

Memorandum

Dulce Patino

Aug 10, 2025

Memorandum

To: SNAP Stakeholders- USDA Leadership, State Agencies, Advocacy Groups, Beneficiary
Representatives, Retail Partners

From: Dulce Patino Program Evaluation Lead

Date: August 11, 2025

Subject: Proposal for Enhanced SNAP Evaluation Framework: Centering Equity, Nutrition, and Stakeholder Voice

Following our review of SNAP's current evaluation framework, we propose a transformative approach to address critical gaps in measuring nutritional outcomes, access barriers, and long-term well-being. Our purpose is to establish an evaluation system that drives equitable program improvements through stakeholder-centered data collection. The vision is to see SNAP operate as a program where every participant achieves food security, nutritional health, and dignity, supported by evidence-informed policies. The mission is to co-design and execute a mixed-methods evaluation that centers beneficiary voices, identifies actionable gaps, and fosters data-driven innovation in program administration. The primary goals are threefold: first, to improve SNAP's nutritional impact by ensuring benefits translate into diverse, health-promoting diets; second, to eliminate access barriers by systematically reducing administrative, economic, and stigma-related obstacles; and third, to measure long-term well-being by linking participation to economic stability and improved health outcomes.

The evaluation will address critical questions central to program effectiveness. These include whether SNAP participation improves dietary diversity, such as increased fruit and vegetable intake, and reduces diet-related diseases like diabetes among children and other vulnerable groups. It will examine what administrative, geographic, or stigma-related barriers disproportionately limit access for marginalized communities, including rural families and BIPOC populations. Additionally, it will explore whether benefit levels and time limits support or hinder economic self-sufficiency. Evidence of accomplishment will be both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative indicators include improved Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores, a 20%

reduction in application abandonment rates, and longitudinal Medicaid data demonstrating reduced HbA1c levels among participants. Qualitative evidence will include participant narratives confirming reduced stigma and mobile food diaries documenting improved food choices.

Stakeholders will play distinct but interconnected roles in this evaluation. USDA and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will provide policy alignment, data access, and funding oversight. State agencies will handle implementation and localized data collection. Beneficiaries will be engaged in co-designing evaluation tools and sharing lived experiences, while advocacy groups such as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) will help identify equity gaps and amplify community needs (CBPP, 2022). Retail partners will contribute electronic benefit transfer (EBT) purchase analytics to track food buying patterns. Among these, the most impactful guidance will come from beneficiaries and frontline state staff, who offer irreplaceable insights into daily barriers and practical solutions.

Two key evaluation methods are proposed. First, mobile food diaries will serve as a qualitative method where participants use a secure application to photograph meals, record food sources, and describe trade-offs, such as skipping vegetables to afford infant formula. This approach captures real-time nutritional decisions and contextual barriers often missed in surveys and aligns with Giancola's (2025) call for contextual qualitative depth. Second, linked administrative data analysis will serve as a quantitative method by anonymously merging SNAP participation records with Medicaid claims, school attendance, and workforce data. This method reveals long-term health and economic impacts that cannot be tracked through isolated audits (Schanzenbach, 2023) and supports a goal-free evaluation approach that uncovers unintended positive outcomes, such as improved school performance.

Implementing this evaluation will require both financial and human resources. The estimated cost is \$400,000 over 18 months, covering technology platforms, staff training, stakeholder stipends, and analysis software. Human resources will include external evaluators with mixed-methods expertise, state agency “Evaluation Fellows” trained in participatory techniques, and community liaisons responsible for beneficiary engagement. These resources are essential to strengthen the evaluation design, ensure inclusivity, and maintain methodological rigor.

This evaluation is grounded in a commitment to equity and actionable outcomes. It prioritizes participatory design and utilization-focused theory to ensure findings directly inform policy changes. Co-design workshops will be held with beneficiaries in underserved counties to refine tools and indicators. By centering marginalized voices and measuring key outcomes, nutrition, dignity, and opportunity, SNAP can be transformed from a transactional benefit program into a catalyst for health justice. With stakeholder collaboration, rigorous methodology, and an equity-driven framework, this evaluation will set a new standard for program accountability and impact.

References

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2022). *Policy basics: SNAP*. <https://www.cbpp.org>

Giancola, S. P. (2025). *Program evaluation: Embedding evaluation into program design*. Sage.

Schanzenbach, D. W. (2023). Understanding SNAP: An overview of recent research. *Food Policy*, 114, 102397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2023.102397>