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*Executive Office of Health and Human Services*  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**  
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**Field Operations Memo 2004-12**  
**March 22, 2004**

**To:** Transitional Assistance Office Staff  
**From:**  Cescia Derderian, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations  
**Re:** Food Stamp Application Processing Guidelines

**Background**

Continued outreach efforts and simplification of food stamp program rules to reduce access barriers have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of food stamp applications across the state. To process these applications timely, TAOs are encouraging and using the waiver of the face-to-face interview, see Field Operations Memo 2002-16. In response to the increase in the number of applications received by Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet (*Dorchester, Greenfield, Hyannis, Newmarket, Worcester TAOs only*), and the rise in the number of telephone interviews, revisions have been made to forms and BEACON has been enhanced to ease the burden on TAO staff.

**Purpose of Memo**

This memo provides standardized instructions for processing Food Stamp Applications. Revised and new forms will be described. In addition, changes to BEACON which simplify the process will be identified. This memo will discuss:

- Revised/New Forms and Associated BEACON Changes.
  - Revised/New Forms; and
  - BEACON Changes.
- Filing a Food Stamp Application.
- The Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview.
- Processing Food Stamp Applications:
  - Walk-In Applicants;
    - ◆ Applicants Subject to a Face-to-Face Interview; and
    - ◆ Applicants Potentially Eligible for a Telephone Interview.
  - Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet Applicants;
    - ◆ Applicants Eligible for Telephone Interview; and
    - ◆ Applicants Subject to a Face-to-Face Interview.
  - Unable to Contact; and
  - Missed Interview Appointment.

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**Revised/New Forms and Associated BEACON Changes**


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In developing the standardized food stamp application process, the following forms were revised/created and BEACON changes made.

**Revised/New  
Forms**

***The paper Food Stamp Application Form (FSA-1) has been revised to meet federal standards.***

- Language informing the applicant of the minimum requirements to establish a food stamp filing date was added to the instruction page.
  - Page one now includes a signature line with date and language defining the minimum information needed to establish a food stamp filing date: Name of Applicant, Address (if any) and Signature.
  - A new *Source Box* is now located in the upper right corner of page one.
  - The Department Use Only Section was moved to the bottom of page one.
  - The *Caretaker* question was removed from the paper Food Stamp Application. (The caretaker question is grayed out on BEACON for FS-Only applications.)
  - The *Sharing* question was removed from the shelter expenses section of the Food Stamp Application.
  - A new question #24 was added to the shelter expenses section which addresses information on both heating and cooling expenses.
  - The Rights and Responsibilities were removed from the FSA-1 form.
- A new Rights and Responsibilities/Penalty Warning (RR/FSP-1B) Form has been created.***
- The RR/FSP-1B form will be mailed from Schraffts with centrally-printed BEACON FS-Only applications.
  - A limited supply will be available in TAOs. It will be used when an applicant requests a replacement because they misplaced or lost the original RR/FSP-1B form that was mailed from Schraffts.

***The Central Print functionality has been revised for BEACON-generated FS-Only applications that are not expedited and Method of Application is: Drop-Off, Fax or Mail-In.***

**BEACON  
Changes**

- A header with the applicant's name and address, and the TAO return address will appear on the first page of the BEACON-generated FS application whenever an *Application-Central Print* request is made.
  - A paragraph instructing the applicant to review all information on the application form and to sign and return the RR-FSP-1B form appears on page one. The instructions read: *Please review the enclosed application form to ensure all the information you gave us is correct. Be sure to sign and date the enclosed blue Rights and Responsibilities/Penalty Warning Page form. Mail the signed blue (yellow, if Spanish) form along with any additional verification(s) requested to the DTA office listed on this notice to complete your food stamp application.*
  - A reminder was added at the end of the BEACON-generated application: *Be sure to sign and date the enclosed Rights and Responsibilities/Penalty Warning page; you must do this to complete your food stamp application.*
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**Revised/New Forms and Associated BEACON Changes (Continued)**


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**BEACON  
Changes  
(Continued)**

- A new *Application-Central Print* option was added on the Application/Reevaluation window of the Program Administration workflow. This functionality is available to all applications whose methods of application are: Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet and who are not requesting expedited food stamps.
- *Application-Central Print* was added as a selectable item on the Verification checklist. The AU Manger must verify *Application-Central Print* using the signed RR/FSP-1B form once it is returned.
- **A new Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process was added** under **Reason Category: Noncooperation**. This denial reason must be used when the applicant fails to return a signed RR/FSP-1B form; when the applicant fails to contact the TAO to schedule an application interview; or when the applicant misses and fails to reschedule an appointment for an application interview.

***BEACON-generated FS (PA or NPA) applications that are printed locally have been modified.***

- The sentence referencing the FSP-1B has been removed.
- The Food Stamp Penalty Warning (English or Spanish) is now incorporated on all *locally-printed* BEACON FS applications.

**Filing a Food  
Stamp  
Application**


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All applicants must be advised and encouraged to file applications on the same day the household contacts the Department in person, by telephone or in writing. If an individual requests a food stamp application form by telephone or in writing, an application form must be mailed to the AU the same day as the request.

In accordance with *Tompkins*, TAOs must not limit the time periods for accepting food stamp applications or making food stamp applications available during regular business hours. An application is sufficient as long as the form contains the applicant's **name**, **address** (if any) and is **signed** and dated by the applicant. An application submitted in this manner is sufficient to establish the filing date for food stamp benefits.

- The date a Drop-Off or Mail-In application is received and date-stamped in the TAO is the application filing date.
  - Fax and Internet based applications will have their filing dates determined by the time of day the application is received, and the day of the week the application is received.
    - Fax and Internet based applications received on or before 5pm on a business day will have an application filing date of that day.
    - Fax and Internet based applications received after 5pm on a business day, a weekend or a holiday will have an application filing date of the next business day.
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## The Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview

All AUs must have a face-to-face interview in the TAO unless the face-to-face interview requirement is waived in accordance with 106 CMR 361.510 (A)(B). Many applicants who apply by Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In and Internet may qualify for a waiver of the face-to-face interview. AU Managers must offer all applicants the opportunity to take advantage of a telephone interview and explore any potential waiver reasons such as transportation, employment, illness or childcare issues.

**Note:** If an applicant eligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview prefers to go to the TAO for a face-to-face interview, the applicant must not be denied the opportunity to so.

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## Processing Food Stamp Applications

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### Walk-In Applicants

Some applicants who apply in person at the TAO may be eligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview. AU Managers must offer these applicants the opportunity to take advantage of a telephone interview and explore any potential waiver reasons such as transportation, employment or childcare issues.

*If an applicant is not eligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview, the AU Manager must:*

*Applicants  
Subject to a  
Face-to-Face  
Interview*

- Complete the RFA on BEACON on Day 1.
    - Note:** Completion of RFA establishes the application filing date and serves as the expedited service screening tool. As part of RFA, the AU Manager must give the applicant all program brochures: the Food Stamp Program Brochure, Your Right to Know Brochure and the Family Resource Brochure.
  - Complete an Image-1 form for a Mass EBT card on Day 1.
  - Complete the BEACON application interview, if time permits, or schedule a follow-up face-to-face application interview:
    - within seven days if the applicant qualifies for expedited service; or
    - within fourteen days if the applicant does not qualify for expedited service.
  - **Reminder:** If after the BEACON application interview, an expedited service AU appears eligible for food stamp benefits, expedited food stamp benefits must be issued by Day 7. The only verification necessary to process expedited food stamp benefits is proof of identity.
  - Enter verifications received on Day 1.
  - Print the BEACON food stamp application **locally**.
  - Review the Rights and Responsibilities and newly incorporated Penalty Warning pages with the client at the time of signing.
  - Have the applicant sign the application.
  - Wrap-up the interview process once outstanding verifications are received.
  - Create a request for the application to be approved or denied by Day 30.
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**Processing Food Stamp Applications (Continued)**


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*Applicants  
Potentially  
Eligible for a  
Telephone  
Interview*

If a Walk-In applicant is unable meet with an AU Manager to complete the RFA on Day 1, *i.e.*, at the end of office hours or individual has time constraints due to work or child care issues, the AU Manager must:

- Give the applicant a date-stamped FS Application to establish the filing date for food stamp benefits. **DO NOT RECORD THIS APPLICATION ON BEACON AS A WALK-IN.**
- Once the applicant returns to the TAO to be interviewed in-person or returns the actual paper FS application by Drop-Off, Mail-In or Fax, record the appropriate Method of Application on BEACON. Be sure to explore any potential waiver reasons for the face-to-face interview when the FS application is returned.

Many applicants who apply by Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet may qualify for a waiver of the face-to-face interview. AU Managers must offer these applicants the opportunity to take advantage of a telephone interview and explore any potential waiver reasons such as transportation, employment or childcare issues.

**Drop-Off, Fax,  
Mail-In, or  
Internet  
Applicants**

When a food stamp application is received in the TAO by Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet, the AU Manager must:

- Review the paper FS Application for completeness/signature on Page 1 or complete the Web Application workflow.
- Contact the applicant by telephone to ask the expedited service screening questions and explore possible waiver reasons.

***If an applicant is eligible for a waiver of the face- to-face interview, the AU Manager must:***

- Record the reason for the waiver in the BEACON Narrative.
  - Complete the BEACON RFA at that time.
    - Select the Method of Application on BEACON.
 

*Note:* The mailing of the FS App Info Notice is tied to the Method of Application and is critical for tracking and reporting purposes.
    - All applications with a Method of Application of Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet will be sent the FS App Info Notice once RFA or the Web Application workflow has been completed. Schraffts will enclose all informational brochures with the FS App Info Notice mailing: Your Right to Know brochure, the Food Stamp Program brochure, and Family Resources brochure.
  - Complete the telephone application interview, if time permits, or schedule a follow-up telephone interview:
    - within seven days if the applicant qualifies for expedited service;
    - within fourteen days if the applicant does not qualify for expedited service.
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*Applicants  
Eligible For  
Telephone  
Interview*

*Applicants  
Eligible for a  
Telephone  
Interview  
(Continued)*

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**Processing Food Stamp Applications (Continued)**

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- After the **telephone interview** has been conducted, the AU Manager must:
    - Enter/modify information as clarified through the telephone application interview.
    - Review all verifications submitted with the application and request additional verifications, if necessary.
    - Select *Central Print* option for the Verification so that the verification checklist is mailed from Schraffts.
 

**Remember:** If local print is selected, the AU Manager must enclose and mail the Verification checklist from the TAO.
    - Select *Application-Central Print* on the Application /Reevaluation window of the Program Administration workflow. The BEACON-generated application along with the new RR/FSP-1B form will be mailed from Schraffts.
 

**Note:** The *Application-Central Print* option is restricted to pending FS-Only applications that are not expedited and whose Methods of Application are: Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet. **The AU Manager must print the BEACON-generated application locally and mail it to AUs eligible for expedited service.**
  - Verify *Application-Central Print* when the applicant returns the signed RR/FSP-1B form.
 

**Note:** *Application-Central Print* is both a print function and a new item to be verified on the Verification checklist.
  - Once all outstanding verifications are received, the AU Manager must approve or deny the application on or before Day 30.
    - If the applicant fails to complete the application process by not returning a signed RR/FSP-1B form, deny the application using **the new Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process** under **Reason Category: Noncooperation**.
    - If the applicant fails to submit the required verification(s), or fails to meet any other specific nonfinancial requirement, the AU Manager must deny the application for that specific reason.
  - Issue a Valid-Without-Photo EBT card and mail-issued PIN to that applicant. See a *User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIV, Section C, pages 8 and 13 for instructions on completing a Valid-Without-Photo EBT card and mail-issued PIN.
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**Processing Food Stamp Applications (Continued)**


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Applicants  
Subject to a  
Face-to Face  
Interview

*If an Applicant is ineligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview, the AU Manager must:*

- Call/send an appointment letter to schedule a face-to-face interview.
  - within seven days if the applicant qualifies for expedited service; or
  - within fourteen days if the applicant does not qualify for expedited service.
- Refer to the **Walk-In Applicant: Applicant Subject to Face-to-Face Interview** section of this memo for processing instructions.

**Unable to  
Contact**

An applicant whose application was received by Drop-Off, Fax, Mail-In or Internet must be contacted by Day 5. If the AU Manager cannot contact the applicant, an appointment letter for a face-to-face interview must be mailed on Day 5.

**Note:** If the applicant subsequently contacts the AU Manager and is found eligible for a telephone interview, the AU Manager must consider processing timeframes in granting such a request.

The AU Manager must deny the application on Day 30, using the **new Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process** under **Reason Category: Noncooperation**, if the AU Manger is unsuccessful in attempts to contact the applicant, and the applicant failed to contact the AU Manager.

**Missed Interview  
Appointment**

If an applicant misses a scheduled face-to-face or telephone appointment, and fails to reschedule the appointment within the thirty day timeframe, the AU Manager must deny the application on Day 30, using the **new Denial Reason: Failure to complete the application process** under **Reason Category: Noncooperation**.

**Questions**

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

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