

Education Administrative Reporting System (EARS)

National Conference Call

November 15, 2007

Agenda

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|-------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 11:00 | Welcome, Ground Rules & Regional Roll Call | Judy Wilson |
| 11:10 | Purpose of Call, review of Agenda | Karen Walker |
| 11:15 | Overview FY 2008 Reporting Requirements
Timeline for EARS Reporting | Judy Wilson
Alice Lockett |
| 11:20 | Review of Financial Questions
Question 9
Question 10 | Charlie Okal |
| 11:30 | Roles and Responsibilities
Implementing agencies
SA FSP Office
Regions and HQ | Maura McCormick |
| 11:35 | Overview of the Approved EARS Form | Judy Wilson |
| 11:40 | Training Plans and Tentative Schedule
Overview of Training
Training Schedule | Susanne Gregory
Melissa Walker |
| 11:45 | Q & A
Note: one per region... | |
| 11:55 | Wrap-up <ul style="list-style-type: none">• submit all in writing to RO• Response will be posted on the FS Nutrition Connection (FSNC)• Visit FSNC For:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Approved EARS form○ Updated training schedule○ Related information | Judy Wilson |

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Summary of Presentations

Welcome and Introduction *Judy Wilson*, Director, Nutrition Services Staff, ORNA

- ✚ On behalf FNS and the Food Stamp Program, we thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to participate in this call.
- ✚ Throughout EARS' development, we have used a collaborative process to move this effort forward and have involved representatives of all the key stakeholders. Likewise, successful implementation will also require that we work together to achieve our common goal. By doing so, I am confident that we will be able to collect accurate data that will help staff and management at all levels, make informed decisions and to be even more successful in achieving results.

Purpose and Review of Agenda- *Karen Walker*, Director, Program Accountability Division

- ✚ The purpose of today's call is to provide an overview of the OMB approved Food Stamp Education Administrative Reporting System fondly known as EARS and outline the timeline in which this form will be implemented by our State partners.
- ✚ This call will focus on the FY2008 reporting requirements for EARS, which are the financial components, i.e., items # 9 and 10. We want to review these aspects of the report to ensure that the data provided for FY2008 is accurate.
- ✚ Many of you are planning to report on other aspects too for FY 2008. We appreciate your diligence in trying to provide all of the data. The trainings that will be conducted later this year will cover the other components of EARS in detail.
- ✚ The agenda also includes an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the State Food Stamp agency, implementing agencies and FNS in completing and/or submitting the EARS form, training, and for other key aspects of the implementation process.
- ✚ Lastly, we will discuss where we go from here, share the training plan for EARS and the tentative training schedule.
- ✚ We do appreciate your attendance on this EARS conference call and deem your participation as a crucial first step in the successful implementation of EARS.

Overview of FY 2008 Reporting Requirements - *Judy Wilson Director, Nutrition Services Staff, ORNA*

- # We will start today by providing a brief overview of the FY 2008 reporting requirements for EARS. Our goal is to ensure we have a common understanding and that we are working together toward that common goal.
- # Specifically for FY 2008, States are required to report expenditures for FSNE from the period beginning Oct 1, 2007 thru September 30, 2008.
- # This is the timeline for all States. We understand that some States have a different fiscal year but it is essential to remember that the data for EARS must reflect the Federal fiscal year. This is true for both the financial data and other FSNE activities reported for EARS.

EARS Implementation Timeline – *Alice Lockett, Senior Nutritionist, Food Stamp Program*

- # Good morning. I will be discussing with you the timeline for EARS implementation. First, I will give you a general overview of the implementation plan and then break down what will happen in each fiscal year.
- # This year, each State submitted Template 9, “The EARS Implementation Plan” with their FY 2008 FSNE plan. This template outlined when each State anticipates reporting data and information for each aspect of the EARS form.
- # There will be a two-year implementation period for EARS reporting starting with FY 2008. During this two-year period, State agencies and implementing partners will create or modify elements of their current data collection systems so that accurate data can be collected and reported for all applicable elements of EARS.
- # By FY 2010, all State agencies must collect and report all applicable components of EARS and fully submit this data on the web-based system by 12/31/ 2010.
- # Now I would like to briefly breakdown what will occur during each fiscal year while EARS is moving towards full implementation.
- # **FY 2008** is the first year of EARS implementation. During this first year, States are required to submit financial data for expenditure items 9 and 10.
- # The web-based reporting system will be available from October 15, 2008 to December 30, 2008. State Food Stamp Offices will use this system to submit EARS information. EARS data are due by 12/31/2008. We suggest that the State Food Stamp Office establish an earlier date, such as November 1st of each year for implementing agencies to send EARS information to them.
- # During this first implementation year, FNS will conduct multi-level, ongoing trainings and provide technical assistance to support States with smooth implementation of EARS.
- # FNS will continue with multi-level trainings and technical assistance to address ongoing questions that emerge during the implementation process in 2009.

- # State FSP agencies may also continue trainings and monitoring activities to assist implementing agencies in making needed adjustments in data collection processes in order to capture accurate data for EARS.
- # State FSP agencies will review and report FY 2009 EARS data provided by implementing agencies, using the web based submission system by the deadline of 12/31/2009.

Review of Financial Questions 9 & 10 – *Charlie Okal*, Branch Chief, Grants Management Branch

Good Morning

- # I think Question 9 is straightforward but there might be some confusion regarding Lines 2 and Lines 5. What we are actually looking for is all of the sources of funding for Food Stamp Nutrition Education. We think we have captured the basic types involved but I want to clarify Line 2 (Public and Private Cash Contributions - Other than State and Local Tax Revenue) and Line 5 (Private Cash Contributions to State Food Stamp Agency Only). The difference is that Line 5 is cash that is contributed to the State Agency itself. It is not cash that is given or provided to a local provider for activities. Money that is contributed to the State Agency has to get a waiver because of an OMB requirement. So if the funds go from a private contributor to the State Agency itself, a waiver is required. Those funds are reported differently on this form; they go onto Line 5.
- # The rest of the lines are actually fairly straight forward. Nobody should have an issue with any of the definitions because the instructions are pretty explicit. A potential math issue is the money from Indian Tribal Organizations since that is reimbursed at 75/25 rather than the usual 50/50 ratio. The Indian Tribal Organizations only need to put up 25% of the money rather than 50%, so if you did the straight math it might not come out to 50-50. That is probably the only two things I'll mention about this table; private cash contributions and the percentages on the Indian Tribal Organizations.
- # Question 10 really gets at the larger management issue as to how the funds are spent; whether they are actually spent for nutrition education activities or for overhead or administration of the actual project. We provided definitions for each of those lines in the instructions. You can report either actual or estimated costs based on the activity of the people involved. If they spend 20% of their time administering the grant then you can use that kind of data, but we have tried to separate it out by the actual types of costs that are to be included on each of those lines. This would give us information about how much money is actually spent on first line nutrition education and how much is spent on the administration of the program. We tried to make it as clear and as simple as we could.

Thank You!

Overview of the Approved EARS Form - Judy Wilson, Director, Nutrition Services Staff, ORNA

During the OMB clearance process, some changes were negotiated both in the data contained in EARS and in the instructions. We made minor edits through-out the form; the most significant modifications are as follows:

The **Direct Education** component is now structured in a way that achieves the following:

- ✚ Allows implementing agencies (IAs) either to report actual unduplicated FSNE participants **or** estimated counts of participants.
- ✚ Establishes actual unduplicated counts of participants as the preferred data to report.
- ✚ Allows IAs that are unable to report actual unduplicated counts to provide an **estimated** count of participants.
- ✚ Collects data on **actual or estimated** contacts. The inclusion of the contact data, coupled with the participation information adds an additional level of richness to the EARS data and provides more contexts for analyzing the data.
 - When IAs submits data as **estimated**, they must describe the methods used to derive these estimates.
 - This new format is used consistently throughout the **Direct Education** section including the following sections:
 - 1a. FSNE Participants by Age & FS States
 - 1b. FSNE Contacts by Age & FS States
 - 2a. FSNE Participants by gender
 - 2b. FSNE Contacts by gender
 3. Participants by Race / Ethnic Groups.
- ✚ We made minor changes in instructions and examples in other sections of the EARS form. For example, under the *Indirect Education Section (item 8b)*, we added a 'source of data' column to get information on how agencies are "estimating the size of audience reached". We included codes for this column.

Roles and Responsibilities for EARS Implementation– Maura McCormick, Nutritionist, Nutrition Services Staff, ORNA

Both the State Food Stamp Agency and its FSNE implementing partners play critical roles in regards to EARS. FSNE implementing agencies are responsible for:

- ✚ Attending any State or Regional trainings on EARS.
- ✚ Providing training and technical assistance to local FSNE providers regarding the collection of EARS data.
- ✚ Reviewing and monitoring the collection of EARS data at the project level including making necessary adjustments in current collection systems to ensure that data is accurately collected and reported in a manner that is consistent with the EARS format.
- ✚ Collecting, compiling and accurately completing the EARS form and submitting it to the State FSP Agency in the format requested by the State Agency.
- ✚ Using EARS data to inform the planning and management process as appropriate.

The State Food Stamp Agency is responsible for ensuring that accurate and complete information is collected by the implementing partners and for submitting the data to FNS by December 31st of each year beginning in 2008. This role involves:

- ✚ Participating in regional trainings on EARS.
- ✚ Providing training and technical assistance to FSNE implementing agencies regarding the collection of EARS data and informing them of the format to use in submitting it to the State Agency.
- ✚ Reviewing and monitoring FSNE implementing agencies' collection for EARS to ensure that data is accurately collected and reported.
- ✚ Entering and submitting EARS data for each implementing agency in the Food Program Reporting System (FPRS).
- ✚ Using the EARS data to inform the annual FSNE State Plan process, generate reports for State partners and stakeholders, and generate awareness regarding FSNE services in the State.

The Regional offices will be responsible for:

- ✚ Coordinating, planning and participating in Regional trainings lead by headquarters.
- ✚ Providing training and technical assistance to State FSP regarding the collection and reporting of EARS data.
- ✚ Reviewing EARS information submitted by the State FSP agencies, providing feedback, as needed, to correct problems and forwarding it to headquarters through the FPRS system.
- ✚ Using the EARS data to inform the annual FSNE State Plan review process, generate reports for State partners and stakeholders.

Headquarters is responsible for:

- ✚ Planning and conducting EARS training.
- ✚ Providing technical assistance to Regional offices and State Food Stamp Agencies as requested to ensure continuous quality improvement and timely implementation.
- ✚ Provide training resources.
- ✚ Developing a web based on-line reporting system and testing its functionality.
- ✚ Generating reports and papers to inform management decisions.
- ✚ Monitoring progress in implementing EARS including developing a plan to consolidate EARS and the annual reporting process.
- ✚ Collecting user feedback and responding as appropriate and using information to improve the process for the next OMB authorizing cycle.

Overview of EARS Training – *Susanne Gregory*, Training Contractor and Facilitator

- ✚ What we have planned are several different training products that you will be able to use in a couple different ways. The first thing that you have already heard about is a one day regional training in each of the regions that will take place between January and May of next year. It includes a case study, lots of time for questions & answers, lots of exposure to data that's realistic data and use of the form. We plan for the trainings to be a very hands-on and participatory. We will also make the training materials available for you to adapt and use for training in your own State. For instance, you will be able to take the Power Point and adapt it for your own training needs. If your State does not do Social Marketing, you do not need the content for Element #7 and you would be able to hide those slides and take out that content so you are just training on just what you need to address.

- # The second piece is that we will be capturing all the questions and answers from each regional trainings and rolling all of that content into a training document that will be available online. We will be learning as we go and capturing what we learn in the training manual.
- # The third phase is to offer some targeted technical assistance conference calls that would be topic specific for any States who are struggling with data collection around, for example, elements 1 through 5 for direct education (or another particular element,). We would actually focus on that particular issue and design a technical assistance conference call that could be offered once or several times to address some of those issues. This capacity has been built in to the training plan.
- # The final document would be an online training manual/resource that actually pulls together all of these training pieces. We will place all of these on the FSNE Nutrition Connection web site. You will have access to these training resources for future State, local or new staff training, by going to the web site and pulling down exactly what you need from it. It will include lots of examples including the case studies. You will be able to use these resources at in any way that you need to support EARS implementation in your State. We want to try to make it a living training document that is available online and that can be updated as often as needed.

Training Schedule – *Melissa Walker*, Nutritionist, Food Stamp Program

- # Good morning. I am very happy to report that at this point we have scheduled EARS trainings for all seven regions on our calendars.
- # I am going to review the dates and locations of these scheduled trainings at this time.
- # Our inaugural training is being conducted in the Western region on 22 January in Sacramento, CA
- # On Feb 06 and 07th we will be doing two ½ day trainings with the Midwest Region in Lansing, MI
- # Next up is the Mid-Atlantic region on Feb 20th. The location for this training is still being determined so stay tuned.
- # We open up the month of March in Denver, Colorado with training for the Mountain Plains region on the 4th
- # Later that month we will travel to Durham, NH to conduct training for the Northeast region on March 19th.
- # For the month of April we have training scheduled in Dallas, TX for the Southwest regions on the 09th
- # And we finish with the regional trainings on the 23rd of April in Atlanta, GA with the Southeast region.
- # Many of your questions regarding the particulars of these trainings and the logistics will be answered and more information will be provided as the training dates in each respective region draw nearer. The training schedule is attached as a separate document for easy printing.

Wrap-up – *Judy Wilson*

Thanks again for attending the call today. Please remember the following:

- ✚ Submit all questions in writing to RO
- ✚ Responses to all Q & As will be posted on the Food Stamp Nutrition Connection (FSNC)
- ✚ Visit FSNC at <http://foodstamp.nal.usda.gov> for:
 - Approved EARS form
 - Updated training schedule
 - Related information

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Regional Training Dates

	REGION	REGIONAL CONTACT	TRAINING DATE	LOCATION	Meeting Site
1.	WRO	Marisa Cheung	22 JAN	Sacramento, CA	Sacramento Convention Center
2.	MWRO	Mavia Fletcher	06-07 FEB (1/2 days)	East Lansing, MI	TBD
3.	MARO	Joni Garcia	20 FEB	Mt. Laurel, NJ	Hyatt Place
4.	MPRO	Colleen Bray	04 MAR	Denver, CO	Crowne Plaza
5.	NERO	Martha Cavanaugh	19 MAR	Durham, NH	The New England Center
6.	SWRO	Linda Melcher	09 APR	Dallas, TX	Radisson Hotel Central Dallas
7.	SERO	Crushonda Todd	23 APR	Atlanta, GA	Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center

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Questions and Answers

- 1. Questions:** How would program income be treated? Program income is defined as cash received due to activities that were funded by the grant. The funds received are exclusive of the costs of producing the materials.

Answer: Program income is shared with FNS and should be accounted for in this way. If the entire amount of the Program income is applied towards the total cost of program operations, that is, a 100% deduction of costs based on the income, then no amount needs to be reported on Question 9.

- 2. Questions:** How should indirect cost adjustments which are made each year after closeout be handled when completing the EARS form?

Answer: In most cases, a State Food Stamp agency or local grantee would not have indirect cost adjustments. If there are anticipated adjustments, you should base the amounts on the best estimate and obligate these funds prior to close out of the fiscal year. Final adjustments would be recorded in the following year's outlays.

- 3.** EARS implementation will require that new data collection forms are created for the end users. Is there any possibility that FNS would consider developing an end user collection form for use by interested States? If not, would FNS consider setting up a system for sharing forms among States?

Answer: FNS is asking States to share their data collection forms with us. FNS will review these forms and post the ones that meet EARS reporting needs on the Food Stamp Nutrition Connection (FSNC) Web site. Please send copies of your form to the appropriate regional office by January 4, 2008.

- 4.** Is it possible for Staff from one region to attend training in another region due to schedule conflicts or other reasons of convenience?

Answer: Each FNS region will determine if they are able to accommodate State and RO staff from other regions at their EARS training. Consequently, States that need to attend EARS training outside of their region should send these requests to their RO to coordinate. Please keep in mind that the total number of people that may attend an EARS training will remain the same-35 state and implementing agency personnel.

5. What is the difference between a participant and a contact

Answer: Reporting an unduplicated count of direct education **participants** means providing the number of different individuals who receive any FSNE direct education. Each individual counts as one participant, regardless of the number of times he or she has participated in direct education activities. A **FSNE contact** is defined as an interaction in which a FSNE participant participates in a direct education activity. Each FSNE participant may have one or more FSNE contacts.

6. The States will have to have access to FPRS and to the specific EARS form. Who will manage this access to information?

Answer: State Food Stamp offices currently use FPRS to submit other program data. The State Food Stamp Agency may assign the EARS report submission to staff that is doing this for other aspects of the program or assign it to others. The State Food Stamp Agency in each State will determine the appropriate person to receive, review and rollup EARS data and to transmit it to FNS.

7. How many people can attend the EARS training? And who specifically should be invited?

Answer: FNS can accommodate up to 35 people from the States at each of the regional trainings. This includes staff from the State Food Stamp Office and implementing agencies. The training is designed to address information that implementing agencies must collect and submit. Therefore, we anticipate that most of the audience will be implementing agency staff involved in EARS related activities and State FS staff that work closely with them.

In addition, personnel from the region and the national office will attend the trainings. We will set up special training sessions for State Food Stamp Office and regional staff to review the FPRS EARS application and address any questions they have concerning it. At this time, we project that this training will be done late summer or early fall.

8. Will computer access or other equipment be necessary when making conference arrangements?

Answer: Yes, we will work with designated staff in each region on logistical issues.

9. What does the daily schedule look like? Including starting and ending times, breaks and lunch? The hotel conference center wants these types of details when arranging for the conference.

Answer: The EARS trainings will generally start at 8 am and last until at least 5 pm. We are planning to have exercise breaks (no refreshments) and lunch will generally be at noon, unless there are special circumstances. Again, we will work with each region on these logistical issues and will address any unique concerns from individual regional offices with them.