

SAVE

OUR

ACCURACY

RATE

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## FFY99 Food Stamp Reinvestment Plan



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# SOAR: Save Our Accuracy Rate

## FFY99 Food Stamp Reinvestment Plan

### Introduction

The State of Alaska incurred a \$ 979,902 liability for excessive Food Stamp Program payment errors discovered in the FFY 1999 quality control sample. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service and Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance agreed to settle this claim with State funds through a Reinvestment Plan. Alaska has a Reinvestment Plan to repay the \$402,237 QC penalty for FFY98. The goals of the Reinvestment Plans are improved Food Stamp payment accuracy throughout the State and to achieve other program improvements. Early results from the FFY98 Reinvestment Plan give evidence that Alaska's Reinvestment efforts are succeeding. On June 1, 2000, the FNS projected Alaska's error rate FFY 2000 QC sample as 7.26 percent.

Reinvestment Plan activities are discrete efforts directly related to reducing the Food Stamp error rate and are paid only from State funds. Only activities that qualify as above the traditional corrective action activities<sup>1</sup> and routine field operations receive approval as a reinvestment activity. Approval, planning, and funding of traditional corrective actions are under the purview of the DPA managers. Reinvestment Plan expenditures require the signature authority of the QA Program Officer, which prevents unauthorized use of reinvestment funds.

The State will expend at least 65 percent of the liability amount on payment accuracy activities that do not diminish program accessibility. As permitted under terms of the agreement, the State intends to pursue some reinvestment plan activities that promote other basic goals of the Food Stamp Program. The time period for completion of this plan is estimated to be three years.

At this time, the FFY98 plan will overlap with the FFY 99 plan, and some of the successful activities will carry over into this plan. The State desires to complete spending on the FFY98 plan as early as possible to eliminate possible confusion and duplication of effort likely to occur with two plans operating concurrently. Staff responsible for the financial operation and reporting of the plan activities understands these requirements.

This plan outlines the activities the State of Alaska will employ to improve our Food Stamp Program. It also defines the status report due dates and the process used to account for and report on the expenditures for the planned activities.

Local office management staff, Food Stamp and Quality Assessment managers, and the State's Corrective Action Committee members developed the initiatives in this plan.

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<sup>1</sup> The QA Program Officer tracks status of CAP activities and provides a separate status report to FNS.

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Alaska encouraged ongoing submission and development of Reinvestment Plan ideas by local offices. Given the length of time this plan will be in effect, the QA Program Officer advised managers to continue submitting new ideas for the plan. This supports the State's ongoing emphasis on improving food stamp payment accuracy. The QA Program Officer will amend the plan to reflect new quality improvement Food Stamp initiatives with each quarterly report. Prior to implementation of any major Reinvestment Plan effort, the QA Program Officer will advise the Food and Nutrition Service regional staff before approving and implementing the activity. This approach worked successfully with previous Reinvestment Plans.

## State Agency Contacts

Val Horner, Division of Public Assistance, Quality Assessment (QA) Program Officer, will direct the approved reinvestment activities, including preparation of progress reports. (Phone (907) 465-4952, or e-mail [Valerie\\_Horner@health.state.ak.us](mailto:Valerie_Horner@health.state.ak.us))

Randy Moore, Division of Public Assistance, Administrative Officer, will identify State funds and assist the QA Program Officer with monitoring expenditures. (Phone (907) 465-3348.)

Orlando Moskito, Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Administrative Services, Finance Officer, will prepare the SF-269 quarterly report. (Phone (907) 465-3131.)

## Financial Tracking and Reporting

The DPA Quality Assessment (QA) Program Officer has primary responsibility for the plan. This includes reviewing proposed initiatives to ensure they meet FNS reinvestment requirements. The QA Program Officer is well acquainted with DPA operations and all assistance programs. This background ensures that the QA Program Officer can readily identify and disapprove proposals that do not directly benefit the Food Stamp Program or are proposals that would be routine Food Stamp business thus not qualifying for reinvestment funds. Initiatives that could benefit more than the Food Stamp Program will be prorated according by the QA Program Officer to reflect the portion that does qualify under the Reinvestment Plan.

Purchases and expenditures related to the plan must have pre-approval by the QA Program Officer and the QA Program Officer must sign billings to authorize payment. The QA Program Officer reviews proposals to ensure the initiative meets federal requirements. The Food Stamp Program Officer is an alternate signature when the QA Program Officer is unavailable.

The QA Research Analyst maintains a database for all approved expenditures. Approved and signed billings then go to the Administrative Officer for payment processing.

The Administrative Officer set up a specific funding code for expenditures associated with Reinvestment Plan activities. All purchases, salaries, travel, and other expenses related to the plan are coded to this account. The fiscal coding designates the funding source, and then object codes identifies the type of purchase, such as travel or supplies. State money funds the reinvestment efforts. Federal and matching funds are not used to pay for reinvestment efforts. "Expenditures are not simply a reallocation of resources."

The Administrative Officer processes invoices and tracks expenditures. He receives the signed and coded billings, then passes them to the Department's accounting section. If the billings lack the correct code and expected signature by the QA or FS Program Officer,

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he will not allow coding to the Reinvestment Plan. The Administrative Officer also compiles all expenditures coded to the plan and prepares the fiscal reports to FNS.

The Department's Finance Officer prepares and submits the appropriate FNS reports to account for the expenditures charged to the plan.

## Chapter

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## Reporting Requirements

The QA Program Officer will provide quarterly Reinvestment Plan status reports to the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Western Regional Office, for the duration of the plan. The QA Program Officer and Administrative Officer will track expenditures in a special account to meet the requirements of this plan. Staff responsible for the financial operation and reporting of plan activities understands these requirements.

The progress report due dates follow:

December 4, 2000	December 3, 2001	December 2, 2002
March 5, 2001	March 2, 2002	March 3, 2003
June 4, 2001	June 3, 2002	June 2, 2003
September 10, 2001	September 9, 2002	September 8, 2003

The Finance Officer will report Reinvestment Plan expenditures quarterly in column (18) of the SF-269. The Division will maintain expenditure documentation and a clear audit trail.

## Chapter

## 3

## Reinvestment Initiatives

The Quality Assessment (QA) Program Officer will oversee and record Reinvestment Plan initiatives. Field staff and managers will propose and develop the initiatives, with guidance from the QA Program Officer.

The initiatives described in this section reflect ideas from staff at all levels, including Food Stamp Program policy, QA, field office managers, and front line staff.

## QA Lite

The Quality Assessment Unit will oversee Quality Assessment Lite projects. Two full-time Quality assessment positions will be devoted to the review and assessment of the current month's Food Stamp benefits. This is an increase of one full time position as described in the FFY98 plan. The QA Unit established these positions for the sole purpose of QA Lite and related Reinvestment activities. The staff assigned to this initiative will use a review guide that focuses on QC-determined error prone areas. The substance of the review will be a desk audit that compares information in the case file to the information used by EIS to generate the current benefit.

Office sizes and structure vary, so some flexibility will be allowed in designing office efforts. QA will determine a statistically valid sample size for each office. An office may select all or a portion of the caseload, however, the number will be at least equal to the statistical sample size. The regional and local manager can request review of specific units or caseworkers. Only Food Stamp cases will be selected for the review.

The QA Reinvestment Plan reviewers assigned to QC Lite will visit local offices statewide to conduct reviews. The reviewer will randomly select cases, complete the review guide, correct errors when possible, and meet with the local manager and staff to discuss findings. The primary goals are Food Stamp policy training for local staff, and assessing the quality of work.

The Research Analyst assigned to the QA unit will develop unique error codes to facilitate analysis of the QC Lite findings. The Research Analyst will compile the findings to prepare a formal report to the Corrective Action Committee. The QA Program Officer will discuss results with the Corrective Action Committee at monthly meetings, as well as with field managers following the meetings.

## ESTIMATED COST:

FFY02 \$120,000	Personal Services
FFY02 \$17,000	Travel
FFY03 \$120,000	Personal Services
FFY03 \$17,500	Travel

## Accuracy Summit for Managers

The Food Stamp Program Officer will organize an annual Accuracy Summit meeting for management staff. This meeting will provide an opportunity to explore ideas, plan initiatives, and sustain support for the plan and to motivate staff.

Travel, per diem, and other costs related to staff attending the Accuracy Summit would be charged to the Reinvestment Plan. Personnel salary costs will be excluded. Approximately 25 management staff members will attend. The Food Stamp Program Officer will facilitate the meetings.

### ESTIMATED COST:

FFY01	\$4,000
FFY02	\$5,500
FFY03	\$5,000

## Field Staff Training

Staffs training needs will change over the time span of this plan. The Program Officer in the DPA Staff Development and Training (SD&T) Unit, in consultation with the QA and Food Stamp Program Officers, will identify training topics to expand Food Stamp policy knowledge and improve basic productivity skills. The SD&T Unit will provide some classroom training and may contract with outside trainers as needed. The QA Program Officer will monitor content of proposed training to ensure it meets the federal requirement for Reinvestment activities. Routine training normally provided by the agency will not be funded under this plan.

Policy training under this plan will provide refresher training to existing staff to enhance their Food Stamp policy knowledge and case processing skills. The form of training will vary depending on the subject, number of trainees, and the location. Some policy training will be in the form of policy discussion forums conducted in the local offices by the Food Stamp Policy Specialist.

### ESTIMATED COST:

FFY02	\$5,000
FFY03	\$5,000

## Computer Training Modules

The Staff Development and Training (SD&T) Program Officer will oversee the development of computer -based training. The State will contract with a vendor to develop sophisticated training material that will be accessed through the internet, similar to those developed by the University of Wisconsin – Stout Technologies for the State of Wisconsin's Food Stamp corrective actions. The initial planning of this effort began in July 2000 with a demonstration from Stout on potential solutions and a meeting of training staff to discuss topics and design issues. The FFY98 Reinvestment Plan covered the initial costs of this effort.

The selected contractor will use instructional designers, graphic artists, Authorware programmers, delivery technicians, and project managers to work with State staff to develop detailed specifications, exact course content, presentation flow, detailed scripts,



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user interaction patterns, screen and media element requirements, and programming interface specifications to create product modules. The CBT project phases under this plan involves the actual programming and production of the web modules, creation of end-user documentation, and preparing the modules for beta testing. The final product, ready for beta testing, will be fully functional, including all data recovery elements.

The proposed CBT modules will provide interactive on-line training available to all staff upon demand via the Internet. The training unit will receive regular reports on the usage and outcomes, thus allowing more targeted policy clarification by the policy staff in the manual as well as in the routine training materials used in the class room.

The estimated cost for contractor development is approximately \$60,000 per topic. The State anticipates development of two topics, which will be charged to the Reinvestment Plan. Additional expenses will be the training of Division trainers and technical support staff who will have responsibility for maintenance and future development of training modules. Some specialized software for trainers and some upgrades in personal computers used by field staff will be purchased with funds from the Reinvestment Plan to enable their use of the training material.

Personal services costs for one Publication Specialist, devoted full time as a technical resource in developing the Food Stamp CBT modules, will be charged to the Food Stamp Reinvestment Plan. A second Publication Specialist will be involved part-time in technical support for the project. Trainers assigned to the SD&T Unit will be called upon to assist the contractor as content specialists.

**ESTIMATED COST:**

FFY01	\$120,000	Development Contract
FFY02	\$40,000	Personal Services

### Internal Exchange Program

As each region develops successful initiatives and business tools, the information will be shared in other regions; a concept similar to the FNS State Exchange Program. Staff will travel to other offices to improve program policy knowledge and workflow procedures through sharing of information.

**ESTIMATED COST:**

FFY02	\$3,000
FFY03	\$3,000

### FS Policy Analyst

The Food Stamp Program Officer will hire a Public Assistance Analyst (PAA) in FFY01, who will assist the Food Stamp Policy Specialist. Assignments will support activities described in the Reinvestment Plan with a focus on enhancing the policy knowledge of field staff. This position will have responsibility to develop education reference material, policy pages, and the FS Newsletter and Quiz started in the FFY97 Reinvestment Plan. This PAA will work with the Food Stamp Policy Specialist and Analyst/Program IV in developing the on-line Food Stamp Manual and EIS enhancement projects.

**ESTIMATED COSTS:**

FFY02	\$60,000	Personal Services
FFY02	\$18,250	Newsletter/Quiz

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FFY03	\$60,000 Personal Services
FFY03	\$18,250 Newsletter/Quiz

### Analyst/Programmer IV

System Operations managers will hire an Analyst Programmer IV by FFY01, who will be devoted to developing Food Stamp Program enhancements to the Eligibility Information System (EIS). The State proposed in the FFY98 Reinvestment Plan to hire an Analyst Programmer IV (A/P IV) to complete **EIS Food Stamp Enhancements** that otherwise would not be completed. The FFY98 plan will cover initial costs for the hire of this employee.

One goal is development of an on-line Food Stamp policy manual. The A/P IV will find and use specialized software to develop programming for an on-line Food Stamp policy manual. This will improve access and provide more timely updates to policy. Costs will include equipment /software needs related to accomplishing the task.

Other major programming tasks include the ability to download Food Stamp data from the EIS database into statistical analysis software, such as SPSS. This will greatly enhance the available Food Stamp Program's management information. Routine assignments to this programmer will be system work requests from policy and field staff to enhance EIS Food Stamp functions. The cost to the plan will be salary and necessary equipment for a computer analyst/programmer, and the purchase of related software.

#### ESTIMATED COSTS:

FFY02	\$80,000 Personal Services
FFY03	\$1,000 Travel
FFY03	\$80,000 Personal Services

### Fee Agent Training

Fee Agents provide local rural access to the Food Stamp Program. Fee Agents aid applicants in completing forms, conduct an intake interview, and mail to the DPA office the packet of forms and verifications for a determination of eligibility. Traditional training of a Fee Agent is done by a caseworker assigned to process applications for the represented village. Training is limited to a telephone conference that reviews the agency's expectations. Follow up training occurs by telephone when the agent makes or causes case errors.

The Northern and Coastal Regions have the greatest percentage of Fee Agents assisting households with the application process. The staffs in these offices identify Fee Agent errors as one cause for some of the FFY00 agency errors. Staffs in these offices rely heavily on the ability of the Fee Agent to understand basic application rules including those governing verification. Incomplete applications and missing verifications delay application processing and cause agency errors when applications are processed with incomplete and incorrect verifications.

When the agency pends rural applications, typical mail and communication obstacles often cause the pended application to exceed 30 days processing. This in turn discourages applications. Caseworkers operating under the 30-day processing timeframe, with a goal to issue benefits to needy clients, sometime act on the application despite the poor documentation. This contributes to the agency's errors caused by "failure to act or follow up on known information".

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Training will focus on submission of complete applications and appropriate verifications, and an understanding of the rural village error trends. In rural Alaska self-employment is more common than wages, and unearned income such as bingo winnings and public assistance are typical. These types of income are particularly error prone for the agency and are difficult for the Fee Agent to correctly identify. As active members in a small community, the Fee Agent often has first hand knowledge of the family. Verifying information is a difficult concept for the many rural Fee Agents who are typically Alaskan Native.

Face to Face training in a classroom or with a single individual is more effective than communicating by telephone when there is a problem. Formal training of approximately one day would allow the trainer to provide instruction in such a way that it is a learning experience rather than a critique of work that is traditional Fee Agent training. The expectations are that the proposed training will improve service delivery and client access when applications are processed correctly and timely.

Managers will undertake a Fee Agent Training project. The plan is to train approximately 20 fee agents in Northern and Coastal region villages. Staff will develop approximately one to one –and-a- half day of food stamp application processing instruction. Topics covered will include: Overview of Food Stamps, recognizing other public assistance benefits as unearned income, suitable verifications, understanding questions on the application form, screening for expedited service, and timeframes. The QA Program Officer will approve each agenda prior to training. The plan will fund the printing of material, related overtime, and travel expenses.

**ESTIMATED COSTS:**

FFY01	\$ 2,000	Personal Services
FFY01	\$10,000	Travel
FFY01	\$ 3,000	Printing

## Statewide Eligibility Staff Conference

The Food Stamp Program Officer and Chief of Field Services will organize a conference in Anchorage for lead-worker eligibility staff. The target audience will be front line managers (typically Eligibility Technician III) and assistant managers, as well as other staff specifically involved in corrective action activities. Lead workers typically assist office or unit supervisors, including performing case reviews and training. Enhancing their skills and understanding of the corrective action process will improve the quality of the local training and staff evaluations. This meeting will provide an opportunity to explore ideas, plan initiatives, train on successful techniques, and present policy forums.

Travel, per diem, and other costs related to staff attending the conference would be charged to the Reinvestment Plan. Personnel salary costs will be excluded. Approximately 50 staff members will attend. Staff in the Staff Development and Training Unit, under supervision on the Chief of Field Services, will organize and facilitate the conference.

**ESTIMATED COST:**

FFY01	\$4,500
FFY02	\$5,500
FFY03	\$5,000

## Client Access and Service Delivery

- FNS developed client access materials, such as posters. The agency will print material from FNS' available client access material and distribute it statewide through community service agencies.

### ESTIMATED COSTS:

FFY01 \$5,000  
 FFY02 \$5,500  
 FFY03 \$5,500

- The Food Stamp Policy Specialists will develop at least one new client education brochure designed to improve client access to the Food Stamp program. Additional educational material maybe developed to improve program performance. The plan will fund printing and distribution of the material.

### ESTIMATED COSTS:

FFY01 \$5,000  
 FFY02 \$5,500  
 FFY03 \$5,500

- Staff in offices throughout the state experience challenges in communicating with limited English speaking Food Stamp clients. Through AT&T Alascom the workers have access to a language interpretation service. Staffs need telephones with a conferencing feature to use the AT&T service. The cost to the plan will be \$565 per handset.

### ESTIMATED COSTS:

FFY01 \$28,250

## SERO Training Project

The Southeast Region (SERO) plans to hire one Eligibility Technician III position who will have responsibility for training a pool of new Food Stamp workers. This region has had persistently high staff turnover and low accuracy rate. This is a unique position developed as a Reinvestment Plan initiative by staff in the region to address these on-going issues.

A small caseload will be assigned to the unit, and the Trainer will oversee assignments to the workers including 100 percent review of all case actions to develop a pool of skilled workers to fill vacancies. This project will provide intensive on-the-job training, an opportunity not available to the typical new-hire who must take on a full caseload with limited mentoring during the first months on the job. The cost to the plan will be salary and necessary equipment to support the new position.

### ESTIMATED COSTS:

FFY01	\$20,000	Personal Services
FFY02	\$40,000	Personal Services
FFY03	\$40,000	Personal Services

## Chapter

## 4

## FS Reinvestment Plan Amendments

The Division will work to complete the Reinvestment Plan requirements as quickly as possible. This plan overlaps time scheduled to complete the FFY98 Reinvestment Plan. The goal is to close out FFY98 as quickly as possible to avoid monitoring two plans during FFY01 and FFY02.

Local and regional offices will develop and implement new initiatives as they analyze current error trends and needed resources. Local involvement is key to effective initiatives and has proven successful in keeping local offices focussed on improving the quality of Food Stamp benefit determinations and case processing. To be effective, and to provide continuous improvement, the plan must be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each office and caseload. The QA Program Officer will amend the plan with each quarterly status report. No major initiative will be undertaken without the approval of FNS.

## Chapter

## 5

## Estimated Expenditures

Some activities from the FFY98 plan overlap those described in this plan. In the estimates shown below for FFY01, zero dollars indicate that activity will be covered with funds from the FFY98 Reinvestment Plan.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>FFY2001</b>	<b>FFY2002</b>	<b>FFY2003</b>	<b>Totals</b>
QC Lite	\$0	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$240,000
QC Lite Travel	\$0	\$17,000	\$17,000	\$34,000
FS Programmer	\$0	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$160,000
Accuracy Summit Travel	\$4,000	\$5,500	\$5,000	\$14,500
SERO Trainer	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$100,000
Internal Exchange Program	\$0	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$6,000
Computer Training Modules	\$120,000	\$40,000	\$0	\$160,000
FS Policy Analyst	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$120,000
Field Staff Training	\$0	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$10,000
Newsletter	\$18,250	\$18,250	\$18,250	\$54,750
Fee Agent Training	\$15,000	\$0	\$0	\$15,000
Eligibility Conference	\$4,500	\$5,500	\$5,000	\$15,000
Access & Education	\$38,250	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$50,250
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$220,000</b>	<b>\$400,250</b>	<b>\$359,250</b>	<b>\$979,500</b>

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Appendix

A

## Statement of Assurance

## Statement of Assurance

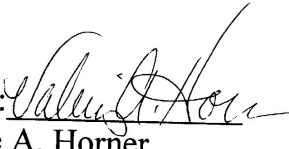
As representative of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, I certify that:

The expenditure plan of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services for the federal fiscal year 1999 (FFY99) Quality Control Liabilities will not claim any federal matching funds for reinvestment expenditures.

Approved activities are above the minimum Food Stamp Program requirements dictated by law and regulation.

No other state or federal programs benefit from reinvestment activities.

The requirements for planning and reporting reinvestment activities and expenditures as described in the Guidelines for State Agencies for Reinvestment of Quality Control Liabilities (Administrative letter Number 00-06) are known to me.

Signed:  Valerie A. Horner  
Quality Assessment  
Program Officer

Date: 11/08/2000