modernization, the survey defined modernization in very broad terms—focusing not just on technological innovations but on any policy changes, organizational changes, and partnering arrangements that create more efficient systems or improve client access and experiences. In addition, the survey classified modernization activities by time and date of implementation (pre- or post-2000), even though state and local SNAP agencies may view modernization as an ongoing, evolving process of continuous improvement, where one effort builds on and leads into another. Even with these constraints, the survey findings present a picture of a rich and varied landscape of modernization activity across the country.

A. Range of Modernization Activities

Among the 10 modernization efforts, every state or nearly every state has implemented some type of customer access, technological innovation, information sharing, or partnering arrangement. About half of all states implemented organizational changes, electronic applications, paperless systems, and call centers; while just a few states implemented CAPs, data brokering, and biometric identification.

Customer access activities are reported by the largest number of states, with almost all states providing combined applications, accepting applications by mail or fax, and accepting recertification by mail or fax. About half of the states implemented customer access initiatives before January 2000. A majority of states also provide flexible business hours at local offices and outstation workers.

A range of technological innovations are reported by a large number of states as well. Nearly every state has created an online policy manual. A majority of states have also integrated their MIS systems across programs or agencies, created electronic case files, implemented document imaging, and allow clients to check account history or benefit status online. Almost every state has an electronic application or is in the planning stages to create one; 22 states have implemented an online tool.

Most organizational changes, information sharing/application assistance activities, and the implementation of call centers have occurred post-2000. The most common organizational change is the involvement of CBOs in the functions of SNAP offices. Almost all states are conducting some type of information sharing effort to the community or working with partners

who conduct information sharing efforts. Just over half of the states have or are planning to implement call centers, with the majority implemented after 2000.

B. Modernization Experiences and Outcomes

States and local agencies overwhelmingly report that the main motivations for their initiatives were to increase participation, improve program access and improve customer service. Although they have limited information on the outcomes of their efforts so far, survey findings indicate that, for both state and local offices, increased overall participation and participation of certain subgroups is the greatest success attributed to modernization efforts.

The overall response of states and local offices to modernization is positive. The majority of respondents agreed that modernization efforts have a strong or somewhat strong positive impact on both clients' access to SNAP and customer satisfaction. Few respondents rated the impacts of modernization efforts negatively, although many indicated that they did not know the impacts on fraud, error rates, and administrative costs.

The greatest challenges to modernization are limited resources and the resource allocation process. A majority of both state and local offices also reported struggling to train and hire staff. Overall, states also agreed that the most important lessons learned from the process were that modernization is an ongoing process and that modernization efforts require more planning, take more time, and are more costly than expected.

C. Analysis of Survey Findings

Several broad themes emerge from this comprehensive inventory and analysis of state SNAP modernization initiatives. Overall, the majority of states implemented multiple efforts (four to five) together, not just one or two. The majority of the implementation took place after 2000, with the exception of customer access activities, data brokering, and organizational changes, where states implemented several activities before 2000. There is also a considerable amount of planning taking place across the states, with more than 75 percent of states indicating they are planning at least one effort.

While most states have implemented some type of customer access activity, information sharing effort, and technological innovation, it is difficult to discern other typical combinations of efforts. States implemented electronic applications, paperless systems, and call centers together most often, but few patterns of combinations of more than three efforts emerged.

In general, the Mid Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, and Southwest include states that implemented more than the average number of efforts. The Mountain Plains and Western regions include states that tended to implement few efforts. On average, the larger the caseload size, the more efforts were implemented; states with small caseloads implemented an average of four efforts, medium states implemented five, and larger states implemented seven. In addition, analysis of population density shows that the more urban states implemented more efforts—the majority of states that implemented six or more efforts are considered to be more than 70 percent urban.

The analysis of reported barriers and key reasons for modernizing are mixed, with few relationships appearing between efforts and barriers or reasons. There are some interesting relationships between the number of additional assistance programs offices administer and the modernization efforts states implement. Few efforts are implemented in the states that administer one or two or other assistance programs or in states where the state agency administers six or more programs. The majority are implemented in states that administer three to five additional assistance programs. Analysis based on the type of additional programs states administer was not particularly telling, but one interesting finding did appear. The majority of the states with CAPs did not administer or conduct case management for the SSI program, indicating that these states have worked successfully cross-agency to implement the effort.

This report provides interim findings based on national surveys and does not present the more comprehensive analysis that will include both site visit information and FNS administrative data. The survey responses provide a glimpse of the varied activities that might be undertaken in a particular modernization category; however, they do not provide all of the detail needed to fully understand every process. For example, based on just the survey findings, two states with call centers that accept changes may look identical; however, after seeing the operation in practice, the states could be very different. One may operate in the local office with one or two staff fielding calls as they come in, whereas the other could be an entire office with hundreds of staff whose only job is using high-level technology to answer calls from across the state. The site visit phase of this study will provide more nuanced information that builds upon and enhances these survey findings.

D. Implications for Future Research

As noted, a number of critical issues related to the implementation and operation of modernization activities are not examined fully here, in part because some questions cannot be easily or thoroughly addressed within the confines of the web-based survey methodology. Many key issues raised through the analysis of the survey data will be explored in greater depth in the final project report, which will integrate data from all three phases of the study. In particular, qualitative data collected during the case study site visits to 14 states conducted in Spring 2009 will yield richer information that will provide context, offer additional detail, and inform the survey results described here.

One of the topics that will be explored more fully in the final report is the rationale for choosing and the perceived success of the particular combinations of modernization efforts states most often implement. Why do many states implement some combination of electronic applications, paperless systems, call centers and organizational changes together, and what are the ramifications of these choices? Another issue that will be examined is the timing of the implementation of modernization activities. Many of these efforts are being launched during a period of unprecedented growth in the SNAP caseload. What is the perceived effect of this caseload growth on measures of success for modernization activities? Are positive outcomes of modernization efforts being masked by the current economic conditions—large increases in caseloads, budget cutbacks, and staff shortages? Is modernization actually allowing states simply to keep pace with all of the demands associated with changes in economic conditions? Where would states be had they not modernized? How long does it take for the full benefits of modernization to be observed throughout the system? Analysis of FNS administrative data on

caseload trends, administrative costs, and error rates, which will be included in the final report, should also shed light on potential outcomes and effects of modernization efforts.