
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES MANUAL
GENERAL PROCEDURES & REQUIREMENTS
FNS 140 PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS

FNS 140 Personnel Requirements

Change # 1-2021

May 1, 2021

140.01 PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS

- A. The county department of social services is required to provide a sufficient number of qualified employees necessary to assure that prompt action is taken on all applications. County employees used to certify households for participation in the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Program must meet the standards set by State Human Resources in the certification of applicants for benefits under the federally aided public assistance programs. Only qualified county employees may conduct the interview of applicant households and determine the household's eligibility or ineligibility and the level of assistance.
- B. Exceptions to the use of State approved personnel in the interview and certification process are made for:
 - 1. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) households applying at the Social Security Administration.
 - 2. The county department of social services may utilize temporary, non-merit-based staff for the administration of the Disaster Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS) Program. This includes retired eligibility staff, staff from other county or state departments, as well as contracted staff that are adequately trained and supervised by county merit-based staff. This does not include keying in NC FAST unless the individual has prior NC FAST experience.
- C. Program discrepancies tied to staff shortages include such areas as applications pending over allowable time standards, incomplete verifications, omissions on forms, failure to comply with the work registration requirement, information already available in the case file, etc. Corrective action is needed in many areas of program operations, but none is as important as this single area. An adequate number of trained staff is required so that each case is assured of receiving program expertise and reducing program discrepancies.

140.02 SPECIAL PROVISIONS

Special provisions apply regarding two groups of individuals.

A. Volunteers

Volunteers or other persons not employed by the county may be used in certification related activities but are not permitted to conduct the interview or certify as eligible, applicant households. Volunteers are used to provide program information, teach nutrition education, and provide transportation to the certification office. They may also assist households who need help with completing the application and other forms and in securing the needed verification of information reported on the application. In certain

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situations, volunteers may act as an authorized representative for households who are unable to personally come to the certification office.

B. Personnel and Facilities of Parties to a Strike

The county department may not use, in any certification-related activity, persons or organizations that are parties to a strike or lockout. Such persons are not permitted to certify applicant households, interview households, or secure verification required of such households. These individuals may be used as a source of verification for information provided by the applicant household if they would, under normal circumstances, be in the best position to confirm a household's circumstances. Facilities of persons or organizations who are parties to a strike or lockout may not be used in the certification process or as a site for the interview.

140.03 FRAUD DETECTION

- A. Counties are required to establish and operate fraud detection units in counties where 5,000 or more households participate in the program. The fraud detection unit is responsible for detecting, investigating, and assisting in the prosecution of program fraud. The workers fulfilling this function are not required to work full-time in fraud detection or work exclusively on the program.
- B. A written county procedure that systematically identifies and refers potential fraud cases to investigators is considered a detection activity meeting the requirements of this section.
- C. It is strongly recommended that all counties establish and operate fraud detection units regardless of the number of households participating in the program.

140.04 BILINGUAL REQUIREMENTS

- A. Based on the estimated total number of low-income households in a county which speak the same non-English language (a single-language minority), the county department must provide bilingual program information, certification materials, and staff or interpreters as specified in this section. Single language "minority" refers to households which speak the same non-English language, and which do not contain adult(s) fluent in English as a second language.
 - 1. The county must provide materials used in program information activities in the appropriate language as follows.
 - a. In counties with less than 2,000 low-income households if approximately 100 or more of those households are of a single-language minority.
 - b. In counties with 2,000 or more low-income households if approximately five percent or more of those households are of a single-language minority.

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- c. In counties with a certification office that provides bilingual service as required in 140.04 B.
2. The county must provide both certification materials in the appropriate language and bilingual staff or interpreters as follows.
 - a. In each individual certification office that provides service to an area containing approximately 100 single-language minority low-income households.
 - b. When there is a total of less than 100 low-income households if a majority of those households are of a single-language minority.
 - c. "Certification materials" include the application form, change report form, and appropriate notices sent to households.
3. In counties with a seasonal influx of non-English speaking households, the county department must provide bilingual materials and staff or interpreters if, during the seasonal influx, the number of single-language minority households which move into the county meets or exceeds the requirements in 140.04 A. and 140.04 B.
4. The county department must ensure that certification offices subject to the requirements in 140.04 A. or 140.04 B. provide sufficient bilingual staff or interpreters for the timely processing of non-English speaking applicants.
5. The county department develops estimates of the number of low-income single-language minority households, both participating and not participating in the program, for the county and each certification office by using census data (including the Census Bureau's Current Population Estimates and Projections, Series P25, No.627) and knowledge of the county and areas serviced by the certification offices.
 - a. Local Bureau of Census offices, Community Services Administration offices, Community Action Agencies, planning agencies, migrant service organizations, and school officials may be important sources of information in determining the need for bilingual services.
 - b. If these information sources do not provide sufficient information to determine if there is a need for bilingual staff or interpreters, each certification office will, for a six-month period, record the total number of single-language minority households that visit the office to make inquiries about the program, file a new application, or be recertified.
 - c. Those certification offices that are contacted by a total of over 100 single-language minority households in the six-month period will be required to provide bilingual staff or interpreters.
 - d. County departments also combine the figures collected in each certification office to determine the need for bilingual outreach materials in the county.

140.05 TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

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- A. The State provides periodic training to counties regarding policies and procedures of the FNS Program.
- B. County directors, through their FNS supervisors, are solely responsible for direct orientation and training of new personnel, as well as providing day-to-day training and consultation for each FNS caseworker to ensure appropriate eligibility determinations and program effectiveness. Supervisors are responsible for developing and instituting training sessions for the appropriate workers in their agencies.

County training programs must cover:

- 1. FNS eligibility criteria;
- 2. FNS certification procedures;
- 3. Household rights and responsibilities, including non-discrimination rights;
- 4. Other job-related responsibilities concerning the certification of households, for example, interviewing skills, supervisory training, etc.;
- 5. Date management and issuance related activities; and
- 6. Record keeping and reporting requirements.

NOTE: County agencies are required to maintain a training file for documenting training activities conducted or attended.

- C. Employees assigned responsibility for the certification of households must be provided sufficient training prior to initially assuming their duties. Formal training must be provided periodically to all FNS Program staff, as needed. The need for training is established by policy changes and program deficiencies identified through the Performance Reporting System. Inadequate performance by individual employees may also indicate the need for training.
- D. State and/or county may allow public attendance at formal certification training sessions that are conducted on a statewide, regional, countywide, or citywide basis. Attendance at these training sessions may be allowed if, in view of the agency, such participation is beneficial. The State and/or county:
 - 1. May invite individuals who represent recipients or organizations working on behalf of recipients who are knowledgeable about program rules, certification requirements;
 - 2. May invite individuals who are actively engaged in work or volunteer activity related to FNS certification rules;
 - 3. Should not arbitrarily exclude individuals (who otherwise meet this criteria) due to disagreements between these individuals and the State or county concerning aspects of FNS operations; and
 - 4. The county may limit the role of public participants to observation only.

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- D. Training must be provided to volunteers and to the staff of other organizations and agencies that the State or county uses for providing program information. The training will be in sufficient detail and frequency to ensure the information provided is accurate.
- E. State hearing officials and quality control reviewers are provided with sufficient training prior to initially assuming their duties. This training includes a detailed comprehensive study of the regulations and State hearing or performance reporting procedures, as appropriate. Formal training is also provided periodically to hearing officials and reviewers. The need for training is established by policy changes and program deficiencies indicated by the performance reporting system.
- F. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture reviews and approves State training procedures. County training is subject to county review conducted under the State Performance Reporting System. FNS reviews the effectiveness of State and county training based on information obtained from the performance reporting system and other sources.

140.06 DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. System functions are divided into three categories:
 - 1. Inquiry only: appropriate for any county agency employee who has the need to know FNS case data. Such persons can include support staff who answer questions about certification status and benefit availability as well as caseworkers, supervisors, and other administrators.
 - 2. Transaction Keying Authority: access is appropriate only to those agency employees who authorize benefits. Since direct worker entry, caseworkers became responsible for all tasks necessary to establish and authorize FNS benefits.
 - 3. Transaction Authorization: may be given to caseworkers and supervisors to key requests for supplements, restored benefits, and replacement benefits in addition to keying new cases.
- B. Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Admin Terminal Inquiry and Update Functions
 - 1. Admin Terminal Inquiry is appropriate for any county agency employee who has the need to know FNS, Work First, or Special Assistance EBT data. Such persons may include support staff who answer questions about card issuance and benefit availability, as well as caseworkers, supervisors, and other administrators.
 - 2. Admin Terminal Update Functions include Card Maintenance Screen, Benefit Maintenance Screen, Client Maintenance Screen, and Adjustment/Repayment Screen. To ensure separation of duties, Admin Terminal Update Functions **cannot** be given to Individuals that have Transaction Keying Authority or Transaction Authorization as described in 140.06 2 & 3.

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- a. Card Maintenance Screen allows the user to reset a pin, place an EBT card in lost, damaged, stolen, or other status which deactivates it immediately and causes a new EBT card to be mailed to the client.

A fee of \$2.50 is debited from the client's account, for lost or stolen cards only, at the time of the status change. If the account balance does not have sufficient funds, a message will appear, and the account will be moved to "Not Sufficient Funds" to inactivate the account until funds are available.

- b. Benefit Maintenance Screen allows activation or cancellation of the entire EBT account for a client. This function will be performed by designated staff with the Economic Services Section by telephone at 866-719-0141.

140.07 MERIT BASED STAFF

- A. Staff performing eligibility determination functions for FNS are required to meet merit-based requirements as set forth in federal Office of Personnel Management Standards, Subpart F – Standards for Merit System of Personnel Administration; Section 900.603 (pages 579-580), which include principles of recruitment, selection and advancement, compensation, training, performance, and "fair treatment" principles of personnel management. In addition, 7 CFR 272.4(a)(1) requires that personnel used in the certification process or administration of SNAP (Food and Nutrition Services) be employed in accordance with the current standards for a merit system of personnel administration. Any questions about compliance with the merit-based requirements of FNS staff should be referred to your county Human Resources Office.
- B. Non merit based FNS staff shall not conduct certification interviews or certify FNS cases in NC FAST. Staff not meeting the merit-based requirements may be used to assist applicants in the application and certification process, excluding interviewing, as well as assisting in securing needed verifications. Non-merit-based staff may also be used to assist with updating information related to Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents per Dear County Director Letter EFS-FNSEP-24-2015.