

Meal Application Determination and Verification Process

Initial Eligibility Determination – Meal Applications are processed for all students in the district who have submitted a meal application. A large portion of this work is done at the beginning of the SY, but you must accept meal applications whenever they are submitted to your office throughout the year.

1. Designate an individual to Serve as the “Determining Official”. This could be you, your assistant, or your computer software.
2. The Determining Official ensures applications are complete and approves based on current eligibility guidelines.
 - i. If you are manually approving paper applications, make sure the determining official signs and dates the back of each application
 - ii. If you are using a software program as your determining official, you should sign off on “batches” to indicate that the determinations have been conducted.
3. BEST PRACTICE – have a second party check and sign off on all meal applications. Even though this is not required under normal circumstances, if the State Agency notifies you that you demonstrate a high level of risk for administrative error (based on the results of a recent Administrative Review), you may be REQUIRED to conduct an “Independent Review of Applications”
4. Student eligibility statuses are added to the POS as applications are processed.
5. Meal Applications should be processed as they are received. All eligibility determinations should be made in a timely manner (within 10 operating days).
6. Households must be notified of their child’s eligibility status within 10 operating days of receipt of the application.

Verification Process – The Verification process is only going to affect a small sample of families/students in your district who have submitted meal applications.

1. **Sample Selection:** Select sample of applications that will be subject to Verification (see page 101 of the Eligibility Guide for standard sample sizes versus alternate one or two). The sample pool will be the actual number of approved applications on file as of Oct 1. Students that are categorically eligible through a DC process or SNAP/FDPIR/TANF or foster/homeless/migrant/runaway should not be included in the sample pool.
2. **Confirmation Review¹:** This step is done in house before any students are contacted as part of Verification. Designate a “Confirmation Official” – this person *cannot* be the same person who made the initial eligibility determination. The confirmation official will check the application to ensure that the determining official made the correct calculation. There are four possible outcomes as a result of the Confirmation Review:

¹ NOTE: if you conduct a confirmation review of *all* applications at the time of certification, you are not required to conduct confirmation reviews prior to verification. The confirmation review must be done by an individual other than the individual who made the initial eligibility determination.

- a. The application was determined correctly, **no changes** – in this situation, you will continue with the Verification process for this application.
 - b. The application was determined incorrectly and should **change from Reduced to Free** – in this situation, you should change status immediately, but continue verification process for this application.
 - c. The application was determined incorrectly and should **change from free to reduced** – Do not change the eligibility status at this time, but continue the verification process
 - d. The application was determined incorrectly and should **change from free or reduced to Paid** – in this situation you should give a ten day notice of adverse action. You should NOT move forward with Verification of this application. You should replace this application with a different application for Verification. You should not verify paid applications.
3. **Optional Replacement of Certain Applications**
 4. **Initial Family Notification** – notify families that they have been selected for verification. Give clear instructions regarding how to respond to Verification. Tell them how to contact you or your office to ask questions.
 5. **Process Documents Received:** as you receive documentation from notified households, review the information received and verify that the eligibility category is correct.
 6. **Family Notification based on results of Verification:** as a result of verification, there are three possible outcomes: the documentation can support your initial eligibility determination, the documentation can indicate that benefits should be increased, or the documentation can indicate that benefits should be decreased (adverse action). Whatever the outcome, you should send a notice to the families of the results of verification.
 - a. Notice of no change
 - b. Notice of increased benefits
 - c. Notice of adverse action
 7. **Follow up for Non-Response** : Make 2 attempts to contact household
 8. **Change Eligibility Status for Non-Response:** If the household does respond after 2 documented attempts, the student is moved to paid status. You must give 10 days notice of adverse action before changing the eligibility status in the POS.

Annual Verification Process Checklist

- (if applicable) If you are going to use an alternative sample size, you **MUST** receive prior approval from the State Agency.
- Select sample based on the number of approved applications on file as of **October 1**.
- Double Check to ensure your sample size is accurate! You don't want to pull too many or too few!
- Conduct Confirmation Reviews
 - (if applicable) change students status based on confirmation review
 - (if applicable) substitute any applications that changed to "paid" status as a result of the confirmation review.
- (Optional) Replacement of Certain Applications
- Notify families selected for Verification
- The following tasks should be conducted concurrently (as necessary) until Verification is complete:
 - Process Documents as they are received
 - As documents are processed, notify families of the result of verification
 - Make changes in your POS within 3 days *if* benefits are *increasing*
 - Wait at least ten days before making changes of adverse action in your POS
 - Follow up for no response (1st Attempt)
 - Follow up for no response (2nd Attempt)
 - Notify families who have not responded to Verification (after 2 documented attempts) that their eligibility status will change to paid (must wait 10 days from date of notification to change in the POS).
- Make sure you complete all Verification activities by **November 15**
- Submit your annual Verification Report in MARS by **January 13**