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To follow up on what Jim Hersey presented, I will share some comments based on my experiences having led the study of the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Programs of FY97, and having been a member of the committee that developed the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Evaluation and Reporting System (ERS).

Choosing a set of evaluation indicators is like shopping for a pair of shoes. Each of you might go to a different place to buy your shoes, and choose a different brand and style. But you would buy them from someone who knows their business -- not from someone who has never made shoes before, or tested what they made. Once you choose your brand and style, you can also be pretty confident about your size. In other words, the size has a certain level of validity and reliability.

The Whitepapers have given us a wonderful inventory of valid and reliable instruments or "shoes," shoes in many sizes and designed for a variety of purposes. Each of us can choose what best fits our needs. But the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Programs have grown to a size where we can no longer walk our separate walks in different pairs of shoes. We need to dance together to send a strong message about the work we are doing. And we need to choose some common styles of shoes to coordinate our dance. This is our next challenge.

In our national study of FSNEP programs, we saw diversity. There was diversity in program structure and organization, the nature and strengths of collaborations, types of populations served, modes of delivery, educational goals, ways of reporting, and choices of impact indicators. As a result, it was difficult to aggregate information or look at relationships between the various design elements and outcomes.

Let me use the EFNEP Evaluation and Reporting System (ERS) to illustrate a process that can be taken for developing a national reporting system. The EFNEP program is less diverse in its structure and delivery than are Food Stamp Nutrition Education Programs, but the steps taken in this process may be helpful.

The development team began by identifying the core sections needed for the system and types of data needed. The core sections included: 1) family records (including basic information such as demographics, sessions attended, and enrollment in other agencies); 2) a dietary assessment component (24-hour recall) and nutrient database; 3) a behavior checklist, focused on behaviors that the 24-hour recall could not assess; 4) a youth component; and 5) an interagency component (added in a later version). For FSNEP programs, additional sections, such as structure and organization, collaborators, and reporting methods, might also be needed.

The team also identified what they wanted the system to do. These tasks included allowing for direct data entry and nutrient analysis; composing and printing a summary of feedback for participants if desired; aggregating data into summary reports at the local,

State and Federal levels; and allowing data to be downloaded for analysis in other statistical programs. This ability to download data for further analysis helps leaders to learn from their educational experiences, for example by looking at outcomes by mode of delivery, or impacts by type of population served. Data can also be aggregated according to any of the variables in the database. Again, however, more functions may be needed to properly evaluate FSNEP programs and networks.

Because of the diversity of FSNEP programs, however, it's important to strike a balance between flexibility and consistency. An FSNEP evaluation system needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the needs of administrating agencies and collaborators, the types of populations reached, the variety of delivery modes, goals, and objectives, and opportunities for new research. In contrast, the system needs consistency in standardized, valid and reliable questions; consistent and high-quality data collection, coding, and units of measurement; and consistent systems for getting local data to appropriate partners.

The important thing to remember is that it is a process and not an end. As long as we make a beginning, we'll continue to improve as long as we can learn from our experiences.