

Decreasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) denial rates due to incomplete information

A collaboration between OES, Code for America, and USDA | 2024

Project summary:

In an effort to improve service delivery, customer experience, and client access to nutrition assistance from SNAP, the [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#) invested over \$1.1 billion to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide administrative support to states to invest in technology modernization. Applying for SNAP benefits requires applicants to submit an application, provide the state with multiple verification documents, and complete an interview with a caseworker. Failure to complete the final two steps results in a denial of benefits for incomplete information rather than a denial for lack of eligibility. Uploading verification documents can be difficult for several reasons — applicants may struggle to remember passwords to online systems that accept documents, scanning documents to upload or mail in can be cumbersome, and applicants may be unsure whether they have already uploaded documents. With these barriers in mind, Code for America (CfA) collaborated with a large southern U.S. state to create an easy-to-use, mobile-friendly, web-based document uploader to make it easier for applicants to submit verification documents.

Evaluation and intervention description:

Online SNAP applicants ($N=33,574$) who applied as part of the regular online application process were randomized to a basic text message group or uploader text message group. For applicants assigned to the uploader text group, these text messages included individualized links which granted them access to the redesigned document uploader and encouraged its use. All applicants were sent up to seven text messages reminding them to upload documents between the time they submitted their application and the application deadline. Due to a technical error, 82.9% of the sample were sent the first two messages and 18.1% of the sample were sent the full series of messages. A similar share of applicants in the basic text message group and the uploader text message group were affected by this error.

The redesigned uploader did not require a log-in password that applicants would have to accurately recall or reset and allowed applicants to drag and drop files into it from their desktop. No changes were made to the SNAP application or approval process beyond the introduction of this new, alternative method for uploading verification documents and the introduction of the text campaign.

What did we learn?

A text campaign that included a link to a redesigned document uploader resulted in fewer applicants being denied SNAP benefits due to incomplete eligibility information by 1.1 percentage points. The intervention did not have a meaningful impact on SNAP enrollment.

The project page for this impact evaluation can be accessed [on our website](#).

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Basic text message group

Text message content

Hi <clientName>, thanks for applying for SNAP. Your next step is to have your interview and send required documents. It's best to send as many required documents as you can before your interview.

Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications

Submission modes

-  In-person
-  Fax
-  Mail
-  Email
-  Online portal

Uploader text message group

Text message content

Hi <clientName>, thanks for applying for SNAP. Your next step is to have your interview and send required documents. It's best to send as many required documents as you can before your interview. **It's easy! Go to <URL>**

Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications

Submission modes

-  In-person
-  Fax
-  Mail
-  Email
-  Online portal

Simplified CfA uploader that did not require a log-in password that applicants would have to accurately recall or reset and allowed applicants to drag and drop files into it from their desktop.

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Full sample (N=33,574) sent first two text messages



Basic text message group

First two texts

Hi <clientName>, thanks for applying for SNAP. Your next step is to have your interview and send required documents. It's best to send as many required documents as you can before your interview. Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications



Documents reminder sent X days after application submission

Hi <clientName>, remember that it's best if you send as many required documents you can before your SNAP application interview. Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications



Uploader text message group

First two texts

Hi <clientName>, thanks for applying for SNAP. Your next step is to have your interview and send required documents. It's best to send as many required documents as you can before your interview. **It's easy! Go to <URL>** Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications



Documents reminder sent X days after application submission

Hi <clientName>, remember that it's best if you send as many required documents as you can before your SNAP application interview. **It's easy! Go to << LINK >>** Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications

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Only some applicants (n=6,082) sent second set of messages



Basic text message group

Texts 3-6: Ask for documents, sent by caseworker to request documents

Hi <clientName>, to complete your SNAP application, send in your required documents by <dateDocuments>. Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications.

List of documents, sent with text 1 due to character limits

To see some examples of the documents you may need for your SNAP application, visit: << LINK >>

Documents reminder, sent 7 days before application deadline

Hi <clientName>, remember that it's best if you send as many required documents you can before your SNAP application interview. Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications



Uploader text message group

Texts 3-6: Ask for documents, sent by caseworker to request documents

Hi <clientName>, to complete your SNAP application, send in your required documents by <dateDocuments>. It's easy! Go to << LINK >> Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications

List of documents, sent with text 1 due to character limits

No applicants in the uploader message group were sent this text.

Documents reminder, sent 7 days before application deadline

Hi <clientName>, we still need the required documents for your SNAP application. Please send them by <dateDocuments>. It's easy! Go to << LINK>> If you already sent your documents, ignore this message. Reply StopTEXT to stop

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Only some applicants (n=6,082) sent second set of messages (continued)



Basic text message group

Texts 3-6: Documents reminder, sent 1 day before application deadline

Hi <clientName>, please send your documents by TOMORROW to keep your SNAP application active. If you already sent your documents, ignore this message.



Missed docs, sent if applicant missed verification deadline

Hi <clientName>, we still need documents from you for your SNAP application. Please send them by <60daysApp>, or you'll need to apply again. Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications



Uploader text message group

Texts 3-6: Documents reminder, sent 1 day before application deadline

Hi <clientName>, please send your documents by TOMORROW to keep your SNAP application active. It's easy! Go to << LINK >> If you already sent your documents, ignore this message.



Missed docs, sent if applicant missed verification deadline

Hi <clientName>, we still need documents from you for your SNAP application. Please send them by <60daysApp>, or you'll need to apply again. To send your documents go to <<LINK >> Reply StopTEXT to stop notifications