



MITT ROMNEY
Governor


KERRY HEALEY
Lieutenant Governor

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111

TIMOTHY MURPHY
Secretary

JOHN A. WAGNER
Commissioner

Field Operations Memo 2006-30
July 10, 2006

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  Cescia Derderian, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: FS (NPA or PA) Application Processing Guidelines

Overview

In recent years, the Department has successfully completed a number of initiatives to increase Food Stamp (FS) participation, primarily among them, the expansion of application methods and a broader interpretation of the waiver of the face-to-face interview. As a result, the FS caseload has increased significantly. To help AU Managers meet the challenge of maintaining program accuracy and timeliness, the Department streamlined application procedures through Field Operations Memo 2004-12.

The Department continues to experience an increase in the number of FS applications; however, applications received through methods other than walk-in, followed by an in-person interview, continue to challenge the Department's ability to preserve program accuracy while simultaneously improving access. This situation, combined with continuing application processing issues, has caused the Department to update application procedures and timeframes for TAO staff.

Purpose of Memo

This memo advises TAO staff of the following updated guidelines for processing FS applications:

- General Application Rules;
 - FS Application Terminology
 - FS Application Screening and Interview Scheduling;
 - Issuing EBT Cards;
 - Processing FS Applications;
 - Missed Interview;
 - Entering Verifications as Received; and
 - Approving or Denying a FS Application.
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**General
Application
Rules**

All applicants must be advised and encouraged to file an application on the same day the household contacts the Department in person, by telephone or in writing. If an individual requests a FS application form by telephone or in writing, an application form must be mailed to the individual the same day as the request, if possible. TAOs must not limit the time periods for accepting FS applications or making FS applications available during regular business hours.

AU Managers must provide interpreter services to applicants whose primary language is not English or who use American Sign Language (ASL), regardless of language or national origin. For more information on Interpreter Services, see Field Operations Memo 2005-34.

**Adequate
Application**

An application is considered adequate if it contains the applicant's **name**, **address** (*if any*) and is **signed** by the applicant. An application submitted in this manner is sufficient to establish the filing date for FS benefits once received by the TAO.

Note: Internet applications received through BEACON are adequate since the minimal requirements have been met. The applicant's decision to hit the submit button constitutes a signature for the purposes of setting the application start date.

IMPORTANT: Only applications that are considered adequate should be date-stamped and entered into BEACON. If the TAO receives an unsigned application, the application must be returned to the applicant with instructions to sign and return to the TAO.

**Application
Start Date**

TAOs must date-stamp all applications received with the exception of applications received via fax or Internet. Fax applications have a transmission date and time printed on them and Internet applications are dated by BEACON. The day an adequate application is received is the application start date. For FS purposes, the application start date (**Day 1**) is established as:

- The date a walk-in applicant applies for benefits in person at the TAO; or
 - The date an adequate drop-off or mail-in application is received in the TAO and date-stamped; or
 - The date based on the time of day and the day of the week an adequate fax or an adequate Internet application is received at the TAO.
 - Fax and Internet applications received on or before 5:00 p.m. on a business day will have an application start date of that day.
 - Fax and Internet applications received after 5:00 p.m. on a business day, or anytime during a weekend or a holiday will have an application start date of the next business day.
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FS Application Terminology

Screening

For FS purposes, *screening* is defined as the AU Manager speaking with the applicant to explore hardship waiver reasons and asking/explaining the expedited service questions. Screening can occur in person or over the phone.

Time of First Contact

For FS purposes, *the time of first contact* is defined as the day an adequate application is screened for hardship and expedited purposes.

Note: The first contact may occur outside the seven day expedited timeframe.

Subsequent Discovery

For FS purposes, *Subsequent Discovery* is defined as the later determination that an applicant qualifies or is eligible for expedited benefits. The expedited benefits must be issued seven-day days from the date the subsequent discovery is made. See page 5 of this memo for more information on Subsequent Discovery.

FS Application Screening and Interview Scheduling

Applications are received in a variety of ways, walk-in, drop-off, mail-in, fax or Internet. Any applicant, including an applicant who applies in person at the TAO may qualify for waiver of the face-to-face interview or may be eligible for expedited service. AU Managers must offer every applicant the opportunity to take advantage of a telephone interview and must screen for expedited service, *at the time of first contact*. The applicant does not have to request either a hardship waiver or expedited service.

If the AU Manager is unable to speak with and screen the applicant on Day 1, the AU Manager must on Day 2:

- Mail a *Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an In-Office Interview* (See Attachment A), if the applicant did not indicate a hardship waiver reason on the FS application; or
- Mail a *Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for a Telephone Interview* (See Attachment B), if the applicant indicated a hardship waiver reason on the FS application.

The AU Manager must enter the hardship waiver reason on the BEACON Narratives tab.

Determining Eligibility for Expedited Service is a Two-Step Process:

Step One: Does the AU Qualify for Expedited Service?

Households are eligible for expedited service if:

1. The AU's gross income in the month of application does not exceed \$150 and countable liquid assets do not exceed \$100; **or**
2. The AU's combined monthly gross income and liquid assets are less than the combined monthly rent (or mortgage) and utilities (i.e., the appropriate SUA); **or**
3. The AU is a migrant or seasonal farm worker as described in 106 CMR 365.810.

Step Two: Does the AU Appear Eligible for FS Benefits?

At the **application interview** (*in person or by phone*), the AU Manager must determine if the AU appears eligible for FS stamp benefits. The AU Manager must collect as much information and verification regarding FS eligibility as possible. However, identity is the only eligibility factor that must be verified within the seven-day expedited timeframe. **The electronic validation of the applicant's Social Security Number through the State Verification and Exchange System (SVES) is an acceptable verification of identity for expedited purposes.** After the applicant has been interviewed, lack of verification other than identity must not delay expedited service during the seven-day expedited timeframe.

- If the applicant meets the criteria for expedited service, appears eligible for FS benefits and provides proof of identity by Day 7, the AU Manager must issue expedited benefits by Day 7.
- If the applicant has not been screened, fails to attend an interview (*in person or by phone*), fails to provide verification of identity or does not appear eligible for FS benefits after the interview, the AU Manager must:
 - Go to the Program Administration workflow in BEACON and remove the expedited reason in the Immediate Needs field; and
 - Enter the following language on the BEACON Narratives tab, as appropriate: **Applicant removed from Expedited Service: {not screened}, {not interviewed}, {failed to provide identity}, or {appears ineligible for FSP}.**

IMPORTANT: If the expedited reason is removed, the AU will not appear on the Tompkins Expedited Report as untimely. The expedited service reason is retained in the Request for Assistance notice found on the Document History tab.

**FS Application
Screening and
Interview
Scheduling**

Subsequent
Discovery

Subsequent Discovery of Applicant Qualification for Expedited Benefits

1. An applicant is screened, interviewed and determined eligible for expedited service by Day 7. The applicant **fails to provide identification by Day 7**, but provides proof of identity during the 30-day pending period. The AU Manager must process expedited benefits using ***subsequent discovery*** rules within seven days after the applicant provides proof of identity. If the applicant fails to complete the application process by Day 30, the AU Manager must deny FS benefits on Day 30 in accordance with FSP processing rules.
2. An applicant is unable to be screened and interviewed by Day 7. The applicant is screened and interviewed later in the 30-day pending period. If the applicant is determined eligible for expedited service, the AU Manager must process expedited benefits using ***subsequent discovery*** rules within seven days of the date the expedited service eligibility determination is made. If the applicant fails to complete the application process by Day 30, the AU Manager must deny FS benefits on Day 30 in accordance with FSP processing rules.

Example: An adequate application is received and date-stamped on August 21 (*Day 1*). The AU Manager calls the applicant on August 21 and again on August 22 (*Day 1 & 2*) but is unable to reach the applicant. On August 22 (*Day 2*), the AU Manager mails an appointment letter scheduling a telephone interview for August 25 at 10:00 a.m. since the applicant indicated a hardship. The applicant does not call to reschedule and there is no answer when the AU Manager calls on August 25. On September 1, the applicant calls the AU Manager to be interviewed. During the screening/interview, the AU Manager discovers that the applicant is eligible for expedited service. The AU Manager must issue expedited benefits by September 8 under ***subsequent discovery*** rules.

For applicants subject to expedited service under ***subsequent discovery*** rules, the AU Manager must select the expedited reason in the Immediate Needs field on the Program Change window in the Program Administration workflow. The AU Manager must record the reason for the ***subsequent discovery*** on the BEACON Narratives tab using the following language: ***Eligible for expedited benefits by subsequent discovery.***

Scheduling the
Application
Interview

If the AU Manager is unable to complete the application interview at the ***time of first contact***, the AU Manager must schedule the face-to face or telephone application interview:

- within 7 days if the applicant qualifies for expedited service; or
- within 14 days if the applicant does not qualify for expedited service.

The AU Manager must use the appropriate **Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter** based on hardship waiver information to schedule the application interview.

**Issuing EBT
Cards**

Due to audit requirements, it is necessary to verify identity before issuing an EBT card. EBT cards must be requested on Day 1 and issued as soon as the applicant provides proof of identity or the SSN is electronically verified through SVES. The following standardized procedures for issuing EBT cards are more detailed than the *BEACON User's Guide* instructions.

**Issuing
EBT Cards
(Continued)**

*If identity (proof of identity provided or identity document included with mail, fax, drop-off or Internet application) **is verified on Day 1, the AU Manager must:***

- Complete RFA on Day 1 and check the *Request Primary EBT Card* box; **Note:** For Internet applications, an EBT card is automatically requested once the Web Workflow is completed.
- Select the item used to verify identity from the *EBT Card Request Identity* dropdown list in RFA or for Web applicants verify identity in the *EBT Card Request* window in *EBT Client List*; and
- For a walk-in applicant, send the applicant to the CIS clerk, who will:
 - go to *Pending EBT Card Request* view under the *Daily Priority Actions*;
 - verify identity using the verification selected by the AU Manager;
 - create and issue the EBT card; and
 - have the applicant select a PIN.

OR

For an EBT card by mail, the AU Manager must:

- From the *EBT Client list, EBT Card Request* window, select the record and fill out the required fields; and
- Be sure to select *Central Print* from the *Print Location* dropdown list so the request is processed for an EBT card/PIN by mail.

*If identity is **not verified on Day 1, the AU Manager must:***

- On Day 2, check the Verifications tab to see if the SSN has been validated through SVES.
- Once the applicant's SSN is validated through SVES, the AU Manager must:
 - Verify identity in the *EBT Card Request* window/*EBT Client List* by selecting *Validated by SSA/SDX*;
 - Fill out the required fields; and
 - Select *Central Print* so the request is processed for an EBT card/PIN by mail.

Note: If no SSN is provided, or identity is questionable, the AU Manager must request verification of identity before issuing an EBT card in person or by mail.

**EBT Card
(Continued)**

If an expedited applicant for whom an *EBT card by mail* was processed, comes to the TAO and requests an EBT card, the AU Manager must:

Applicant Eligible
for Expedited
Service Requests
EBT Card/PIN in
Person

- On the day the applicant visits the TAO, send the applicant to the CIS Clerk for a **replacement EBT card/PIN** to be issued to the applicant immediately;
 - Tell the applicant that identification must be shown to the CIS clerk; and
 - Explain to the applicant that the EBT card/PIN that were mailed must be destroyed upon receipt.
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**Processing
FS Applications**

The AU Manager must:

- Review the FS Application for minimal requirements and signature on Day 1;
Note: Once “submitted” an Internet application is considered signed for the purpose of establishing the application start date.
- Complete the RFA on BEACON or Web Workflow on Day 1.
Note: Completion of RFA establishes the application start date and serves as the expedited service screening tool.

During the in-office application interview, the AU Manager must:

- Give the walk-in applicant the FS Program Brochure, Your Right to Know Brochure and the Family Resource Brochure, if not received on Day 1;
Note: Drop-off, mail-in, fax and Internet applications will automatically be sent all brochures as part of the FS App Info Notice mailing once RFA or the Web Workflow has been completed.
 - Give the applicant a copy of *Supplement A: Questions Regarding Citizenship Status* on Day 1;
 - Enter verifications received into BEACON and request additional verifications, as necessary, including match-related proofs. The AU Manager must check the Match History tab to see if there is any outstanding match information for the AU.
 - Print the BEACON Verification Checklist **locally** ;
 - Print the BEACON FS application **locally**;
 - Review the Rights and Responsibilities/Penalty Warning pages of the application with the applicant;
 - Have the applicant sign the application;
 - Enter outstanding verifications into BEACON, as received; and
 - Approve or deny the application on or before Day 30. *See the **Approving or Denying a FS Application** section of this memo.*
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**Processing
FS Applications
(Continued)**

During the telephone application interview, the AU Manager must:

- Mail the walk-in applicant the FS Program Brochure, Your Right to Know Brochure and the Family Resource Brochure, if not provided on Day 1;
Note: Drop-off, mail-in, fax and Internet applications are automatically sent all brochures as part of the FS App Info Notice mailing once RFA or the Web Workflow has been completed.
 - Discuss *Supplement A: Questions Regarding Citizenship Status* with the applicant;
 - Review all information provided on the application;
 - Enter the verifications received with the application into BEACON and request additional verifications, as necessary, including match-related proofs. The AU Manager must check the Match History tab to see if there is any outstanding match information for the AU.
 - Print the Verification Checklist **centrally** so that it is mailed from Schraffts;
 - Print the BEACON application.
 - For *Walk-in* applications or expedited service applications, print the BEACON Application **locally** and mail it to the applicant;
 - For drop-off, mail-in, fax or Internet applications, select *Application-Central Print* on the Application /Reevaluation window of the Program Administration workflow. The BEACON-generated application along with the RR/FSP-1B form will be mailed from Schraffts;
- REMINDER:** The *Application-Central Print* option is restricted to non-expedited FS-only applications received by drop-off, mail-in, fax or Internet.
- Enter outstanding verifications on BEACON as received;
 - Verify the *Application-Central Print* when the applicant returns the signed RR/FSP-1B form; and
 - Approve or deny the application on or before Day 30. *See the **Approving or Denying a FS Application** section of this memo.*

**Walk-In
Applicant not
Screened on
Day 1**

If a Walk-in applicant is unable to meet with an AU Manager (*i.e.*, work or child care issues) or the AU Manager is unable to complete the RFA in BEACON on the day the application is filed, (*i.e.*, at the end of office hours), the AU Manager must:

- Ask the applicant to complete paper FS application minimal requirements (applicant's **name, address, if any, and signature**);
 - Date-stamp the application to preserve the start date; and
 - Record the application in the BEACON RFA by Day 2 as a Drop-off so that all brochures can be mailed to the applicant by Schraffts; and
 - Process in accordance with the procedures in this memo based on whether the applicant is subject to an in-office or telephone interview.
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Missed Interviews

If an applicant misses a scheduled appointment interview, by telephone or in person, and the applicant fails to contact the AU Manager to reschedule the interview by Day 30, the FS application must be denied for failure to complete the application process **on Day 30**.

Processing Verifications As Received

After the applicant has been interviewed, the AU Manager must:

- Complete the Verification Checklist at the application interview and offer to help the applicant obtain requested verification(s);
- Advise the applicant to call if having difficulty getting the requested verifications;
- Identify alternative forms of verifications, as necessary;
- Tell the applicant of the date the verifications must be submitted and record that date on the Verification Checklist; and
- Enter all verifications received on BEACON as received.

For more information on verifications, refer to a *User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter III-D.

Approving or Denying a FS Application

A FS application must be approved or denied on or before Day 30. If Day 30 falls on a weekend or holiday, the FS application must be denied on the business day immediately following the weekend or holiday. AU Managers must deny a FS application using the following guidelines:

- If an applicant misses a scheduled in-office or telephone interview, and fails to reschedule the interview within the thirty-day timeframe, the AU Manager must deny the application on Day 30, using the **Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process**.
- If an applicant fails to return the signed RR/FSP-1B form, the AU Manager must deny the application on Day 30 using the **Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process**.
- If the applicant fails to provide one or more mandatory verifications, the AU Manager must deny the application on Day 30 using the **Denial Reason: Failure to provide verifications**.

REMEMBER: The application must not be denied for failure to provide one or more **optional** verifications. In such instances, the AU Manager must approve the AU and enter the following in the BEACON Narratives tab: **Case approved, expense information outstanding - {type}**.

- If the applicant is ineligible due to a *nonfinancial* reason, such as student status or noncitizens status, the AU Manager may deny the application using the appropriate denial reason on or before Day 30.
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Approving or Denying a FS Application (Continued)

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- If the applicant is ineligible due to a *financial* reason, the AU Manager must enter the financial information into BEACON as received. BEACON will deny the application on or before Day 30 for the appropriate financial reason (excess income or assets),

REMINDER: PA /FS AUs must be approved or denied by Day 30 regardless of the status of the TAFDC or EAEDC application, or even if the applicant has been granted an extension (INT-2) to provide verifications for cash program benefits.

Food Stamp Application Workflow Deskguide

A **Food Stamp Application Workflow** deskguide has been developed. This deskguide is being distributed as Attachment C to this memo. The deskguide is being printed and will be shipped to TAO staff from Schraffts next week. It will be placed in Policy Online for August 2006.

Obsolete

This memo obsoletes the following Field Operations Memos: **95-16, 95-17** and **2004-12**.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.



Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an In-Office Interview

Name _____

Date _____

Address _____

Telephone Number(s) _____

An appointment has been scheduled for you at the _____ DTA Office on _____ at _____. This appointment is required to complete your application for foods stamp benefits.

If you are unable to keep this appointment, you must call your worker listed below to reschedule.

If you have been scheduled for an in-office interview but you are unable to come to the DTA Office, please call your worker to see if you can qualify for a telephone interview. You may have a telephone interview if for any reason you have a hardship. Hardship reasons include: *being elderly/disabled; transportation problems; you work during DTA office hours; child care/care of elderly disabled household member, or other hardship reason.*

Your request for assistance may be denied if you do not keep or reschedule this appointment.

Worker's Name _____

Worker's Telephone Number _____



Food Stamp Appointment Letter Telephone Interview

Name _____

Date _____

Address _____

Telephone Number(s) _____

A telephone appointment interview has been scheduled for you on _____ at _____. Your worker will call you at the time of the appointment at the number you provided on your Food Stamp application. This interview is required to complete your application for foods stamp benefits.

If you are unable to keep this telephone appointment, or you prefer to be interviewed in-person at the DTA Office, you must contact your worker at the telephone number listed below.

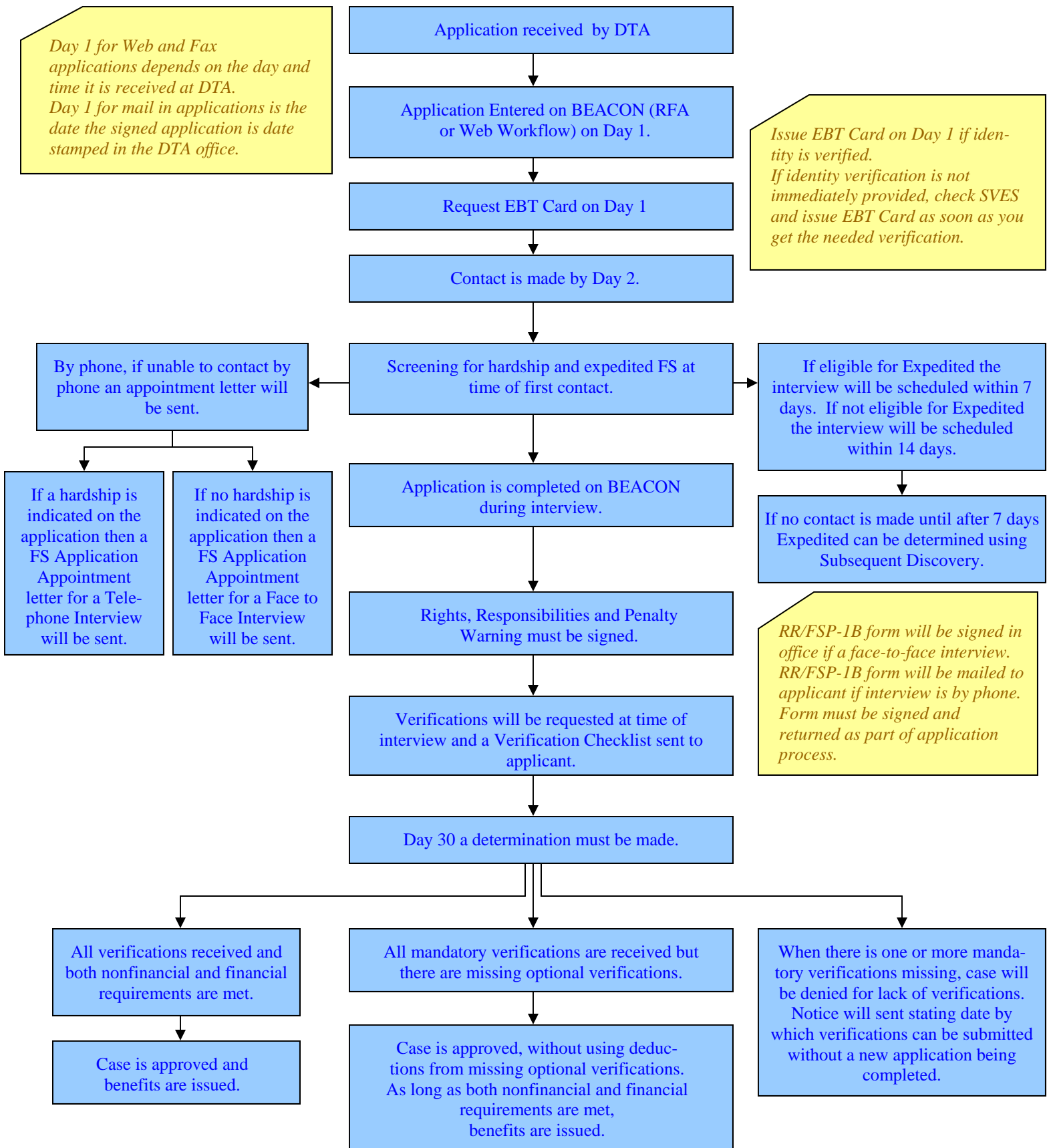
If your worker cannot reach you at this time because your line is busy or you fail to answer your phone, this will be treated as a missed appointment.

Your request for assistance may be denied if you do not keep or reschedule this appointment.

Worker's Name _____

Worker's Telephone Number _____

FOOD STAMP APPLICATION WORKFLOW



FOOD STAMP APPLICATION WORKFLOW (Continued)

