



Department of Human Resources
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore MD 21201

Family Investment Administration
ACTION TRANSMITTAL

Control Number: #05-01

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**TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR FAMILY INVESTMENT
FAMILY INVESTMENT SUPERVISORS AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF**

FROM: KEVIN M. MCGUIRE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: APPLICATION PROCESSING - VERIFICATION

PROGRAM AFFECTED: FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF POLICY, RESEARCH AND SYSTEMS

SUMMARY:

Recently we have received inquiries about application processing and the application compliance report. Compliance with application processing requirements is a top priority and is essential for good public service. This is one of three action transmittals about application processing. This action transmittal provides policy for verification at application in a question and answer format. This policy can also be found in Section 408 of the Food Stamp Manual.

ACTION REQUIRED:

I. General Application Processing Policy

- All food stamp applications, with the exception of those determined eligible for expedited food stamps, must be processed so that benefits are available no later than 30 days after the application was filed. In determining the 30-day processing period, the day after the application date is day 1.
- All applications must be screened for expedited food stamp eligibility on the same day the local department receives the application.
- Applications meeting expedited criteria must be processed and eligible applicants must be provided the opportunity to participate the day after application, but no later than seven days after the application is filed. The opportunity to participate means the household must have obtained an EBT card, been trained in how to use it and have benefits in their EBT account.
- Households not eligible for expedited service must be given the opportunity to participate by the 30th day if they are eligible.

- An interview is not required before a household files the application. If an applicant can not be interviewed at the time he or she comes into the local department to apply, the local department must give the applicant a scheduled appointment for an interview.
- Households may file an incomplete application as long as it contains the applicant's name and address, and is signed by a responsible adult member of the household or an authorized representative.
- Households may file food stamp applications by submitting the appropriate form to the food stamp office in person, through an authorized representative, by mail or electronically by fax or other electronic device.
- The local department must accept applications during all business hours.

II. Verification Policy

Question 1. What do I need to verify before I can issue expedited benefits?

Answer 1. The **only mandatory** verification for households that are eligible for expedited service is **identity**. Other verification is postponed if it would delay benefits.

Question 2. What do I need to verify before issuing regular food stamp benefits?

Answer 2. Verify the following information prior to certification for households initially applying:

1. Gross, non-exempt income;
2. Social Security Number;
Note: Verify once, the SS card is not necessary.
3. Medical expenses if elderly or disabled, including reimbursed amounts, if the household claims allowable medical expenses above \$35 per month;
Note: Be sure to ask about prescribed over-the-counter items and transportation expenses. We don't always take the time to explore all of the household's allowable medical expense.
4. Amount of non-excluded resources;
Note: Verification of resources is not required for categorically eligible households. Categorically eligible individuals and households include the following:
 - Individuals who receive or who have been authorized to receive TCA, SSI, TEMHA or PAA;
 - Household members receiving TCA, SSI or PAA whose benefits are suspended or recouped; or

- TCA households that are not paid because the grant is less than \$10.
- All families (that include related children) with income below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines are authorized to receive Family Preservation services. Eligibility for this TANF funded program extends categorical eligibility to any household that meets the TCA definition of “family,” **and** total gross income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for family size.
 - ◆ A household meets the “family” definition if it contains a related child age 17 or younger or a related child age 18 or 19 who will graduate from high school in their 19th year.
 - ◆ The entire household is categorically eligible if any one member receives or is authorized to receive **TANF funded non-cash or in-kind benefit or service**.

Examples:

Ms. G is applying for herself only. She gets SSI. She said she has a bank account. Since she is categorically eligible, you would not verify the amount in the bank account.

Mr. H is applying for himself and three children. He stated that he has CDs totaling \$3,000. His earnings are below 200% of the federal poverty level. You would not verify the value of the CDs.

5. Residency (except in the case of homelessness, households newly arrived in the project area and some migrant farm workers);

Note: Verification of residency may be impossible to obtain in certain situations. Some households, such as migrant farm workers and the homeless, may find it impossible to provide documentary proof of residency. There is no requirement for a specific document to verify residency or identity.
6. Identity;

Note: A picture ID is not a requirement. Use readily available documentation. If none is available, use a collateral contact. If a closed case record includes verification of identity or narration stating that identity was verified, you could use this if nothing else is available.

When an authorized representative applies on behalf of a household, verify the identity of both the authorized representative and the head of household.
7. Household composition, if questionable;
8. Immigrant eligibility status;
9. Citizenship status, if questionable;
10. Legal obligation to make child support payments to or for an individual living outside the household and the amount of the actual payment.

11. Disability when necessary for other eligibility determinations (e.g. eligibility for uncapped shelter, medical expenses or exemption from work registration);
12. Shelter costs for a homeless household if it claims shelter expenses that would result in a shelter deduction in excess of the homeless shelter deduction of \$143.

Example: Ms. N lives in a transitional shelter. The shelter charges her according to her income. She has \$547 unearned income and her shelter costs are \$300/month. The case manager calculates as follows:

- She is eligible for \$60 in food stamps using the \$143 homeless shelter deduction: $\$547 - \134 (standard deduction) $- \$143$ (homeless deduction) $= \$270$ (net income).
- She is eligible for \$45 in food stamps if actual shelter costs are used: $\$547 - \$134 = \$413$; $\$300 - \206 ($\$413 \div 2$) $= \$94$; $\$413 - \$94 = \$319$ (net income).

The case manager uses the homeless shelter deduction.

Question 3. What is optional verification?

Answer 3. Some local departments have elected to verify other items that affect eligibility or benefit level, such as household composition, continuing shelter costs and dependent care costs.

Note: If obtaining shelter verification would delay the household's benefit, determine the benefit without the deduction. **Do not close or deny the case for failure to provide this verification.**

Example: Mrs. H applied for food stamps on June 24. She was interviewed on June 28. At that time, she provided all mandatory verification that the case manager needed, but the local department has chosen to verify ongoing shelter cost. The case manager requested verification. As of July 23, when the 102 alert displayed, Mrs. H had not provided the verification of shelter expenses. The case manager finalized the case without shelter costs and carefully narrated why she did not.

Question 4. What if the customer provides questionable information?

Answer 4. Local departments must verify all other factors of eligibility if they are questionable and affect the household's eligibility or benefit level.

- To be considered questionable, the information on the application must be:
 - Inconsistent with statements made by the applicant; or
 - Inconsistent with other information on the application or on previous applications; or
 - Inconsistent with information received by the local department.
- Evaluate each household on the basis of its individual circumstances when determining if information is questionable.

Example: Mr. P reported on his application that he is charged \$600 for rent and that he is responsible for all utilities. The case manager noticed that on the last application he had reported that his rent was \$200 and that he shared utilities with his housemate. He has not moved and has not reported any other change in household circumstances. This is questionable information since the information on his new application is inconsistent with the information on the prior application. The case manager requests verification of Mr. P's shelter costs.

Note: A household's report of expenses that exceed its income may be grounds for the local department's request for further verification. This circumstance, in itself, is not grounds for a denial of benefits. In this instance, explore with the household how it meets its expenses. Request further verification based on the household's response to these questions.

Question 5. A household applied for TCA and food stamps. The applicant has not done everything required to determine TCA eligibility and the 30-day processing period is ending. Should I deny the TCA and food stamps?

Answer 5. If you have all the documentation and verification needed to process the food stamp case, you should do so, even if you are denying the TCA case. You should never delay processing and approving a food stamp case just because you do not have the information needed for an associated case

Question 6. A household applied for TCA and food stamps on June 10 and was interviewed on June 15. The applicant has not done everything required to determine TCA and food stamp eligibility and the 30-day processing period is ending. Should I deny the TCA and food stamps?

Answer 6. You would deny the TCA case, if appropriate. For food stamps, this case must be allowed to pend for another 30 days. You would enter reason code "AS" on the MISC screen in the Reason Delay field since it is a customer delay.

ACTION DUE:

This action transmittal does not include new policy. It is clarification of current policy.

INQUIRIES:

Please direct policy questions to Kay Finegan at 410-767-7939 or Rick McClendon at 410-767-7307.

cc: FIA Management Staff
Constituent Services
DHR Help Desk