

Text to Connect



Planning a text messaging program to reduce
SNAP churn



Planning a text messaging outreach program to reduce SNAP churn

One in five SNAP clients loses their benefits when the time for recertification comes — but not because they are no longer eligible. Rather, various procedural hurdles can prevent clients from completing recertification obligations.



“Legalese” in the notice might create confusion about a deadline or requirement.



A change in living situation might mean the client never receives recertification notices or requirements.



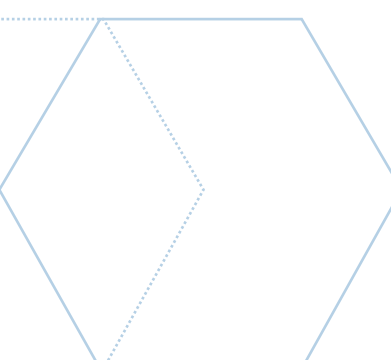
Lack of access to a printer might prevent clients from filling out and submitting mandatory documents.

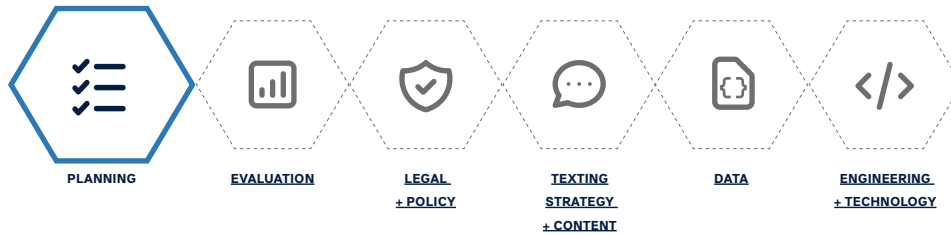


Unreliable or unaffordable transportation might cause a missed caseworker meeting.

If you work in social safety net administration, you already know how a lapse in benefits can harm clients and their households. You also know the havoc churn wreaks on your organization’s workflow — a new application takes caseworkers two to three times more time to process than a recertification, on average.

You may even know that text messaging SNAP clients is a proven tactic to increase the rate of successful recertification. But where to begin? Reading this guide will help you with the first steps.



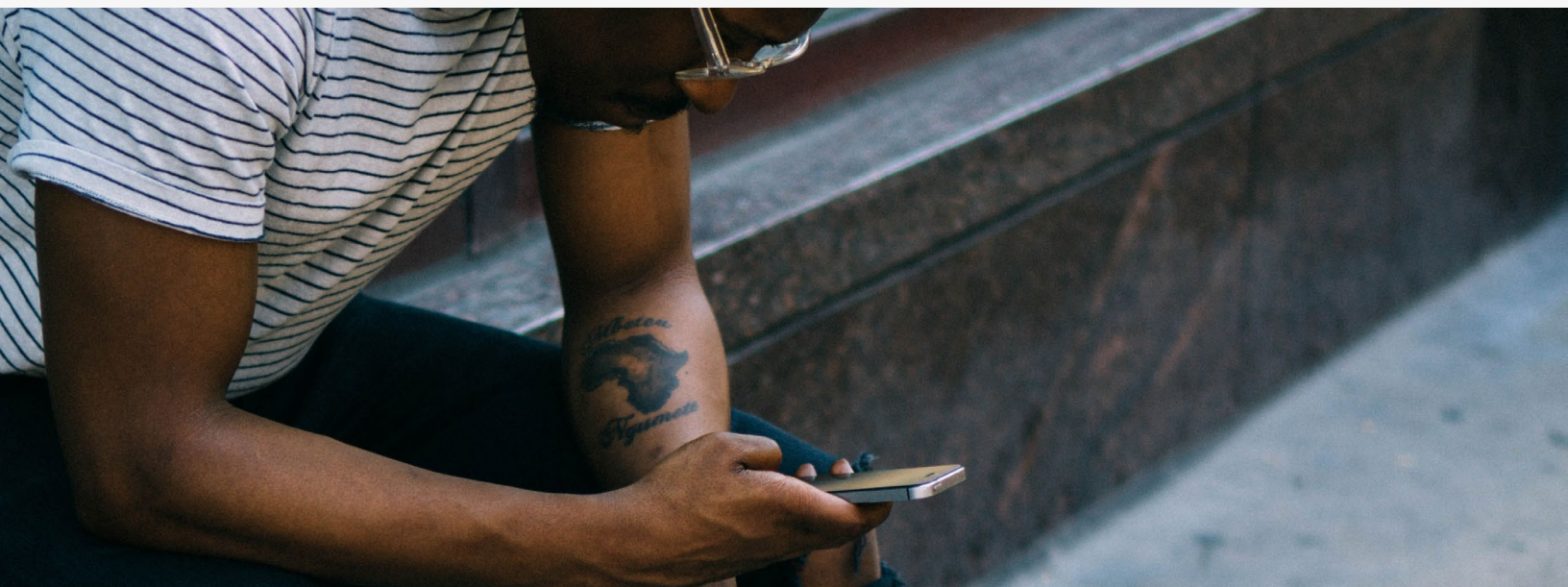


This guide is the first in a series produced by the [Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation](#) at [Georgetown University](#) and the [Benefits Data Trust](#), and is designed to help you implement a text messaging program to reduce SNAP churn. Click on any of the links in this graphic to see a different workstream. Access the entire [guidebook](#).



Inside this document you'll find:

- + [Indicators and methodology](#) for determining how much churn your organization has and why
- + Guidance for [setting objectives](#) for your text messaging program
- + [Roles, skill sets, and FTE equivalents](#) you'll need on your project team from the outset
- + Advice on [mapping workstreams and creating a project plan](#)
- + [Early decision points](#) for you and your team



Understand How Fixing SNAP Churn Can Help Your Agency Achieve Its Goals

When deciding whether and how to begin using text messaging to support clients with SNAP recertification, one of the first steps is to gain a thorough understanding of churn in your state or locale. By understanding how churn affects clients, field staff, and your agency, you can plan a text messaging program that can help your agency meet its goals.

Conducting this initial assessment means working closely with field staff and other agency stakeholders, so it's important to understand your colleagues' thoughts and any concerns they may have about adding text messaging to lessen churn. Socializing the rationale that's explained in the introduction of [the full guidebook](#) may help you gain buy-in for assessment activities.

Get the Numbers

If your reports don't already include churn rates, spend time working with a data analyst to understand what percentage of SNAP enrollment applications are from clients who had participated in SNAP in the previous 90 days.¹ The more that you can use the information you have to understand churn rates over time, across geographies (e.g., county, municipality, ZIP code, urban, rural, and suburban areas), and between other demographic categories (e.g., preferred language, age, race, and ethnicity), the more informed you will be about which clients are experiencing the highest barriers to recertification.

You may want to focus extra effort to understand if and why unique barriers exist in segments of your client population, and design your text messaging program to help alleviate these barriers.²

Also, investigate any available data that indicates why recertification attempts are failing and where clients drop off in the recertification process. Records for clients who experienced churn may include an alphanumeric recertification failure code, and call center staff may categorize calls about recertification failure. Both are valuable data sources. Examine what proportion of clients did not start the process, had recertification form errors, did not submit verification documents, submitted documents that were denied, or did not complete an interview. It's also worthwhile to break this data down by geography and demographic categories. Note if the failure codes indicate any unexpected patterns. This can inform what type of text messaging prompts can be the most effective at reducing churn, and when they should be sent in relation to client deadlines.

1. Rosenbaum, D. (2015).

2. When client demographic data is accessed safely, securely, and ethically, it allows state agencies and their partners in benefit administration to understand how effective they've been at delivering benefits to underserved communities, and can make adjustments to client outreach and processes in order to advance equity. The Equitable Data Working Group, created by Biden-Harris Executive Order 13985 on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government" has started projects designed to responsibly promote data sharing and matching, as permitted by law, to create datasets needed to answer questions pertaining to equity. Source: U.S. Office of Management and Budget. (2021). Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.L.pdf



Collect

Meaningful input and indicators include:

- + Current and past churn rates (% SNAP enrollment applications from clients who participated in SNAP in the previous 90 days)
- + Failure codes assigned to recertification cases
- + Logs/reports from call centers or field staff
- + Additional qualitative data as capacity allows, like field staff surveys and interviews, observations from shadowing field staff, client interviews



Examine

Make sense of the data by asking:

- + What proportion of churning clients:
 - Did not start the recertification process?
 - Had recertification form errors?
 - Did not submit verification documents?
 - Submitted verification documents that were denied?
 - Did not complete an interview?
- + Are there patterns associated with failure codes, cell center, or field staff logs/reports?
- + Does qualitative data reveal any additional reasons for churn?



Disaggregate*

Break results down by:

- + Geography (county, municipality, ZIP code, urban/rural areas)
- + Demographics (preferred language, age, race/ethnicity)

*Consult a data scientist, researcher, or evaluator for accurate and ethical methodologies.

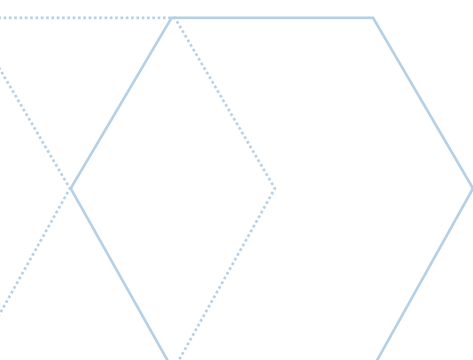
Talk with Field Staff to Understand Churn Rates and Patterns

Qualitative data can help you understand why your clients churn, what's behind any patterns or differences in rates, and what text messages could be the most effective at reducing churn. You may already have information to examine, like logs or reports from call centers or field staff, which can highlight patterns in the problems that clients describe when they experience churn. You could gather new information from field staff through surveys, attending or reading notes from meetings where staff raise issues, conducting a small number of interviews with field staff, or shadowing field staff as they work with clients. If capacity exists to interview clients who've experienced churn, people who work at community organizations that assist clients in SNAP enrollment and recertification, or both you may gain rich information, especially if you want to understand why there may be significant differences in churn rates across groups.

Before deciding to shadow field staff or take on client interviews, we recommend reviewing several resources to assure awareness of best practices involving methods, ethics, privacy, recruitment, and compensation. This kind of work is also called user research.

- + [Stakeholder and User Interviews](#), [Contextual Inquiry](#) (for shadowing field staff), [Privacy](#), [Recruiting](#), and [Incentives](#), 18F
- + [Qualitative Research Practice Guide](#), Code for America

If you do not have trained researchers on staff and your interest in these findings is high, vendors (or independent contractors, or research and evaluation firms) can conduct user research. Contracting with vendors, including independent contractors and research and evaluation firms, can conduct user research. See the Procurement and Vendor Management section of the [Engineering and Technology guide](#) for important considerations.





Clarify How Text Messaging Can Help Your Agency Meet Its Goals

Now that you've gained a more thorough understanding of churn in your state, you should set objectives for a text messaging program. These could include:

- + **Reducing the equity gap** in successful recertifications between non-English speaking clients and English-speaking clients, by including alternate language options in text message outreach.
- + **Minimizing burden on field staff**, by increasing the proportion of successful recertifications and reducing the proportion of new applications coming from people who churned off SNAP, saving time to address more complex cases.
- + **Shortening backlogs of client help requests** that come to call centers and other field staff during recertification deadlines, by supporting clients in getting their recertification process started sooner and providing more clarity about the steps they need to take.
- + **Modernizing how clients can submit forms**, by seeing if text messaging increases the rate of recertification forms that are submitted online vs. postal mail.

Refer back to the list in introduction of [the full guidebook](#) for additional suggestions for program objectives. Before setting your objectives, it's worth taking a look at the text messaging approaches that are possible (one-way texting, two-way texting, and variations described in the [Texting Strategy and Content guide](#)) to understand what types of objectives are feasible objectives. For example, can you increase the number of clients who successfully submit recertifications on time by a certain percentage? It may be advisable to wait and see how much of an impact text messaging has when it is first implemented so your targets are more realistic.

By tying your objectives to needs and issues identified by field staff and clients, you can build buy-in for a text messaging program that will address the real issues that affect SNAP recertification in your state or locale. These objectives can make a strong case to your stakeholders for resourcing and for collaboration from your colleagues in other departments and agencies. Include rates, cost-benefit estimates, and quotes from your quantitative and qualitative assessments.

The objectives will also be used to shape your evaluation plan and identify the data you will need to conduct text messaging. See the [Evaluation guide](#) and the [Data guide](#) for more detail.

Gather Your Team, Resources, and Stakeholders

Every team that takes on a text messaging program will be different. What's important is to bring workstream leads and subject matter experts to the table early on during the planning process so your team can make informed decisions. For a list of decisions that are important to make early for a text messaging program, and options your team can consider, see the [“Early Decision Points”](#) content later in this guide.

As you review this list of needed roles and expertise, remember that some people can contribute in multiple ways, and that some roles and expertise may be shared by more than one person. For instance, an executive sponsor may also manage some partner relationships, or you may have multiple people involved in creating data pipelines.

Project manager

Estimated time commitment*
75-100%



Though a successful text messaging program requires the expertise of many people, the project manager is considered the project “owner”—the one responsible for making sure the project is being conducted in alignment with agency objectives and is moving forward. This person is the primary point of contact for the project and will know the status of its multiple workstreams.

Software developers

Estimated time commitment
30%



One or more people who can build and maintain the infrastructure for the texting platform and data pipeline, and are trained in data privacy and security best practices.

Content and outreach specialists

Estimated time commitment
25%



One or more people who can draft text message content, translate or oversee translation into priority languages, and create the texting engagement plan. It may be useful for this individual to have a background in behavioral science as well as user experience and design. This role may also lead monitoring text message delivery for quality assurance.

Data engineers/analysts

Estimated time commitment
25%



One or more people who can help build the data pipeline and manage, analyze, and synthesize data.

Research and evaluation specialists

Estimated time commitment
10-25%



One or more people trained in qualitative and quantitative research methods who can be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the program. Sometimes also called a user researcher.

Legal counsel

Estimated time commitment
5%



Someone familiar with legal precedent and guidelines at the government agency who can be responsible for contracts and data-sharing agreements.

Partnership liaisons

Estimated time commitment
5%



One or more people who manage relationships with external partners and stakeholders, like community organizations, funders, and other government agencies.

Benefit program specialists

Estimated time commitment
5%



One or more people who are deeply familiar with SNAP program enrollment and recertification processes, including the current service delivery model, pain points, and federal, state, and local program priorities.

Executive sponsor

Estimated time commitment
1-5%



Someone in a leadership position within the government agency that oversees SNAP recertification and approves allocating resources to the text messaging program. Ideally an executive sponsor is also a champion, both externally and within the agency, for the need to improve client experience with SNAP recertification and churn reduction.

Field staff, community-based organizations, and clients

Estimated time commitment
1-5%



Include field staff and community organizations that work with clients on SNAP enrollment and recertification as well as clients throughout the stages of project planning, implementation, and evaluation. For suggestions of how to do so, see Talk with Field Staff to Understand Churn Rates, above.

Policy specialist

Estimated time commitment
3%



Someone familiar with the federal, state, and local policy landscape for SNAP benefits.

Procurement and vendor management specialist

Estimated time commitment
1%



Someone responsible for vetting, selecting, and managing vendors, service providers, and subrecipients. It's highly recommended that this person read the advice and review the resources in the Procurement and Vendor Management section of the [Engineering and Technology guide](#), along with the project manager and agency subject matter experts on the service being procured.

If you find you don't have sufficient in-house capacity to fill each of these roles and areas of expertise, you may choose to engage external vendors that can fill in gaps and bring valuable experience from similar work. We recommend reading the Procurement and Vendor Management section of the companion [Engineering and Technology guide](#) to get up-to-date best practices for procurement that lead to more flexibility and better outcomes for government agencies.

*Represents estimated time spent (Full Time Equivalency, or FTE) contributing to the text messaging program during the period it's in development. These estimates will vary depending on the size and scope of your program.



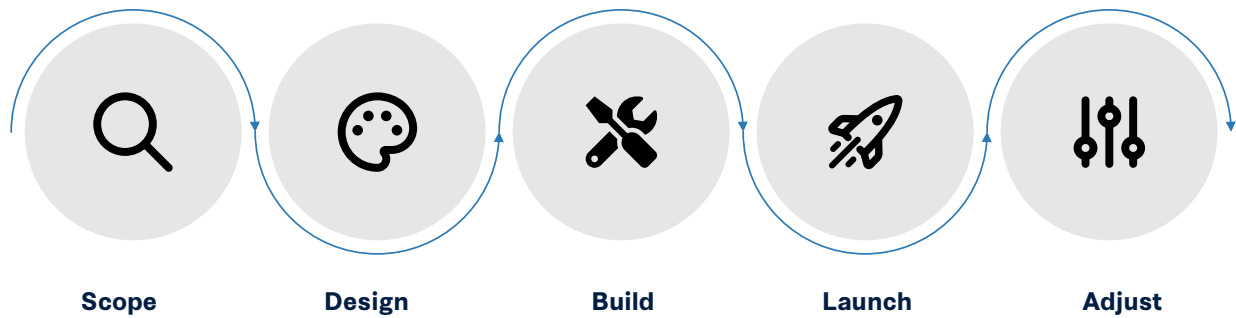
Some best practices to keep in mind as you assemble your team include:

- + Whenever possible, involve people who are familiar with your agency’s systems, protocols, and precedents.
- + Connect with other teams or government agencies that have successfully taken on similar programs to learn from their experiences.
- + Seek out colleagues and partners who may have historical knowledge of previous attempts to engage in client outreach or texting, and understand any sensitivities that may be present from past attempts.
- + Make sure that project workstreams and activities have clear owners and sufficient support (workforce capacity, time allocation, resources) to achieve their goals.
- + Create opportunities for ideation, sharing best practices, troubleshooting, consensus building, and project check-ins as a full, cross-functional team from the outset.
- + Make sure reporting structures and decision-making authority are transparent to ensure people understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to others.
- + Train teams in diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks so that equity is integrated into all parts of the program. Many tools exist to support government agencies in this, such as the Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity’s Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity, which provides a structure to consider equity enablers and risks when implementing a policy or program.³

3. Nelson, J., Brooks, L. (2015). Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity. Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity. <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/resources/racial-equity-toolkit-opportunity-operationalize-equity/>

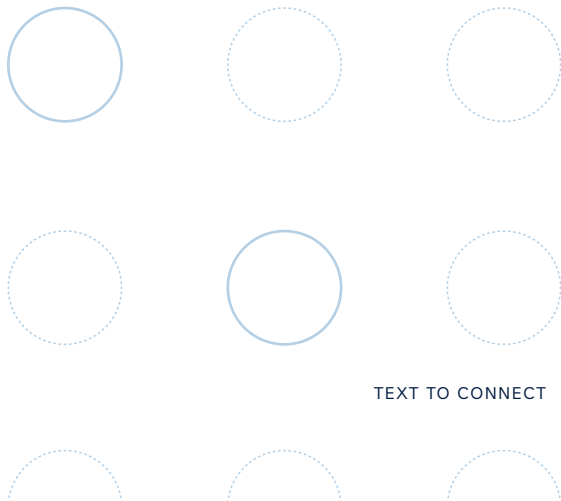
Map Workstream Activities

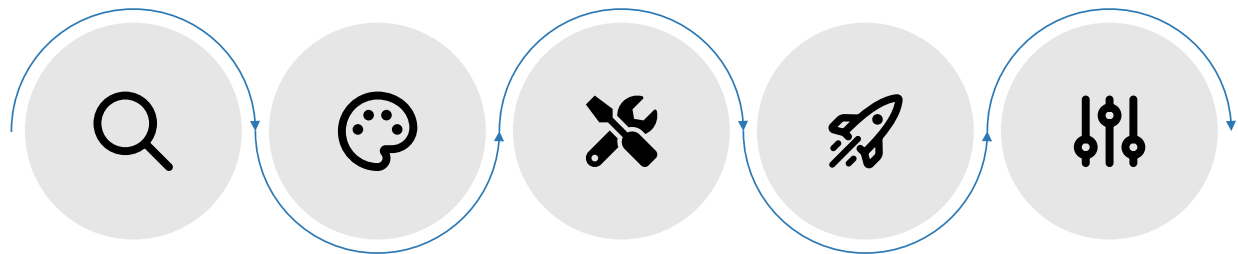
Project lifecycles pass through the following five iterative phases: scope, design, build, launch, and adjust.



Each of the core workstreams involved in developing and implementing a text messaging program—namely, planning, evaluation, legal and policy, texting strategy and content, data, and engineering and technology—are involved in one or more of these phases. The planning workstream is part of the scope phase, as is the legal and policy workstream. The evaluation workstream is most active during the scope, build, and adjust phases. The texting strategy and content, data, and engineering and technology workstreams have activities throughout all phases of the project.

On the next page is a roadmap to help you visualize the major activities happening across the project lifecycle. Scope and design activities—which are the focus of this guidebook—are color-coded by workstream (see key). Some scoping activities are relevant for multiple workstreams (e.g., map resources and identify needs, and conduct analysis of processes, policies, and regulations). For these, we’ve used a grey box with a strip of colors on the left to indicate the relevant workstreams that actively participate in the activity.





Scope

Design

Build

Launch

Adjust

<p>Conduct scoping research to identify client, case worker, and agency needs</p>	<p>Design and user test texting engagement plan</p>	<p>Prototype, build, and test data pipeline (if needed)</p>	<p>Train field staff on the new texting program and their role in implementation (if needed)</p>	<p>Use qualitative and quantitative methods (including analytics data) to monitor and evaluate program implementation and impact</p>
<p>Define program goals and priorities</p>	<p>Define data set and data pipeline specifications (if needed)</p>	<p>Prototype, build, and test texting platform and other tech components</p>	<p>Launch text messages</p>	<p>Adjust and scale technology to continuously improve program impact</p>
<p>Map resources (workforce, data, technology) and identify needs</p>	<p>Execute data sharing agreement (if needed)</p>	<p>Incorporate texting engagement plan into text messaging platform</p>	<p>Continuously receive client data and maintain data pipeline (if needed)</p>	
<p>Assemble your team</p>	<p>Establish technical specifications for text messaging platform and other tech components</p>	<p>Pilot text messages</p>		
<p>Develop your project plan</p>	<p>Procure technology components (if needed)</p>			
<p>Secure stakeholder buy-in, funding, and vendor contracts (if needed)</p>				
<p>Define outcome metrics and develop evaluation plan</p>				
<p>Conduct analysis of processes, policies, and regulations</p>				
<p>Obtain client consent</p>				

- Planning
- Evaluation
- Legal + Policy
- Texting Strategy + Content
- Data
- Engineering + Technology
- Multiple Workstreams



The companion guides will walk you through the major scope and design activities for each of the core workstreams. We encourage you and your teams to use each of the workstream guides as you move through project scoping and design. Doing so will ensure you set yourselves up for success for building, launching, and adjusting your program down the line.

Create a Project Plan

As the team gathers and begins to make early decisions about your text messaging program, you'll want to begin drafting a project plan to organize major steps across workstreams. Read the next sections of this guidebook to learn what major activities happen in each workstream, and note where decisions and actions need to be coordinated—for example, if data needs to be collected for program evaluation purposes prior to deploying a first round of text messaging. Also pay close attention to the length of time each workstream requires; for example, if you plan to share data with a vendor to conduct text outreach, expect that the creation of a data sharing agreement and the legal review involved may take weeks or months.

One tool used to plan coordination across workstreams is a swimlane diagram, which uses horizontal rows (swim lanes) to represent a particular person, team, or organization. A workstream is represented with a flowchart that moves from lane to lane as a particular person, team, or organization takes action on it.⁴ For a visual example of a swimlane diagram, see the [Data guide](#) where one is used to demonstrate the cadence of data transfers in a text messaging program. Multiple workstreams can be represented in the same diagram for group awareness of actions to coordinate, though as the project progresses, teams may want to make more detailed diagrams that focus on a particular part of the process.

We encourage you to create a project plan that allows for flexibility and iteration, whether that's driven by feedback from clients and field staff or unexpected technical issues. Ultimately, you will serve your clients better if you build in the capacity to measure the effectiveness of your text messaging program at regular intervals and adapt if course corrections are necessary. For more on this practice, which is part of Agile methodology, see the [18F Agile based project approach](#), published by the U.S. General Services Administration.⁵

4. Lucidchart. What is a Swimlane Diagram. (Accessed 8/26/21). https://www.lucidchart.com/pages/tutorial/swim-lane-diagram/#section_0

5. 18F. Agile Principles and 18F Practices: 18F Agile Based Project Approach. (Accessed 8/26/21). <https://agile.18f.gov/18f-agile-approach/>

Early Decision Points

Working In-House and with Vendors

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, go through procurement processes, and allow sufficient time to create data sharing agreements that undergo legal review. Learn more about these options in the [Engineering and Technology guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Government agency conducts all workstreams in-house	All activities are conducted by in-house staff.	Government agency has high technical capacity that includes Agile methodology experience, and staff with various expertise have collaborated successfully on efforts in the past.	Procurement process is not necessary and data sharing agreements may be limited or unnecessary.
Government agency contracts with vendor(s) for specific workstreams	Vendor(s) fill gaps in government agency capacity and bring valuable experience from similar work.	Government agency has capacity to do some but not all activities, and vendor services are specific to one or several activities like client interviews, user research, developing and delivering text messages, or engineering.	Follow best practices for Procurement and Vendor Management in the Engineering and Technology guide . Allow time for procurement and legal review of data sharing agreements.
Government agency contracts with vendor(s) for most workstreams	Government staff and program subject matter experts partner closely with vendor(s) that bring valuable experience from similar work.	Government staff can fulfill some roles, (e.g., project manager, executive sponsor, legal counsel, benefit program specialists) but need substantial guidance and additional capacity to undertake text messaging program.	Follow best practices for Procurement and Vendor Management. Allow time for procurement and legal review of data sharing agreements.

Text Messaging Approach

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, plan evaluation, make data requests, and prepare field staff. Learn more about these options in the [Texting Strategy and Content guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
One-way automated messaging	Your text messaging program sends clients information, reminders, or status updates about their SNAP recertification.	Your program does not have capacity to set up, test, and maintain branching logic within text messages.	Clients cannot transmit responses or questions through text. Clients must rely on other avenues (e.g., call center, field office) for personalized assistance.
Two-way automated messaging	Your text messaging program invites clients to respond to texts to get automated support for common questions or information and updates about their case status, due dates, verification documents received or needed, etc.	Your program has capacity to set up, test, and maintain branching logic within text messages, but capacity for personalized field staff support is limited.	Allows clients to reply over text to choose support options or update case status, meaning they will receive more timely and detailed guidance by text. Clients must use other avenues (e.g., call center, field office) to get personalized assistance.
Two-way messaging with field staff	Your text messaging program provides personalized, one-on-one support to clients from field staff over text, in addition to the features of two-way automated messaging.	Capacity of field staff and technology team is sufficient to provide support to clients over text.	Field staff should be bought in on providing guidance over text and heavily involved in creating/vetting procedures for responding to clients.
Text-enabled document uploads (Add onto two-way messaging)	Your text messaging program lets clients take photographs of verification documents or forms and securely upload them to a case management system or directly to field staff.	Capacity of field staff and technology team is sufficient to provide support for secure document uploads.	Must work with legal, policy, data, and technology teams to assure document transmission complies with privacy and security regulations.
Text-enabled interview scheduling (Add onto two-way messaging)	Your text messaging program prompts clients to schedule any required interviews over text.	Capacity of field staff and technology team is sufficient to provide support for text-based interview scheduling.	Must interface without time lag with interview scheduling systems already in place.

Using Control Groups, Subgroups, and Pilots

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, plan evaluation, make data requests, and build the texting engagement plan. Learn more about these options in the [Evaluation guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
No control groups	All clients due for SNAP recertification get sent texts.	There is unusual urgency to recertify clients, a surge in recertifications expected that exceed staff capacity. There is little to no evaluation capacity available, or there are technical barriers to sending some clients, but not all, texts.	The text messaging program can not be said, with certainty, to be correlated with a change in the rate of timely recertifications, because rate change could be due to other factors.
Presence of a control group	For a designated period of time, one group of clients gets text messages, but those in the control group do not.	Evaluation and technical capacity is sufficient. Clients can be separated into groups in a way that they are roughly the same in geographic and demographic characteristics.	Clients who get texts and clients in the control group still receive current correspondence about the need to recertify (e.g., a mailed letter).
Control group, plus subgroups among clients who receive texts	Among the clients receiving texts, there are subgroups of clients who receive different content in texts, and/ or number of text messages.	There's interest in testing what messaging content and frequency works best for clients in the service region. Evaluation and technical capacity is sufficient. Clients can be separated into groups in a way that they are roughly the same in geographic and demographic characteristics.	May require that more clients receive texts overall in order to evaluate response among subgroups.
Pilot text messaging in smaller number of counties (with or without a control group, or subgroups among clients who receive texts)	Clients in specific counties receive text messages, and clients in other counties do not.	There's interest in adopting text messaging at a smaller scale than statewide. State's SNAP operating structure allows for different counties to pilot outreach. Evaluation and technical capacity is sufficient. Technical systems allow for county - level text delivery.	Any initial issues with text delivery could be worked through while affecting a smaller number of clients. While counties may not have similar geographic or demographic makeup, good results could lead to wider scale adoption in more counties or statewide.

Offering Texts in Multiple Languages

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, plan evaluation, make data requests, and build the texting engagement plan. Learn more about these options in the [Texting Strategy and Content guide](#).

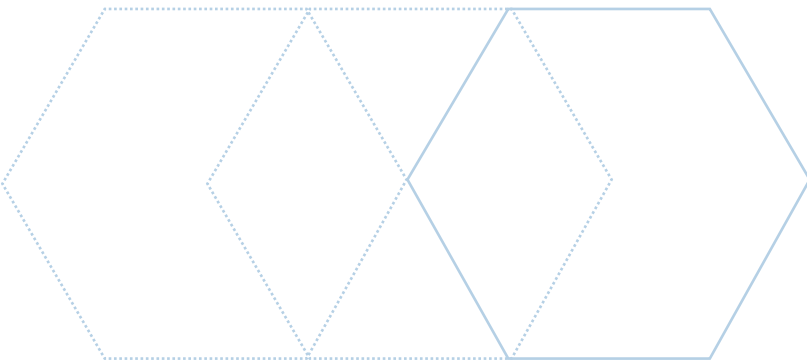
	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
English only	Only sends texts written in English, guidance (phone number, website) provided where additional languages are available.	Client population is overwhelmingly English-speaking and few have limited English proficiency. Using one-way automated texting and data is not yet available in clients' preferred language.	Data about rates of other preferred languages and limited English proficiency may not be available or under counted.
Two or more languages offered for texts	Offers clients a language selection when text is sent. May send text in the client's preferred language if that information has already been collected.	Using two-way automated texting, and/or the client provided their preferred language in the application process.	Offering multiple languages to clients over text may reduce equity gaps in recertification rates. Text translation must be done and checked by fluent speakers of the language, not based solely on free translation tools.



Opt In or Opt Out

These decision points are needed early to build the texting engagement plan, and ensure agreement with the government agency's legal and policy teams. Learn more about these options in the [Texting Strategy and Content guide](#) and the [Legal and Policy guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Clients confirm they want to opt in to text messages after giving initial consent to receive them	First text to clients asks them to opt in to receiving future texts. By default, clients will not receive subsequent texts unless they engage and opt in.	Either approach works, choice may depend on state or local regulations, and government agency and telecommunications vendor policy.	Must first obtain direct consent to text individual clients in their SNAP application (or a different permission granting format), with exceptions for state agencies.
Clients are given the opportunity to opt out to text messages after giving initial consent to receive them	First text to clients says the client will receive texts unless they request texts stop. By default, clients will receive subsequent texts unless they engage by opting out.	Either approach works, and choice may depend on state or local regulations, and government agency and telecommunications vendor policy.	Must first obtain direct consent to text individual clients in their SNAP application (or a different permission granting format), with exceptions for state agencies.



Type of Number Used to Send Texts

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, and ensure agreement with the government agency’s legal, policy, and technology teams. Learn more about these options in the [Texting Strategy and Content guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Short code	Sends clients texts from a 5- or 6-digit number.	Your program can build in time to apply for a short code from telecommunication carriers, which can take 8-12 weeks. Government agency has budget to pay for setup fees and annual maintenance costs from a texting platform vendor.	Generally has higher deliverability, throughput, and volume rates than other types of numbers.
Toll-free number	Sends clients texts from a 10-digit number with a 8## prefix.	May take less time to set up, and set up fees and annual costs are much less than short codes. Desire is to send messages through existing voice line numbers (e.g., agency’s customer service hotline).	Verification with texting platforms can delay setup, and delivery and throughput will vary.
Local number or 10-digit long code	Sends clients texts from a local number or 10-digit number.	May take less time to set up, and set up fees and annual costs are much less than short codes. Desire is to send messages through existing voice line numbers (e.g., agency’s customer service hotline).	Chance is higher that the number may be blocked by telecommunication carriers.

Include Clients' Geographic and Demographic Data

These decision points are needed early to plan evaluation, make data requests, and build the texting engagement plan. Learn more about these options in the [Evaluation guide](#), and [Data guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Include clients' geographic and demographic data in initial churn assessments, and when assessing results during text message delivery	Allows your program to understand if barriers to recertification exist for subsections of clients in your service area, and if text messaging yields different results across geographic areas or demographic groups.	Your program uses this data to understand where recertification rates are better and worse, makes an effort to understand why, and designs the text messaging program to increase equity in successful recertification rates.	Work with researchers, evaluators, data scientists, field staff, and clients to plan how to incorporate client information safely, securely, and ethically into evaluation and delivery.

Frequency of Data Transfers

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, engage with the engineering and data teams about the data pipeline and data transfer cadence, make data requests, build the texting engagement plan, and plan evaluation. Learn more about these options in the [Data guide](#) and the [Engineering and Technology guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Less frequent	Allows your program to send clients texts about recertification, but text content does not change when a client takes action (e.g., completes recertification, submits documents).	Your program plans to send clients a limited number of text messages (e.g., a recertification reminder when the recertification window opens).	Choice depends on capacity to send frequent data updates to texting platform vendor, and other characteristics of the system(s) where client data is stored.
More frequent	Allows your program to send clients texts about recertification, and text content changes according to the actions a client takes (e.g., completes recertification, submits documents).	One or more of the text messages your program plans to send clients are reminders sent after the recertification window opens, or subsequent texts about items needed to complete recertification (e.g., client still needs to submit verification documents).	Choice depends on capacity to send frequent data updates to texting platform vendors, and other characteristics of the system(s) where client data is stored.

Texting Platform Architecture

These decision points are needed early to allocate government agency and vendor resources, engage with the engineering team, and plan procurement processes. Learn more about these options in the [Engineering and Technology guide](#).

	What It Does	Works Well When	Considerations
Partnering with a vendor to handle the texting platform	Government agency partners closely with a vendor that takes on most aspects of the texting platform, including building the data pipeline.	Government agency has limited in-house technical capacity, and the vendor procured has prior experience doing this work with government agencies.	Follow best practices in the Engineering and Technology guide . Allow time for procurement and legal review of data sharing agreements.
Procuring an enterprise solution	Government agency procures an enterprise solution for the texting platform and can control it in house. Customization is done by the enterprise organization and can come at a high cost.	Enterprise solutions can be very expensive and complex, and may not be the best solution for most text messaging programs.	Follow best practices in the Engineering and Technology guide . Allow time for procurement and legal review of data sharing agreements.
In-house engineering using an off-the-shelf texting platform	Government agency procures a full featured, hosted texting platform that may have limited capacity for customization.	Government agency plans to run a simple texting program (e.g., one-way automated texts). Government agency's technical capacity is low.	Follow best practices in the Engineering and Technology guide . Allow time for procurement.
In-house engineering using a flexible texting platform	Government agency procures a texting platform or texting API to send and receive text messages to clients, but manages other technology components in-house.	Government agency would like to have a two-way automated texting program with the option to add more customization and capabilities as the program evolves. Government agency has a moderate level of in-house technical capacity.	Follow best practices in the Engineering and Technology guide . Allow time for procurement.
System fully built and maintained in-house	In-house engineers build, integrate, and manage technology components of texting platform.	Government agency has high technical capacity that's experienced in Agile methodology, and your agency's objectives require a high level of customization.	High risk for government agencies with no experience developing and implementing texting platforms.

About the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation

The Beeck Center is an experiential hub at Georgetown University that trains students and incubates scalable, leading edge ideas for social change. We believe impact at scale requires the courage to think and behave differently. Our work centers on investing in outcomes for individuals and society. We equip future global leaders with the mindset to promote outcome-driven solutions, using the tools of design, data, technology, and innovation. We convene actors across the public, private, and civic sectors to advance new tools, frameworks, and approaches necessary to achieve these outcomes.

About Benefits Data Trust

Benefits Data Trust (BDT) is a national nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia that uses these modern approaches to support government agencies in transforming how their residents access the social safety net. In 2017, BDT began a SNAP recertification text messaging program in New York City, and now partners with several states to implement similar programs suited to their needs.

About This Guidebook

Together, the Beeck Center and BDT authored this guidebook to detail practices so more states and local agencies can use text messaging to reach the people they serve with important, timely, and easy to understand guidance so people don't lose their SNAP benefits when they need them most. While we focus on the use case of SNAP recertification, we hope this content might be useful for anyone using text messaging to improve safety net benefits delivery in other ways.

This guidebook is part of a larger initiative by the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University to document innovations in social safety net benefits delivery driven by human-centered service design, data-informed practices, and responsive technology with a goal of spreading proven practices more widely. You can find other resources on maintaining public benefits and more on the [Digital Benefits Hub](#).

Please contact us with any thoughts, questions, or suggested additions to this guidebook. We can be reached via email at:

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