Administrative checkpoints, burdens and human-centered design:

Increasing interview access to raise SNAP participation

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Plan

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- Administrative burden $\rightarrow$ policy take-up problem

SNAP Participation Rates by State, All Eligible People (FY 2018)
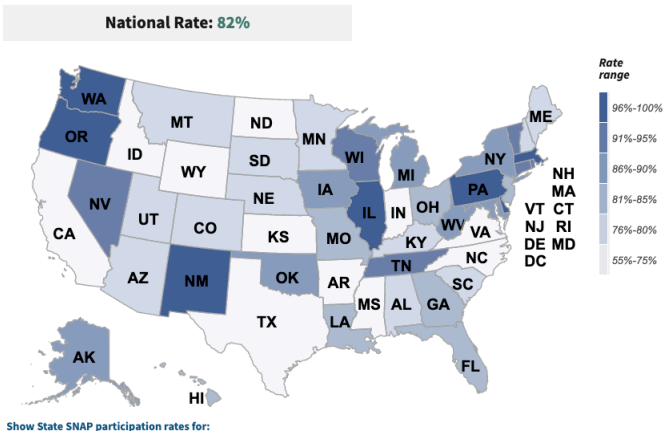
Figure 1: SNAP participation rates by state (all eligible people) Source: USDA FNS (2018). Note: 41M Americans benefit from SNAP.

Figure 2: Biden administration's burden reduction policy infrastructure

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  - ▶ Psychological cost: People followed all the rules, but still did not receive benefits (= procedural denials)
  - ▶ More importantly, checkpoints reproduce inequality (big negative effects for lowest income (Homonoff and Somerville, 2021)

Plan

- ▶ Premise: Administrative checkpoints generate administrative burdens.

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[2]Code for America, Georgetown's Better Government Lab, and Colorado State and Boulder County Governments.

[3]Boulder started flexible SNAP interview in December 2022. The sample is limited to those who applied to the SNAP program via PEAK (Program Eligibility and Application Kit), Colorado's integrated safety net program website that includes SNAP and other services.

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- ▶ Research question: if these checkpoints are flexible and informative (buffering), applicants may find it easier to learn and comply with the procedures and get safety net benefits.

- ▶ We[2] tested this hypothesis using a **field experiment** and a **follow-up survey** based on **SNAP applicants** ($N = 1{,}554$) in Boulder, Colorado (March 22-2023).[3]

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    - ▶ Benefit approval impact: **6-7pp**
    - ▶ Post-experiment survey shows that the text **reduced learning costs** about the interview requirement.

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Plan

1. Burdens and administrative checkpoints

2. The argument in brief

3. Human-centered design

4. Results

5. Discussions

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  - ▶ HCD is a common approach in the field of <u>civic tech</u>, a movement that applies technology, data, and human-centered design to improve policy implementation with a social justice focus (Pahlka, 2023; McGuinness and Schank, 2021)

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  - ▸ *Listening* (people) first: Delivery (evaluation) is grounded in discovery (user-centered research)

privacy interests, and transparent, ... ral Government can build public
trust. Further, the Federal Government's management of its customer
experience and service delivery should be driven fundamentally by the voice
of the customer through human-centered design methodologies; empirical
customer research; an understanding of behavioral science and user testing,
especially for digital services; and other mechanisms of engagement.

Figure 3: HCD in the U.S. government: Customer Experience
Executive Order (2023)

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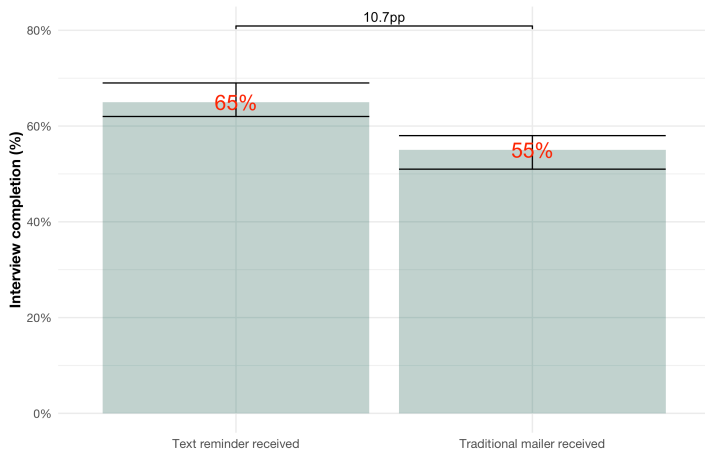 - ▸ Quant analysis based on admin data shows that <u>missed interviews</u> are the biggest reason for denials
  - ▸ *Co-designed* solutions for <u>improving communication</u> between the county and benefit applicants

Plan

Effect of flexible interview option plus texting

N = 1554

Figure 4: Effect of flexible interview option plus texting on compliance.

Effect of flexible interview option plus texting

Only among those interviewed during their initial applications (30 days window)
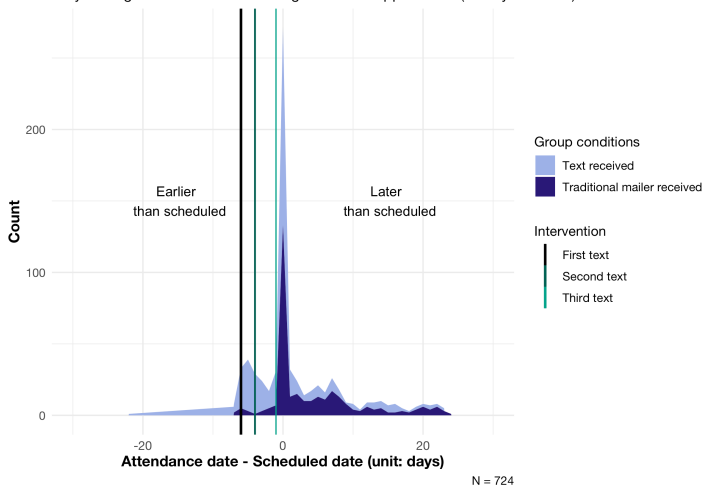
Figure 5: Effect of flexible interview option plus texting on timing (scheduling)

Figure 6: The distribution of SNAP applicants' interview timing

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- The combination of behavioral (field experiment) and attitudinal evidence (follow-up survey) demonstrates that making administrative checkpoints flexible and informative reduces administrative burden. ▸ Benefit approval table,

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  - Treated group was more likely to say they (a) knew the interview was required by 9 pp and (b) they knew what to do during the interview by 11 pp.

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- ▶ Yet: some nudges are effective due to these contexts and design choices (Giannella et al., 2024; Chohlas-Wood et al., 2023; Lopoo et al., 2020)

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    - ► Texting is cheap, but research investment (human-centered design and rigorous evaluation) is not cheap.
    - ► Agencies can build the capacity internally, buy, or partner.
    - ► Yet, showing what's possible is crucial to shift the norm. Political will for change is the key.

Thank you

Comments or questions?
E-mail: jkim638@jhu.edu

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Plan

6. Appendix

County mailer content

Dear _____,

We have received your application or recertification for assistance. An interview is required for _____ (program) _____.

You have been scheduled for a phone interview at (time) on (date). Please call (303) 441-1660 at this time. Please contact our office at (303) 441-1000 if you like a face-to-face interview instead of a phone interview.

If you miss your appointment or need to reschedule, you must contact us at (303) 441-1660 to reschedule your interview. If you do not complete a required interview for your application or recertification, your benefits will be denied.

Text reminders

In the text below, Code for America and Boulder couldn't mention SNAP specifically, but instead used PEAK, a broader term, to comply with the FCC guideline on telephone consumer protection (TCP), particularly in the context of human and health services.

Initial text (sent 24 hours after initial application)

Boulder County:Hi First Name we've processed your PEAK application!
Please call 303-441-1660 in the next week to complete a phone interview. The interview should take about 30 minutes and you'll learn if you qualify for benefits.
Our hours: 8:30am-3pm, Mon-Fri
Learn more about the process here:
`http://www.boco.org/SNAP-FAQ`

First reminder (sent 3 days after initial application)

Boulder County: Hi First Name reminder that you have the option to complete your interview at your own convenience by calling 303-441-1660 any time between 8:30am-3pm, Mon-Fri.
Learn more about the process here:
www.boco.org/SNAP-FAQ

Second reminder (24 hours before scheduled interview)

Hi First Name , your PEAK phone interview is tomorrow. This should take about 30 minutes. Call us at 303-441-1660 during your scheduled time to complete your interview.

Can't make it? Just call anytime Monday through Friday between 8:30am-3pm to conduct an unscheduled interview.

Learn more about the process here:
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Impact on Benefit Approvals

	Approved	Approved (procedural denials imputed)	Approved during initial applications (procedural denials imputed)
(Intercept)	0.3399***	0.3355***	0.2121***
	[0.3057, 0.3741]	[0.3016, 0.3694]	[0.1819, 0.2423]
	$p = 0.0000$	$p = 0.0000$	$p = 0.0000$
Treatment status	0.0631*	0.0643**	0.0691**
	[0.0145, 0.1116]	[0.0160, 0.1125]	[0.0262, 0.1121]
	$p = 0.0110$	$p = 0.0091$	$p = 0.0016$
Num.Obs.	1517	1533	1539
R2	0.004	0.004	0.006
R2 Adj.	0.004	0.004	0.006
AIC	2097.3	2112.4	1771.8
BIC	2113.3	2128.4	1787.8
Log.Lik.	-1045.647	-1053.200	-882.891
RMSE	0.48	0.48	0.43
Std.Errors	HC2	HC2	HC2

Interview Impact on Benefits Among Compliers

	Approved	Approved (procedural denials imputed)	Approved during initial applications (procedural denials imputed)
(Intercept)	0.0016	0.0016	−0.1533
	[−0.2542, 0.2574]	[−0.2443, 0.2474]	[−0.4143, 0.1077]
	$p = 0.9899$	$p = 0.9899$	$p = 0.2495$
Interview status	0.6146**	0.6147**	0.6693**
	[0.1892, 1.0400]	[0.2014, 1.0279]	[0.2322, 1.1065]
	$p = 0.0047$	$p = 0.0036$	$p = 0.0027$
Num.Obs.	1517	1533	1536
R2	0.197	0.202	−0.066
R2 Adj.	0.197	0.201	−0.067

Impact on Learning Costs

	Know interview	Interview easy (4-point)	Interview easy (binary)	Learning cost index
(Intercept)	0.5171***	0.4116***	0.4087***	0.4362***
	[0.4528, 0.5814]	[0.3540, 0.4692]	[0.3180, 0.4994]	[0.3699, 0.5026]
	$p = 0.0000$	$p = 0.0000$	$p = 0.0000$	$p = 0.0000$
Treatment status	0.0931*	0.1096*	0.1277+	0.1335**
	[0.0034, 0.1828]	[0.0220, 0.1972]	[−0.0031, 0.2584]	[0.0370, 0.2299]
	$p = 0.0420$	$p = 0.0144$	$p = 0.0556$	$p = 0.0069$
Num.Obs.	470	225	225	225
R2	0.009	0.027	0.016	0.032

Heterogeneous treatment effects

- The estimand is ITT since we only know who received the texts, not who read them.

- To estimate heterogeneous treatment effects, we also estimated the ITT conditional on applicants' language preference, gender, homeless status, and household size.

- ATEs do not reliably vary by language, gender, and homeless status.

- ATEs vary by household size. Applicants with a larger household who received the treatment show up for the interview at a lower rate than their counterparts (Finkelstein and Notowidigdo, 2019).