

## ALASKA FOOD STAMP MANUAL

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### APPLICATION PROCESS

In order for the Division of Public Assistance (DPA) to determine a household's eligibility, the household must:

- Submit an **identifiable application**;
- Complete and sign an approved **application form**;
- Attend an **interview** with a DPA caseworker, fee agent, or Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP) agency staff person, if an interview is required; and,
- Provide **documentation and verification, including required forms**, needed to determine program eligibility.

An application form must be given to the individual the same day DPA or the fee agent receives a request for an application. All households must be advised that they may file an application the same day they contact the office in order to establish their benefit start date. Individuals requesting an application by phone will be sent one the same day the telephone request is made.

Fee agents help individuals who live in communities that do not have a local DPA office apply for public assistance. DPA provides fee agents with applications and other forms individuals need to apply for assistance. Individuals are not required to go to a fee agent, and may send the application directly to the nearest DPA office.

An application is considered filed when a DPA office receives an acceptable application form containing the applicant's name, address, and signature. Faxed applications are accepted. Applicants must be advised that eligibility cannot be determined until a member of the household completes an application form and participates in an interview with a caseworker, fee agent, or Native Family Assistance Program agency, if an interview is required.

The receipt of an identifiable application in a DPA office establishes the application filing date. The caseworker has 30 days (or 7 days for food stamp expedited service applications) following the application filing date to process the application. When the applicant asks to apply for another program prior to the eligibility determination, use the original filing date and benefit start date for all programs.

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### ELIGIBILITY IN ONE HOUSEHOLD

An individual may only be determined eligible as a member of one household at a time in any given month.

**Exception:** A resident of a shelter for battered women and children may participate as a separate household and be issued benefits for the same month he or she participated in another household, provided the former household contains the individual who abused him or her. See FS MS 605-1D for special policy on residents of shelters for battered women.

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### 601-2 THE APPLICATION FORM

#### 601-2A WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE APPLICATION FORM?

The **Gen 50B, Application for Services form**, is the initial application form that is used to apply for any public assistance program, except the Heating Assistance Program. To apply for Heating Assistance, a Heating Assistance Program application must be completed.

The **Gen 72, Eligibility Review Form**, is the review application form that is used to determine continued eligibility for Adult Public Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance.

- If received in the month following the end of the certification period, the Gen 72 form can be used as an initial application form.
- If received after the month following the end of the certification period, a Gen 50B application form is required. The Gen 72 form will be accepted to protect the benefit start date, however, it cannot be used as the initial application form.

The **Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP) application form** is an acceptable application form for Adult Public Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance.

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### 601-2B **WHEN IS AN APPLICATION REQUIRED?**

- (1) Upon the individual's first application for a program, even if the individual is already a recipient of another DPA assistance program.
- (2) Upon application from a denied, withdrawn, or closed status, unless the denial or closure was the result of an administrative error.
- (3) Any time the caseworker believes the individual's circumstances have changed sufficiently to justify conducting a special redetermination of eligibility, including when an office conducts a special review project for all or part of its caseload.

### 601-2C **WHEN IS AN APPLICATION NOT REQUIRED?**

- (1) To reopen a closed case as a result of an individual's timely request for a fair hearing, or to open or reopen a case as the result of a fair hearing decision.
- (2) To reopen a case that had been closed incorrectly.
- (3) To resume benefits after benefits have been suspended.
- (4) To redetermine eligibility after the application is denied for failing to provide verification and the household provides the verification within 60 days from the application filing date.
- (5) To redetermine eligibility after the application is denied for failing to attend an interview and the household contacts the office to reschedule the interview within 60 days from the application filing date.
- (6) When there is a change in "payee", "in care of" addressee, or mailing address.
- (7) When individuals are added to an open case.

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### 601-2D **WHAT IS AN IDENTIFIABLE APPLICATION?**

An identifiable application is an acceptable application form containing the applicant's name, address, and signature (or witnessed mark) of the individual seeking assistance or of the individual's authorized representative. Each DPA office must accept and date the identifiable application when it is presented.

An individual who contacts a DPA office and who shows interest in the program or a desire to apply shall be advised of his or her right to submit an identifiable application on the date of the contact in order to establish the benefit start date. The individual may file an identifiable application on an acceptable application form, as described at MS 601-2A.

### 601-2E **WHO CAN SIGN THE APPLICATION FORM?**

- An adult household member
- An authorized representative
- An individual who has legal authority to act on the applicant's behalf (i.e., Office of Public Advocacy, legal guardian)
- An individual with appropriate power of attorney

The signer must certify, under penalty of perjury, the truth of the information contained in the application.

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### 601-2F **WHO CAN BE AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE?**

A responsible adult, 18 years or older, may be designated by the applicant in writing as authorized representative. If the applicant is illiterate, his/her mark must be witnessed by two individuals who must each sign their names and date the document. No special form is required.

Authorized representatives may sign the application and act on behalf of a household. A household member should prepare or review the application, if possible, even though the authorized representative will be filing the application and/or attending the interview.

The household may designate an emergency authorized representative (no age limit) if the need arises. The emergency authorized representative can obtain benefits on those occasions when, due to an emergency, neither a household member nor the authorized representative is able to do so. A separate written designation is needed each time an emergency authorized representative is requested to act for the household.

The household is liable for any overpayment resulting from erroneous information provided by an authorized representative.

If an authorized representative has knowingly provided false information, or misused the household's food stamp benefits, the caseworker can disqualify the individual from acting as an authorized representative in the Food Stamp Program for one year. For special requirements concerning authorized representatives for residents of certain institutions see MS 605-1D.

### 601-2G **WHO CANNOT BE AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE?**

Retailers authorized to accept food stamp benefits, fee agents, or DPA employees involved in the certification or issuance process may not be authorized representatives without the written approval of the Director or Chief of Policy & Program Development.

Individuals disqualified from the Food Stamp Program for fraud may not be authorized representatives during the period of disqualification, unless the disqualified individual is the only adult living with the household and no one else is available to act as an authorized representative.

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### 601-2H **COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM**

In addition to making an identifiable application and having it signed by an eligible individual, the applicant must answer all of the questions on the application form.

If the individual requests help in completing the application form, the caseworker will offer assistance.

If the application form is not completed, the caseworker will allow the household an opportunity to complete the form. In this case, written notification will be sent to the household listing the items that need to be completed. See MS 601-5C, Pending the Application.

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### 601-3 THE INTERVIEW

#### 601-3A WHEN IS AN INTERVIEW REQUIRED?

Interviews are mandatory for all food stamp applicants. A face-to-face interview is required at the time of initial application and once every 12 months thereafter, unless the face-to-face interview is waived. See MS 601-3D for policy on when an interview can be waived.

#### 601-3B WHO MUST ATTEND THE INTERVIEW?

A member of the applicant household who can sign the application form or an individual authorized by the household must attend the interview.

#### 601-3C WHO CAN CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW?

- (1) **DPA Caseworker:** Most individuals will be interviewed by a DPA caseworker in the DPA office or by telephone.
- (2) **Fee Agent:** In communities where there is no DPA office, the fee agent conducts the interview for individuals who want to apply for public assistance. The fee agent will complete a Fee Agent Interview Report form (FA #1) and submit it with each application.
- (3) **Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP) Agency:** We will accept the NFAP interview, if one is conducted, and not require the individual to be interviewed again. If the NFAP interview notes are not provided with the application, the caseworker will obtain them from the NFAP agency.

**Note:** Regardless of who conducts the interview, if additional information or verification is needed to process the application, the caseworker will contact the applicant to get this information.



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### 601-3D **WHEN CAN THE FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW BE WAIVED?**

Face-to-face interviews can be waived when the applicant is unable to attend the interview for reasons including:

- (1) Illness or disability
- (2) Transportation difficulties
- (3) Prolonged severe weather
- (4) Needed to care for a family member
- (5) Living in a location not served by a DPA office
- (6) Work or training hours that preclude an in-office interview during office hours

Face-to-face interviews may be waived for households that have no earned income and all members are elderly or disabled.

The caseworker shall document the reasons a face-to-face interview is waived. A household whose face-to-face interview is waived shall be interviewed by telephone or through correspondence.

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### 601-3E INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AT THE DPA OFFICE

Interviews must be scheduled for applicants who cannot be interviewed on the day they submit an application.

The interview must be scheduled timely to ensure eligible households have an opportunity to participate within 30 days after the application is filed.

Applicants may bring anyone they choose to the interview. During the interview, applicants must be informed of their rights and responsibilities and basic program procedures.

When a food stamp applicant fails to appear for a scheduled interview, a notice must be sent informing the household that it missed the scheduled interview and that it is responsible for rescheduling the missed interview.

- If the household contacts the office within 30 days of the application filing date, the office must schedule a second interview. If the household is determined eligible, benefits are prorated from the date the application was filed in the DPA office or with a fee agent.
- If the household does not appear for the first interview and fails to reschedule, the application is denied on the 30th day from the date the application was filed in the DPA office. An application cannot be denied for failure to participate in an interview prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> day from the application filing date.

**Note:** If an application is registered on EIS as a food stamp request for service (RF), EIS will automatically deny the application on the 30th day from the date the application was filed. The household is notified via the system-generated notice X011, Failure to Participate in a FS Interview.

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### CHANGES REPORTED AT THE INTERVIEW

Applicant households must report all expected changes affecting their eligibility or benefits at the interview. Changes reported after the interview, but before a case decision is made, will be considered in the initial eligibility determination.

- Applicant households assigned to status reporting must report changes within ten days of when the changes become known by the household, including changes that occur following the interview but before a case decision is made.
- Applicant households assigned to semi-annual reporting have no reporting requirements prior to the approval of their application.

When the household reports a new household member before a case decision is made, the new member is considered part of the household. The benefit start date is used to determine the benefits for the household, including the new member.

The individual must be in the home at least one day of the month to be included in that month. However, when the household reports prior to the eligibility determination that a person moved out, that person is not considered part of the household for any month.

**Example:** *A household applies May 27. At the interview on June 5, the individual reports her spouse moved in on May 30. The spouse is considered part of the household and the household's benefit start date is May 27. If the spouse moved in on June 3, the spouse is included in the household effective June 1.*

**Example:** *A household applies on July 28th and is interviewed August 9th. During the interview, the individual reports that her husband moved out on August 4th and is not expected to return. The husband is not considered part of the household for either July or August, and verification of his income and resources are not needed. Income and resources available to the household must still be considered.*

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### 601-4 VERIFICATION

For households who appear eligible, mandatory verification, including income and expense verification, must be obtained. Verification of previously verified information that has not changed cannot be required, unless the caseworker determines the information has become questionable. A household may not be determined ineligible solely because we cannot get the information from a third party.

If the household is unable to obtain needed verification in a timely manner, the caseworker shall offer assistance in obtaining the verification. Each district office must give its toll-free telephone number to all households for purposes of assisting households to meet verification requirements.

The signed application can be used as a source of verification and provides adequate documentation when the household is ineligible. This includes cases when income or resources exceed maximum eligibility standards after applicable deductions are allowed. The application can be denied without further verification.

### 601-4A VERIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIAL APPLICATIONS

#### (1) Mandatory Verification

For all households applying for food stamps, the following verification is required:

- (a) Identity of the individual applying;
- (b) Residency;
- (c) Alien status of any household member who is not a U.S. citizen;  
and
- (d) Countable gross income.

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### (2) **Verification Required Prior to Allowing Deductions**

Caseworkers must obtain verification of allowable expenses when the expenses result in a deduction of countable income and an increase in the amount of benefits. Households must be given an opportunity to provide the verification before the eligibility determination is made. If the household does not provide verification of the following expenses, the application is processed without the deduction.

- (a) Dependent care expenses.
- (b) Deductible child support payments.
- (c) Shelter costs, and household responsibility for utility expenses or household responsibility for the cost of heating its home.
- (d) Deductible medical expenses for Special Category (SPECAT) members.
- (e) Disabilities qualifying the individual or household for Special Category (SPECAT) status.

**Note:** If obtaining verification of the expense would delay processing the initial application, the household may choose to have the application processed without the deduction. Document this request in the case record.

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### (3) Information from Data Systems and EIS Interfaces

Several data systems and computer interfaces are available through the Internet and on-line EIS access. Caseworkers must check these systems for each household member at each application and recertification as part of the verification process.

Direct Data Systems	Information Verified
INGENS Public Information Database	Ownership of resources including vehicles, real estate, fishing permits, mining claims, boats  Drug felony charges
NSTAR or NFIN State of Alaska Child Support Services Division	Child Support collections Child support disbursements Legal obligation to pay child support
State of Alaska Department of Labor (DOL)	Unemployment Insurance Benefits
Automated Status Verification System (ASVS) (formerly SAVE)	Qualified alien status of household members who are not U.S. citizens
EIS Interfaces (using the INME menu)      Information Verified	
BENDEX Social Security Administration	SSA payments
SDX Social Security Administration	SSI payments
State of Alaska Department of Labor (DOL)	Employment history through quarterly wage match
State of Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Division	PFD payments
SeniorCare	SeniorCare payments

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### 601-4B HOUSEHOLD COOPERATION

To determine initial eligibility, the application form must be completed and signed, the individual or authorized representative must be interviewed, and certain information on the application must be verified. Individuals already receiving assistance must cooperate in providing information and/or verification necessary to establish continuing eligibility.

If the individual refuses to cooperate in completing the application process, the application is denied at the time of refusal. If the individual refuses to cooperate in providing information to establish continued eligibility, the individual is ineligible and the case will be closed.

“Refusal to cooperate” means the individual is able to cooperate but clearly demonstrates that he or she will not take the action that he or she can take and that the action is required to complete the application process or determine continued eligibility.

If there is any question as to whether the individual refused to cooperate, the individual shall be given an opportunity to complete the application or provide the information needed to establish continued eligibility. A notice will be sent informing the individual of the necessary action he or she needs to take, allowing at least ten days for the individual to cooperate before the application is denied or case closed.

### 601-4C QUESTIONABLE INFORMATION

Questionable information is unclear or inconsistent information on the application that contradicts a previous application, statement made by the applicant, or other information received by the agency. For example, the information would be considered questionable if a household's expenses continually exceed income prior to deductions.

When questionable information from another source contradicts statements made by the household, the household must be provided an opportunity to clarify and verify their circumstances.

Caseworkers must verify questionable financial and non-financial factors of eligibility prior to certification when they affect a household's eligibility or benefit amount.

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### 601-5 ACTIONS TAKEN ON THE APPLICATION

Every applicant must be provided with adequate written notice of the action taken on the application. Adequate notice means that the individual is informed of the action taken, the reasons for the action, and the manual sections from the appropriate program policy manual that support the action.

### 601-5A APPROVING THE APPLICATION

An approval notice must be sent to the household following a determination of eligibility. Except when the application is delayed, approved households must receive benefits no later than 30 days after the application filing date. To meet this requirement, the caseworker must authorize the benefits by the 28th calendar day following the application filing date. See MS 601-5F for policy on when an application is delayed.

**Exception:** Food stamp households eligible for expedited service must receive benefits no later than seven days from the application filing date. To meet this requirement, the caseworker must authorize the benefits by the fourth calendar day following the application filing date. See MS 605-3B for policy on expedited service applications.

**Eligible First Month/Ineligible Second Month:** A household may be eligible for the month of application and ineligible in the subsequent month. In this case, the household should be approved only for the month of application. However, if the anticipated change is expected to last only for the second month, the case should be suspended for the second month according to the temporary ineligibility policy at MS 604-3F.

**Ineligible First Month/Eligible Second Month:** A household may be ineligible for the month of application but eligible in the subsequent month. Even though denied for the month of application, the household does not have to reapply. The same application is used for the first month denial and the determination of eligibility for the subsequent month.



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### 601-5B BENEFIT START DATE

The benefit start date determines the date from which benefits begin. It is the date a household initially requests food stamp benefits and files an identifiable application:

- **At the DPA Office:** The benefit start date is the date the DPA office receives the application form; or,
- **With a Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP) Agency:** The benefit start date is the date the NFAP agency receives the application form; or,
- **With a DPA-Contracted Fee Agent:** The benefit start date is the date the application form is received by the fee agent.

Households receiving benefits from another state will be denied if the benefits received cover the period of time for which application in Alaska is made.

**Example:** *A household received benefits from another state on May 1 for the calendar month of May. Application is made in Alaska on May 15. Benefits have already been received for May, so the application is denied for May. The household may be approved for June, effective June 1, if otherwise eligible.*

**Example:** *A household received benefits from another state that covered the period June 16 through July 15. Application is made in Alaska on July 5. Benefits have already been received for the period through July 15, so the benefit start date for Alaska will be July 16, if otherwise eligible.*

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### 601-5C PENDING THE APPLICATION

When the office needs the applicant to submit a complete application form, attend an interview, or provide information needed to determine eligibility, the application is pending, and a notice is sent. The notice clearly informs the applicant what is needed to complete the application. Applicants will be given at least 10 days, but no more than 30 days, from the date of this notice to provide the verification. The same verification pending time frames will be consistently applied to all applicants within each office.

- (1) Applicants failing to provide all necessary verification at the interview will be sent a pending notice no later than 30 days after the application filing date requesting the required verification.
- (2) Applicants contacting the agency within the pending period expressing difficulty in obtaining required verification will be offered assistance. The caseworker should extend the pending period if additional time is needed to obtain the information. A new pending notice should be sent.
- (3) If the applicant does not complete the application process, the application is denied at the end of the period provided in the notice. See MS 601-3E for policy on when an applicant fails to attend an interview.

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### 601-5D DENYING THE APPLICATION

A denial notice must be sent to the applicant explaining the reason for the denial. This notice should be sent as soon as possible following the determination of ineligibility, but no later than 30 days following the application filing date.

Applicants denied for failing to provide needed verification by the end of the pend period will be sent a notice of denial at the end of the pend period.

- If the applicant provides the verification after the pend period but within 30 days of the application filing date, the caseworker must accept the verification and make an eligibility determination without requiring a new application. If the household is found eligible, the caseworker will use the original benefit start date.
- If the applicant provides the verification after the pend period but within 60 days from the application filing date, the caseworker must accept the verification and make an eligibility determination without requiring a new application. If the household is found eligible, the caseworker will adjust the benefit start date to the date the needed verification was received by the office.

**Note:** When the deadline for processing an application or providing verification does not fall on a workday, it will be extended to the next workday.

See MS 601-3E for policy on denying applicants for failing to attend an interview.

### 601-5E WITHDRAWING THE APPLICATION

The applicant may voluntarily withdraw the application at any time before the eligibility determination is made. A written or verbal request to withdraw is acceptable. The reason for withdrawal (if known) shall be documented in the case file. The applicant shall be advised of his or her right to reapply at any time by submitting a new application. A notice shall be sent to the individual denying the withdrawn application.

If the individual wants to apply again once an application has been withdrawn, he or she must complete a new application.

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### 601-5F WHEN THE APPLICATION IS DELAYED

If a household's eligibility has not been determined or benefits have not been authorized for an eligible household by the 30th day (or 7th day, for food stamp expedited service applications) following the application filing date, the application is delayed. The caseworker will determine the cause for the delay and take appropriate action.

- (1) **Agency-caused delays** include situations where the application was not approved, denied, or pended within the allowable time limits.

If an eligibility determination cannot be made by the 30th day from the application filing date because of action required by the agency, the case is left in a pending status. The household must be sent a pend notice by the 30th day.

- (2) **Household-caused delays** include situations where the office cannot take further action on the application without an action from the household.

If the household fails to submit a complete application form or reschedule an interview by the 30th day from the application filing date, the application is denied and the household loses benefits for the month of application.

If the household fails to provide requested verification by the end of the pend period, the application is denied. If the household fails to provide requested verification by either the 30th day from the application filing date or the end of the pend period stated on the pend notice, whichever is later, the household loses benefits for the month of application. Depending on when the household takes action, it may lose benefits for the subsequent month as well.

If the household then takes the required action (i.e., submits a complete application form, contacts the office for an interview, or provides requested verification) within 60 days of the application filing date, the caseworker must reopen the case without requiring a new application. The new benefit start date is the date the household takes the necessary action to enable the application to be processed.

Caseworkers must process these applications by the 60th day from the application filing date unless the household is determined to be eligible for expedited service. For expedited cases, benefits must be authorized by the fourth calendar day from the date the required information was received or the date the interview was rescheduled.