Compilation of Recent Food Stamp Program Analyses

How Long Does It Take?

Quantifying the Food Stamp Application Process in Four California Counties

Lost Dollars, Empty Plates

The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets

County Food Stamp Performance

Using the Program Access Index to Analyze Performance

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CALIFORNIA FOOD POLICY ADVOCATES

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California Food Policy Advocates is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious and affordable food.

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Introduction

California Food Policy Advocates was established in 1992. With our 15th anniversary approaching, it's a good time to review recent improvements to California's Food Stamp Program. Through legislative and administrative advocacy in Sacramento and at the county level, CFPA and our partners have achieved many notable successes, including:

- Successful legislation to remove persistent barriers to food stamp participation, such as eliminating the rule that prohibited food stamp recipients from owning a reliable automobile.
- Successful budget action to establish transitional food stamp benefits to families leaving welfare.
- Successful legislation to simplify and shorten the food stamp application process.
- Successful advocacy to increase food stamp benefits in California in response to rising energy costs.

CFPA and our partners also engaged in smaller-scale, more "wonky" efforts to achieve incremental improvements to the Food Stamp Program. Our work to improve access to food stamps for ABAWDs (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) is a good example of this type of effort.

Of course, new policies are only worth the results they yield in the real world of families seeking nutrition assistance. As we review the past 15 years, we want to understand what's changed. What impact have our legislative and administrative advocacy achievements had on the Food Stamp Program in California?

This report is a compilation of three analyses that, together, help answer this question. The first analysis is an update of a 2000 study of the food stamp application process, titled *How Long Does It Take*? Four counties volunteered to have CFPA measure the wait times in their food stamp offices. The second analysis, *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates,* examines the financial impact of the underutilization of food stamps on state and local budgets and economies. The last analysis examines county performance in enrolling people into the Food Stamp Program. The tool used in the analysis, the *Program Access Index,* was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to measure state performance. For the first time, we use this tool to measure *county* performance.

Each analysis has its strengths and weaknesses and the three use a variety of approaches and are based on a variety of assumptions. For example, the county performance and the lost dollars analyses are based on different participation assumptions, neither of which is entirely right or wrong. Our hope is that, taken together, the three analyses provide a fair and accurate indication of food stamp performance in California.

So what did we learn? We learned that county administrators *can* move people quickly in and out of their offices during the food stamp process. But we also learned that far too many people eligible for food stamps are not even getting into the process. We learned that county performance in reaching low-income people with food stamp varies greatly. And that this underutilization of food stamps results in an annual loss of $4 billion in economic activity.

We believe food stamp performance is very worthy of analysis. Poor performance in food stamps hurts our children and our state economy. We welcome your feedback on this report. We have intended this document to be primarily a research piece. As many readers may know, CFPA has a long list of ideas to reform the Food Stamp Program. Although specific policy recommendations are not discussed here, we welcome your suggestions for how to improve the Food Stamp Program's ability to address malnutrition in California.

First Analysis:

How Long Does It Take?

Quantifying the Food Stamp Application Process in Four California Counties

Introduction

The Food Stamp Program is the largest food and nutrition assistance program, serving close to 24 million people nationwide in a given month. In California, the Food Stamp Program served nearly 2 million individuals at an average monthly benefit of $97[1] per person in 2005.

A recent study found that over 50% of Americans between the ages of 20 to 65 will at some point receive food stamps.[2] Despite providing vital assistance to half of adults in our country, the Food Stamp Program continues to be underutilized, particularly in California. In fact, California's participation rate is one of the lowest in the country. USDA recently concluded that only 45% of eligible people in California participated in the Food Stamp Program in 2003.[3] From 1999 to 2004, the number of participants dropped over 7% from 2,066,345 to 1,949,892.[4]

Why is California's performance so poor? Some observers believe the food stamp application process is at least partly to blame. Research shows that a lengthy application process, the traditional office hours of food stamp offices and incompatibility with work deter many people from applying for food stamps.[5] In 2000, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) conducted its first study of the average time it took to apply for food stamps as a follow up to USDA's analogous national study in 1999. CFPA's findings included the following:

- In three of the four counties studied, the process required nearly three trips to the welfare office.
- The average time for each trip ranged from 37 minutes in one county to 1 hour and 40 minutes in another.

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[1] Food Stamp Program: Average Monthly Benefit Per Person 2000-2005, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsavgben.htm

[2] **Likelihood of Using Food Stamps During the Adulthood Years** Rank MR, Hirschl TA. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2005 May-Jun; 37(3):137-46.

[3] Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2003, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2003.pdf

[4] California Department of Social Services, Food Stamp Program participation data.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/FoodStamp-_429.htm

[5] Customer Service in the Food Stamp Program, USDA,
http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/fsp/FILES/ProgramOperations/fspcust.pdf

- The average time to complete the whole process ranged from 1 hour 45 minutes in one county to 4 hours 45 minutes in another.

Since the 2000 study, food stamp eligibility rules and the application process have changed. In 1999, the California Legislature passed SB 2013, which required the state to develop a simpler and shorter food stamp application form. This form became available to counties on April 1, 2002.[6] In 2003, AB 231 (Steinberg), which eliminated the auto resource limit of $4650, became law.[7] Together, these changes aimed to make food stamps available to Californians who may not have been eligible before and to increase participation among those who are eligible.

Even with these changes, counties still have leeway on how they administer the Food Stamp Program. Some will implement the new policies efficiently and effectively, while others may not be as successful. By replicating *How Long Does It Take,* CFPA hoped to spotlight how some counties' performance may or may not reflect the Legislature's emphasis on streamlining the application process for working families.

[6] http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/99-00/bill/sen/sb_2001-2050/sb_2013_bill_20000926_chaptered.pdf
[7] http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0201-0250/ab_231_bill_20031010_chaptered.pdf

Methodology

To conduct this study, food stamp applicants were interviewed and timed at county welfare offices in four counties during September, 2004; January, 2005; and May, 2005.[8] A total of 2,083 individuals were approached at the four offices, yielding 406 applicants who met the desired criteria (new applicants or people re-applying).

CFPA interviewers provided study participants with time logs and timepieces. The study participants were instructed to give these materials to the county worker(s) at each stage of the application process. The workers filled in the time they started and the time they finished with the applicant. CFPA interviewers recorded the time applicants entered and exited the building in the time logs and also collected the following information:

- The number of trips the applicant had made as part of the current application process.
- Whether or not the applicant was applying for other benefits.
- Whether or not further visits were required to complete the application process.

Applicants who needed to return at a later date to complete their application process were given a "reminder card" corresponding to the identification number on their survey log and asked to present their reminder card to CFPA staff on their return. This system allowed applicants to be tracked over multiple visits.

It's important to note several limitations to this study. First, the fact that the offices included in the study were not randomly selected raises several questions:

- Would the results be dramatically different if the counties and the offices in the counties were randomly selected?
- Were the counties willing to participate the most efficient counties? Were the offices utilized in each of the counties the most efficient offices?

[8] What follows is a brief summary of the study methodology. For a fuller discussion, please see Appendix F.

- Did the knowledge that a study was occurring impact performance during the study period?

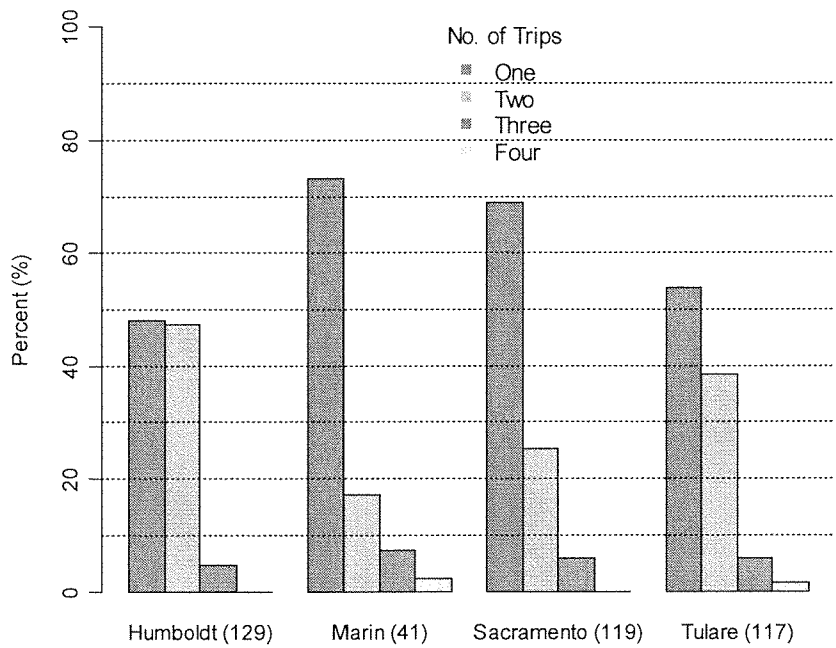
Given these methodological problems, it is important to view the data as case studies from four offices in four counties and not as data that represent the participating counties or the state as a whole.

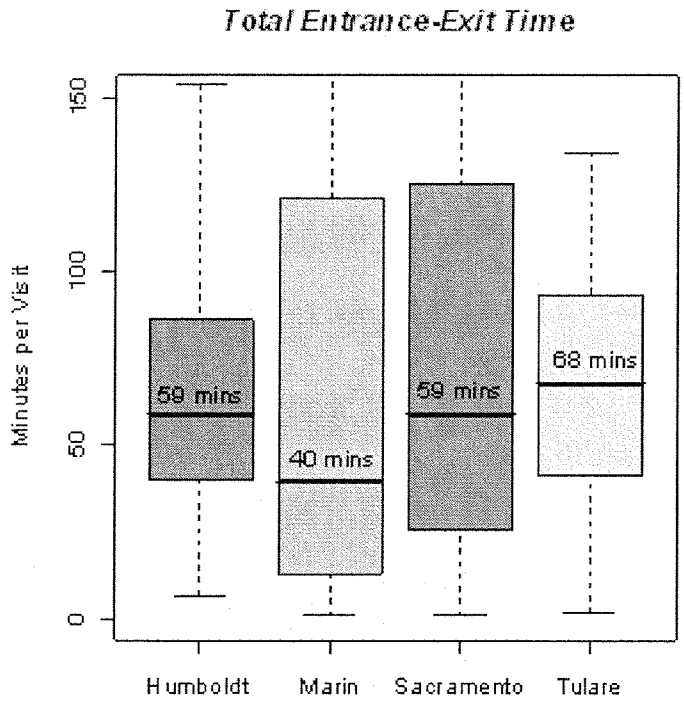
Secondly, the study's focus on the in-office application process should not prevent future studies from focusing on other potential barriers to food stamp enrollment. These important topics include transportation time and the costs associated with application; the impact of office visits on applicant employment; and the time it takes to complete non-office application procedures, such as mail-in and phone applications.

Even with the limitations described above, the data collected yield important findings. In order to complete food stamp applications in the four counties:

- *It took an average of 1.5 trips to the welfare office.*
- *Half of the applicants spent 40 minutes to 1 hour 8 minutes or less per office visit.*

Figure: Office Trip Graph





As noted above, prior analysis by USDA and CFPA found more frequent office trips and more lengthy office waits. This study gives hope that (1) policy changes may be yielding the sought-after improvements and (2) the application process can be faster than previously thought. While we can't draw clear cause-and-effect results, we can conclude that it's worthwhile for the state, counties, and advocacy groups to continue to work to seek improvements in food stamp accessibility for working families. All levels of government can take steps to help shorten the process. However, counties have a unique opportunity to ease the burden of the application process so as to assist working families and increase participation in this essential yet underutilized program.

However, it may also be in the best interest of applicants to avoid office trips and office waits. Given new technology, counties and the state should explore the value of expanding out-of-office application pathways. Analyzing the time and cost associated with these pathways is a logical follow-up to this analysis.

Second Analysis:

Lost Dollars, Empty Plates

The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture ranks California last in the country for Food Stamp Program "participation and access." This underutilization of food stamps not only hurts low-income people, but also hurts our state and local economies. The following analysis examines the impact increased participation in the federal Food Stamp Program would have on state and local budgets.

Program Overview

As the nation's largest nutrition assistance program, the Food Stamp Program provides a critical supplement when families and individuals don't have enough money to put food on the table. The benefits that households receive are entirely federally funded. The federal government also picks up the tab for half of the program's administrative costs. The state covers 35 percent and the counties, the remaining 15 percent.

In California, nearly 2 million people receive food stamps. At an average benefit of $97 per person per month in 2005, the Food Stamp Program generated over $2 billion in federal food purchasing dollars for children, adults, and senior citizens who met the program's strict income and asset limits.

How Food Stamps Help State & County Budgets

Food stamps have a clear impact on families by helping them purchase food; they also help growers and retailers by increasing customers' purchasing power. In fact, food stamps have a "multiplier effect": USDA has shown that every food stamp dollar spent creates $1.84 in local economic activity, since local retailers tend to re-spend their income in their community.

Increased food stamp participation benefits the state budget as well. California's Legislative Analyst's Office developed the following premise to estimate the impact of food stamp participation increases on the state budget:

> *"Research shows that low-income individuals generally are not able to save money because their resources are spent on meeting their daily needs, such as shelter, food, and transportation. Therefore, for every dollar in food coupons*

that a low-income family receives, an additional dollar is available for the consumption of food or other items. Research done at the University of California and elsewhere indicates that individuals with income low enough to be eligible for food stamps would, on average, spend about 45 percent of their income on goods for which they would pay sales tax. The state General Fund receives about 5 cents for every dollar that is spent on a taxable good. Local governments and special funds receive the remainder of the sales tax revenue (generally about 2.25 percent). Because additional food coupons would result in low-income families spending more of their other resources on taxable goods, the receipt of federal food coupons helps to generate revenue for the state and for local governments."[9]

Since counties share sales tax revenue, this premise may be applied to local governments as well. In summary, food stamps have a positive impact on families (increased food), retailers and growers (increased demand for food-related products and services), local and state economies ("multiplier effect" of food stamp dollars) and local and state budgets (increased sales tax revenue).

Low Food Stamp Participation Means Less Tax Income for Governments

More than half of the people eligible for food stamps do not receive them. Barriers to food stamp participation, such as state-imposed red tape, hurt eligible families by limiting their ability to get adequate, nutritious food. These barriers lead to unnecessarily empty plates and a considerable amount of "lost dollars" in state and county tax coffers.

To examine how this underutilization is harming California we applied the LAO's premises described above to existing participation numbers in California. Using the methodology described below, we were able to estimate the impact of food stamp underutilization on state and local budgets as well as on state and local economies.

[9] *See http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2004/health_ss/hss_20_foodstamps_anl04.htm*

The Lost Dollars

California Food Policy Advocates estimates that with full food stamp participation, California could bring in as much as **$2.3 billion** in additional federal funding each year. Applying the "multiplier effect," this means that full participation would generate an additional **$4 billion** in economic activity statewide.

Snapshot

# of eligible Californians not receiving food stamps	2,000,000
Lost federal dollars	$2.3 billion
Lost economic activity	$4 billion
Lost benefit to state budget	$52 million
Lost benefit to county coffers	$21 million

With increased resources for food, these new participants in the Food Stamp Program would spend more on non-food, taxable goods. According to the LAO, these purchases would generate over **$52 million** in revenue for the state general fund and as much as **$21 million** for county coffers.

Important Note: As indicated in the methodology, the estimates are based on the avergage benefits received by *current* food stamp participants. *Non-participants* may have lower average benefits than current participants, thus the results may be considered a high-end estimate of lost dollars.

Conclusion

California should take steps increase participation in the Food Stamp Program. Such action will help low-income Californians, increase federal funding to California, add to the state general fund, and provide some new revenue to local communities.

Estimate of Non-participants

County	Average Participation in 2005	Estimated Number of People Eligible for Food Stamps	Estimated Number of Non-participants
Alameda	*70,269*	156,152	85,884
Alpine	*75*	167	92
Amador	*1,128*	2,506	1,378
Butte	*17,206*	38,237	21,030
Calaveras	*1,697*	3,770	2,074
Colusa	*1,197*	2,659	1,462
Contra Costa	*29,855*	66,344	36,489
Del Norte	*3,852*	8,561	4,709
El Dorado	*4,154*	9,231	5,077
Fresno	*119,775*	266,166	146,391
Glenn	*2,374*	5,275	2,901
Humboldt	*10,970*	24,377	13,407
Imperial	*17,224*	38,276	21,052
Inyo	*952*	2,117	1,164
Kern	*78,439*	174,308	95,869
Kings	*13,781*	30,623	16,843
Lake	*5,538*	12,307	6,769
Lassen	*2,079*	4,619	2,541
Los Angeles	*666,401*	1,480,891	814,490
Madera	*14,412*	32,026	17,614
Marin	*4,227*	9,394	5,167
Mariposa	*829*	1,842	1,013
Mendocino	*7,851*	17,446	9,596
Merced	*29,735*	66,078	36,343
Modoc	*755*	1,678	923
Mono	*269*	598	329
Monterey	*18,373*	40,828	22,455
Napa	*2,639*	5,865	3,226
Nevada	*2,278*	5,062	2,784
Orange	*80,191*	178,201	98,011
Placer	*5,526*	12,280	6,754
Plumas	*687*	1,527	840
Riverside	*81,627*	181,393	99,766
Sacramento	*111,640*	248,089	136,449
San Benito	*2,979*	6,620	3,641
San Bernardino	*141,734*	314,965	173,231
San Diego	*84,616*	188,035	103,419
San Francisco	*32,357*	71,904	39,547
San Joaquin	*53,742*	119,427	65,685
San Luis Obispo	*6,052*	13,450	7,397
San Mateo	*8,586*	19,080	10,494
Santa Barbara	*17,900*	39,778	21,878
Santa Clara	*56,887*	126,414	69,528
Santa Cruz	*10,436*	23,192	12,756
Shasta	*13,283*	29,517	16,234
Sierra	*168*	374	206

County	Average Participation in 2005	Estimated Number of People Eligible for Food Stamps	Estimated Number of Non-participants
Siskiyou	*4,146*	9,214	5,068
Solano	*16,447*	36,548	20,101
Sonoma	*12,750*	28,333	15,583
Stanislaus	*39,334*	87,408	48,074
Sutter	*5,520*	12,267	6,747
Tehama	*5,343*	11,873	6,530
Trinity	*937*	2,083	1,146
Tulare	*59,702*	132,671	72,969
Tuolumne	*2,829*	6,288	3,458
Ventura	*26,712*	59,360	32,648
Yolo	*8,663*	19,252	10,588
Yuba	*8,131*	18,069	9,938

Estimate of Annual Lost Federal Dollars (based on avg. benefit of $97)

County	Additional Food Stamp $ if Full Participation Reached (Based on $97 average benefit))	Additional Economic Impact of Reaching Full Participation (using ripple effect)
Alameda	$99,968,717	$183,942,440
Alpine	$106,985	$196,852
Amador	$1,604,121	$2,951,583
Butte	$24,479,049	$45,041,451
Calaveras	$2,413,619	$4,441,058
Colusa	$1,702,285	$3,132,205
Contra Costa	$42,473,429	$78,151,109
Del Norte	$5,480,759	$10,084,596
El Dorado	$5,909,628	$10,873,716
Fresno	$170,399,383	$313,534,864
Glenn	$3,376,764	$6,213,246
Humboldt	$15,605,942	$28,714,933
Imperial	$24,504,140	$45,087,618
Inyo	$1,355,025	$2,493,247
Kern	$111,591,839	$205,328,984
Kings	$19,605,123	$36,073,426
Lake	$7,878,987	$14,497,335
Lassen	$2,957,336	$5,441,498
Los Angeles	$948,066,231	$1,744,441,864
Madera	$20,503,213	$37,725,913
Marin	$6,014,244	$11,066,210
Mariposa	$1,179,520	$2,170,317
Mendocino	$11,169,227	$20,551,377
Merced	$42,302,993	$77,837,508
Modoc	$1,074,243	$1,976,607
Mono	$382,568	$703,925
Monterey	$26,138,008	$48,093,935
Napa	$3,754,805	$6,908,842
Nevada	$3,240,835	$5,963,136

County	Additional Food Stamp $ if Full Participation Reached (Based on $97 average benefit))	Additional Economic Impact of Reaching Full Participation (using ripple effect)
Orange	$114,084,545	$209,915,563
Placer	$7,861,656	$14,465,447
Plumas	$977,501	$1,798,602
Riverside	$116,127,775	$213,675,106
Sacramento	$158,826,507	$292,240,772
San Benito	$4,237,865	$7,797,672
San Bernardino	$201,640,712	$371,018,909
San Diego	$120,380,233	$221,499,629
San Francisco	$46,032,799	$84,700,349
San Joaquin	$76,456,952	$140,680,792
San Luis Obispo	$8,610,496	$15,843,313
San Mateo	$12,215,332	$22,476,211
Santa Barbara **b/**	$25,465,604	$46,856,711
Santa Clara	$80,930,527	$148,912,170
Santa Cruz	$14,847,582	$27,319,550
Shasta	$18,896,893	$34,770,284
Sierra	$239,267	$440,251
Siskiyou	$5,898,893	$10,853,964
Solano	$23,398,030	$43,052,374
Sonoma	$18,138,715	$33,375,236
Stanislaus	$55,958,696	$102,964,001
Sutter	$7,853,379	$14,450,217
Tehama	$7,600,791	$13,985,455
Trinity	$1,333,685	$2,453,981
Tulare	$84,935,787	$156,281,847
Tuolumne	$4,025,371	$7,406,682
Ventura	$38,002,013	$69,923,705
Yolo	$12,324,820	$22,677,669
Yuba	$11,567,961	$21,285,049

Estimate of lost state and local government revenue

County	Additional Benefit of Full Participation to State Budget (Based on LAO Premise)	Additional Benefit of Full Participation to Local/County Budgets
Alameda	$2,249,296	$1,124,648
Alpine	$2,407	$481
Amador	$36,093	$7,219
Butte	$550,779	$110,156
Calaveras	$54,306	$10,861
Colusa	$38,301	$7,660
Contra Costa	$955,652	$382,261
Del Norte	$123,317	$24,663
El Dorado	$132,967	$26,593
Fresno	$3,833,986	$1,226,876
Glenn	$75,977	$15,195

County	Additional Benefit of Full Participation to State Budget (Based on LAO Premise)	Additional Benefit of Full Participation to Local/County Budgets
Humboldt	$351,134	$70,227
Imperial	$551,343	$165,403
Inyo	$30,488	$9,146
Kern	$2,510,816	$502,163
Kings	$441,115	$88,223
Lake	$177,277	$35,455
Lassen	$66,540	$13,308
Los Angeles	$21,331,490	$8,532,596
Madera	$461,322	$138,397
Marin	$135,320	$27,064
Mariposa	$26,539	$5,308
Mendocino	$251,308	$50,262
Merced	$951,817	$190,363
Modoc	$24,170	$4,834
Mono	$8,608	$1,722
Monterey	$588,105	$117,621
Napa	$84,483	$25,345
Nevada	$72,919	$16,407
Orange	$2,566,902	$770,071
Placer	$176,887	$35,377
Plumas	$21,994	$4,399
Riverside	$2,612,875	$783,862
Sacramento	$3,573,596	$1,072,079
San Benito	$95,352	$19,070
San Bernardino	$4,536,916	$1,361,075
San Diego	$2,708,555	$812,567
San Francisco	$1,035,738	$466,082
San Joaquin	$1,720,281	$516,084
San Luis Obispo	$193,736	$38,747
San Mateo	$274,845	$109,938
Santa Barbara b/	$572,976	$171,893
Santa Clara	$1,820,937	$728,375
Santa Cruz	$334,071	$116,925
Shasta	$425,180	$85,036
Sierra	$5,384	$1,077
Siskiyou	$132,725	$26,545
Solano	$526,456	$118,453
Sonoma	$408,121	$102,030
Stanislaus	$1,259,071	$283,291
Sutter	$176,701	$35,340
Tehama	$171,018	$34,204
Trinity	$30,008	$6,002
Tulare	$1,911,055	$382,211
Tuolumne	$90,571	$18,114
Ventura	$855,045	$171,009
Yolo	$277,308	$55,462
Yuba	$260,279	$52,056

Average Participation in 2005

These figures were generated from the state report DFA 256. It can be found on the State Department of Social Services website at http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/FoodStamp- 421.htm. We average the participation for the year 2005 to account for monthly differences.

Additional Food Stamp Money If Full Participation is Reached

Estimated Number of People Eligible

To estimate the number of people eligible for food stamps, we first identified the state's most recently available food stamp participation *rate*. Rather than use the more recent program access index (see http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/FSP/Participation_Rates_04.html), we use the slightly older but better developed rate of 45% from the US Department of Agriculture. We believe this is a more reliable estimate (though older) because it includes factors beyond income. For more details on this rate, see http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2003.pdf

The formula: "Average Participation in 2005" divided by the participation rate of .45 = "Estimated Number of People Eligible"

Please note this assumption: while individual county performance may vary, we applied the statewide participation rate to county figures in order to provide a rough distribution of non-participants throughout the state.

Estimated Number of Non-participants

The formula: "Estimated Number of People Eligible for Food Stamps" minus "Average Participation in 2005" = "Estimated Number of Non-participants"

Calculation of Benefits

We used the average monthly benefit amount for food stamp recipients in California. It is currently $97 a month according to the US

Department of Agriculture (see http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsavgben.htm). *Important: Please see below for an alternative benefit calculation that adjusts for potentially lower benefits for non-participants.*

We then multiplied the average monthly benefit by 12 months to estimate a year of food stamp benefits.

The formula: [("Estimated Number of Non-participants") X $97/month X 12 months] = "Additional Food Stamp $ If Full Participation is Reached"

Additional Economic Impact of Reaching Full Participation (using ripple effect)

The US Department of Agriculture has identified an economic ripple effect resulting from the use of food stamps. Every $1 in food stamps generates $1.84 in local economic activity. (See *Hanson, K., and Golan, E. Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures Across the U.S. Economy.* Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 26-6. Economic Research Service. United States Department of Agriculture. August 2002.)

The formula: "Additional Food Stamp $ if Full Participation is Reached" X $1.84 = "Additional Economic Impact of Reaching Full Participation (using ripple effect)"

Additional Benefit of Full Participation to State Budget (Based on LAO Premise)

See page 15 for the methodology developed by the Legislative Analyst's Office for estimating the impact of food stamp increases on the state budget. Using this premise, we calculated the revenue that would be generated from the sales tax that would go to the state General Fund: "Additional Food Stamp $ if Full Participation Reached" X 45% X .05 sales tax = "Additional Benefit of Full Participation to State Budget (Based on LAO Premise)"

Additional Benefit of Full Participation to Local/County Budgets

We then applied the LAO premise to local county budgets. Instead of using the state sales tax rate of 5 cents, we use the county rates. All counties receive 1 percent of the state sales tax, but many counties add additional sales tax (see

http://www.boe.ca.gov/news/sp111500att.htm). We got the current overall sales tax used in each county from http://www.boe.ca.gov/pdf/pub71.pdf

The formula: {(Total county sales tax - .0725) + .01] X ("Additional Food Stamp $ if Full Participation Reached X 45%)" = "Additional Benefit of Full Participation to Local/County Budgets"

Alternative benefit calculation that adjusts for potentially lower benefits for non-participants

The methodology above could generally be described as conservative (especially since it uses the older participation rate, which assumes a lower level of current non-participants), with the exception of one assumption. This methodology assumes that new participants in the Food Stamp Program would receive the same average of $97 month in benefits as current participants. However, non-participants may have lower-than-average benefits (which may be a reason for their current non-participation).

Third Analysis:

County Food Stamp Performance

Using the Program Access Index to
Analyze Performance

Introduction

As the federal administrator of the Food Stamp Program, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has responsibility for making sure the program is fulfilling its mission. To do so, each year, USDA releases "participation rates" that measure food stamp participation in all 50 states. These participation rates are sophisticated estimates of food stamp participation that consider a number of factors, such as immigration status and household resources, in approximating food stamp eligibility.

Although these participation rates are likely the best estimates of performance, they have their downsides. First, they are not timely, often providing estimates from more than two years in the past. Second, USDA calculates participation rates at the state level, not the county level. Since the Food Stamp Program is administered by counties in California, there is a need for county-level estimates of participation. Since the sophisticated methodology described above is not readily applied at the county level, another USDA approach, the Program Access Index, can help meet this need.

Program Access Index

The Program Access Index (PAI) is one of the measures used by USDA-Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) to determine states' performance in the administration of the Food Stamp Program. It is a simple ratio of the average monthly number of food stamp participants over the course of a calendar year to the number of people with income below the official poverty line in each state. It is best described as a measure of the extent to which low-income people are participating in the Food Stamp Program, as income is the sole eligibility measure considered by the index.

While limited in application, USDA does use PAI to measure and reward food stamp performance, notably the high performance bonuses established in the 2002 Farm Bill.

This report presents the PAI for California counties. The methodology used appears in a subsequent section.

Alphabetical Listing

The tables below provide the PAI and rank for each of California's 58 counties.

COUNTY	PAI	RANK (1=best)
Alameda	0.441	31
Alpine	0.564	17
Amador	0.353	41
Butte	0.538	21
Calaveras	0.376	38
Colusa	0.457	29
Contra Costa	0.372	39
Del Norte (a)	0.816	2
El Dorado	0.320	45
Fresno	0.631	6
Glenn	0.556	18
Humboldt	0.530	23
Imperial	0.629	7
Inyo	0.486	26
Kern	0.602	9
Kings	0.590	12
Lake	0.594	11
Lassen	0.538	22
Los Angeles	0.395	35
Madera	0.580	14
Marin	0.231	57
Mariposa	0.410	33
Mendocino	0.582	13
Merced	0.657	5
Modoc	0.493	25
Mono	0.247	55
Monterey	0.341	42
Napa	0.248	54
Nevada	0.276	51

COUNTY	PAI	RANK (1=best)
Orange	0.258	53
Placer	0.303	48
Plumas	0.300	49
Riverside (b)	0.855	1
Sacramento	0.614	8
San Benito	0.568	16
San Bernardino	0.307	47
San Diego	0.258	52
San Francisco	0.379	37
San Joaquin	0.550	20
San Luis Obispo	0.240	56
San Mateo	0.185	58
Santa Barbara	0.335	44
Santa Clara	0.308	46
Santa Cruz	0.355	40
Shasta	0.553	19
Sierra	0.384	36
Siskiyou	0.576	15
Solano	0.477	27
Sonoma	0.298	50
Stanislaus	0.521	24
Sutter	0.472	28
Tehama	0.601	10
Trinity	0.454	30
Tulare	0.679	4
Tuolumne	0.425	32
Ventura	0.337	43
Yolo	0.407	34
Yuba	0.757	3

Notes on the Data

(a) This figure represents participation in both Del Norte and Humboldt counties. For the purposes of the PAI calculation, the FDPIR participation is only reported in Del Norte County.

(b) This figure represents participation in both Riverside and San Bernardino counties. For the purposes of the PAI calculation, the FDPIR participation is only reported in Riverside County.

The following are the Indian Tribes participating in the FDPIR within the corresponding counties.

Indian Tribe Organization	Counties
Fort Mojave	San Bernardino
Hoopa Valley	Humboldt
Riverside-San Bernardino	Riverside and San Bernardino

Top 15 Performers

Listed below are the top 15 counties on the PAI

COUNTY	PAI	RANK
Riverside (b)	0.855	1
Del Norte (a)	0.816	2
Yuba	0.757	3
Tulare	0.679	4
Merced	0.657	5
Fresno	0.631	6
Imperial	0.629	7
Sacramento	0.614	8
Kern	0.602	9
Tehama	0.601	10
Lake	0.594	11
Kings	0.590	12
Mendocino	0.582	13
Madera	0.580	14
Siskiyou	0.576	15

Low Performers on the PAI

Listed below are the bottom 15 counties on the PAI

COUNTY	PAI	RANK
San Mateo	0.185	58
Marin	0.231	57
San Luis Obispo	0.240	56
Mono	0.247	55
Napa	0.248	54
Orange	0.258	53

COUNTY	PAI	RANK
San Diego	0.258	52
Nevada	0.276	51
Sonoma	0.298	50
Plumas	0.300	49
Placer	0.303	48
San Bernardino	0.307	47
Santa Clara	0.308	46
El Dorado	0.320	45
Santa Barbara	0.335	44

The following describes the steps taken to establish the PAI for each of the 58 counties.

Step 1:	Determine number of food stamp participants
Step 2:	Determine number of Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) participants
Step 3:	Determine number of disaster assistance participants
Step 4:	Calculate adjusted number of annual participants
Step 5:	Calculate adjusted average monthly participants for CY 2005
Step 6:	Determine the number of individuals with income below poverty in 2003[10]
Step 7:	Calculate adjustments for SSI recipients This adjustment is based on the percentage of SSI recipients among the population income below the official poverty threshold ***FNS uses the 2003 figure which indicates that 3.9% of California SSI participants were below the poverty level. Because there is no way of accurately calculating the level of poverty among the SSI recipients on a county level, we applied the 3.9% to all counties.**
Step 8:	Calculate adjusted number of people with income below poverty The adjusted number of people in poverty (Step 8) is equal to (Step 6) minus the SSI Adjustment (Step 7) in California. In 2003, 3.9 percent of poor individuals in California received SSI.
Step 9:	Calculate the Program Access Index
Step 10:	Rank Order Counties by Program Access Index. This is determined in descending order, from highest to lowest with highest being the best and lowest being the worst.

[10] http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/saipe/saipe.cgi

As mentioned in the introduction, taken together, these three analyses provides a pretty good indication of Food Stamp Program performance in California. After discussing each analysis separately, we will consider their cumulative message.

Discussion of How Long Does it Take

The results of the *How Long Does it Take* study clearly indicate that county food stamp offices can move people quickly through the application process. The average wait times were significantly shorter than those reported by USDA and CFPA in the past. The performance of the four participating counties should be applauded.

However, it is important to remember the limitations of the study:

- The findings cannot be viewed as representative or applicable statewide (or even county-wide), since only four of the 58 counties were studied and these counties were not randomly sampled, and since the offices within these counties were not selected at random.
- There may be possible bias toward faster counties and/or faster offices. Since counties were not randomly sampled, but were instead selected based on their willingness to participate, it is possible that only counties with shorter application times agreed to participate.
- Advance notification of CFPA's study, along with the presence of our interviewers, may have expedited the application process during the study period.

Even recognizing these limitations, the results are valuable, since they help establish standards and ideals.

Stepping back, it's also important to note that one hour spent in the food stamp office may be an improvement over past performance, but *any* time spent in the office may mean lost wages or other hassles for the working poor. Alternatives to office visits (such as phone interviews) should be analyzed and promoted.

Research Recommendations Resulting from How Long Does it Take

The study and the discussion highlight several important areas for future inquiry:

- **Recommendation:** *Conduct a study on the mail-in application process to analyze the use of mail-in applications and compare with the in-person application process.*

  One of the options for food stamp applicants is to apply for food stamps via mail using the mail-in application form. This option is in lieu of the in-person office trip.

- **Recommendation:** *Study and quantify the components of the application process that occur outside the welfare office.*

  This study only focused on the time spent in the welfare office. It did not include time spent on other activities associated with the application process, such as transportation. In order to get a more complete understanding of the time and resource commitments required of food stamp applicants, an additional study to quantify the components of the application process that occur outside of the welfare office is needed.

- **Recommendation**: Study and quantify the amount of time it takes to apply for food stamps if someone already receives public health insurance.

- **Recommendation**: Study and quantify the length of time and correspondence involved in enrolling households outside the welfare office, when processed by CBO-assisters vs. Outstationed Eligibility Workers

Discussion of Lost Dollars, Empty Plates

In past years, the Lost Dollars analysis has been one of CFPA's most popular reports. With high rates of food insecurity, Californians often want to know where the resources are to fight hunger. With this analysis, it is clear that $2 billion could be made available in this fight.

While the analysis is popular, it has not been without its critics. There are two major complaints. First is the complaint that the analysis uses the state food stamp

participation rate to estimate lost *county* dollars. However, the analysis does not pretend to be the precise amount lost in any of the 58 counties. Instead, it gives advocates, administrators and policymakers a good sense of what is at stake and how food stamp performance translates into dollars and cents.

The other issue with the analyses is the use of the current average food stamp benefits for predicting the amount money lost in California. As noted, non-participants may have lower benefit levels than current participants. In the absence of a well-established likely average benefit for *California's* non-participants, we believe that using current benefits is fair as long as the impact is noted.

On a county level there may be skeptics who believe that county revenue may be too small to be significant. While the county share of sales taxes is small, so too is the county share of food stamp administrative costs. By dedicating that small amount of money to effective outreach strategies, counties could realize important food stamp participation gains.

One of the key findings from the Lost Dollars report is that the scale of the loss is surprising. When discussing the study for the first time, listeners often seek to clarify the results: "You mean we're losing $2 million a year?" The $2 billion figure is a shock and, sometimes, seems unbelievable.

We also learned that few public assistance programs are as good for state and local budgets as the Food Stamp Program. Often policymakers must invest a little to get a lot back in federal money. With food stamps, even that "little investment" is covered as a result of the positive state general fund aspects of food stamps. These fiscal advantages deserve greater recognition.

Discussion of County Performance (PAI)

Measuring county performance is a sensitive issue. Without sophisticated measures of eligibility among county residents, attempts at measuring local performance will certainly leave many communities dissatisfied. The PAI is by no means a perfect measure. It is simply one indicator of how well a county is doing at reaching very low-income people with food stamps.

Some counties will likely be pleased with their PAI; others will feel that the demographic characteristics of their counties are playing a greater role in the measure than actual county food stamp performance. These discussions will help advance our

state's thinking about how to track county-level food stamp performance. In the meantime, the PAI is a "good enough" tool to use to get started.

Conclusions Based on the Three Analyses

In view of the three analyses, how is California doing? The answer may depend on the reader's worldview.

For readers who are "glass half-full" types, the analyses may be very encouraging. They show California could be able to get $2 billion in nutrition benefits in a timely manner to a significant percentage of low-income people in all 58 counties in California.

For readers who are "glass half-empty" types, the analyses may be less than encouraging. They show California is able to leave $2 billion in federal nutrition benefits on the table at a time when families are struggling. They show that food stamp applicants may be wasting time in food stamp offices when office visits could be avoided altogether. They show that some counties have an embarrassingly small percentage of low-income people enrolled in food stamps.

Given that it will take a positive attitude to get policymakers to invest attention and resources into the food stamp program in California, we encourage folks to adopt the first view. Given that children throughout the state continue to have "half-empty bellies," we encourage readers to hold onto the second view as well.

In summary, there is much to be proud of and certainly much to do.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Survey instrument used in the study to identify potential study participants:

INTERVIEWER: PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND READ THE NOTES BEFORE BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW.

******Fill in the Survey I.D. # for the log book here:_____******

Agency Name_____
Location (City, County) _____

PLEASE APPROACH EACH PERSON WHO WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR OF THE AGENCY OFFICE AND PRESCREEN THEM FOR STUDY UNLESS THERE IS A LANGUAGE BARRIER. SUPPLY THE PERSON WITH A STUDY TIME LOG (STL) ONLY IF THE PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED HAS BEEN SELECTED FOR THE STUDY VIA THE FOLLOWING SCREENING QUESTIONS. PLEASE ASK THE FOLLOWING SCREENING QUESTIONS. IF APPLICANT FITS CRITERIA, PLEASE DATE AND TIME STAMP THE STUDY TIME LOG, TELL PERSON WHAT WE ARE DOING (SEE SCRIPT) AND INSTRUCT THEM AS TO WHAT TO DO WITH THE STL.

READ ALOUD! HI. MY NAME IS _____FROM CALIFORNIA FOOD POLICY ADVOCATES AND WE ARE WORKING WITH THE WELFARE OFFICE IN YOUR COUNTY DOING A STUDY TO IMPROVE THE FOOD STAMP APPLICATION PROCESS IN CALIFORNIA. WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO HELP US OUT TODAY WITH THIS STUDY?
YES/NO/REFUSED

YOUR ANSWERS ARE COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL, THERE IS NO WAY TO IDENTIFY YOU AND THIS WILL NOT AFFECT YOUR ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN ANY WAY.

IF YES: WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY YOU ARE HERE TODAY.

PRESCREEN QUESTIONS:

1. Do you currently receive food stamps?
   Yes.....1 [GO TO QUESTION 4]
   No.....2 [GO TO QUESTION 2]
   Language Barrier..... ....98 [END SURVEY,GO TO NEXT PERSON]
   Refused.....99 [GO TO QUESTION 2]

2. Are you here today to apply for food stamps?
   Yes.....1 [GO TO QUESTION 3]

No.....2 **[GO TO QUESTION 4]**
Refused.....99 **[END SURVEY,GO TO NEXT PERSON]**

3. In this current food stamp application, prior to today, how many trips have you made to the welfare office?
   This is first trip.....1 **[GIVE SURVEY TIME LOG]**
   This is second trip.....2 **[GIVE SURVEY TIME LOG]**
   This is third trip..... .....3 **[GIVE SURVEY TIME LOG]**
   This is fourth trip.....4 **[GIVE SURVEY TIME LOG]**
   I don't know.....98 **[END SURVEY]**
   Refused.....99 **[END SURVEY]**

4. What is your reason for your trip to the agency office today? **(CIRCLE ONLY ONE ANSWER)**
   Applying for Other Public Benefits..... 1
   Being Recertified..... 2
   Dropping Off Paperwork For Caseworker..... 3 **[PROBE: IS THIS FOR FOOD STAMPS?]**
   Picking Up Information for Myself or Friend..... 4
   Other_____5
   Refused.....99

READ ALOUD! THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUR SURVEY.

Appendix B: Additional Methodology on How Long Study

Objective

This study estimates the range of the number of visits as well as the length of time required to complete each step of and the complete food stamp application process at four welfare offices. The steps in the application process vary from county to county. In general the process contains several elements:

- Entering the office and getting the needed forms;
- Filling out the forms; and
- A face-to-face interview with a county eligibility worker to determine a variety of eligibility factors.

Frequently, additional steps include orientation, finger imaging, and subsequent visits to provide verification.

Sample

The four county welfare offices included in this study volunteered to participate. Although the offices were not randomly selected, we did try to include counties with various demographics. The locations of the offices are listed in Appendix D.

In Tulare County, the availability of a Spanish-speaking interviewer allowed Spanish-speaking applicants to participate in the study. All other counties were limited to English-speaking applicants.

Interviewers spent four consecutive days at each office between September 2004 and May 2005. Each day, every person who entered the building was asked if they were applying for food stamps (see Appendix A for a copy of the interview questionnaire). A total of 2,083 individuals were approached at the four offices. Only those people who were applying for food stamps for the first time, or who were reapplying after their food stamps had been discontinued, were invited to participate in the study. People currently receiving food stamps who were at the office to maintain their benefits and people applying for benefits other than food stamps were eliminated, yielding 406 applicants who met the desired criteria. In total, 119 people in Sacramento, 117 people in Tulare, 129 people in Humboldt, and 41 people in Marin provided the data utilized in this analysis.

Data Collection

Study participants were provided with time logs and timepieces, which they were instructed to give to the county worker(s) at each stage of the application process. The workers filled in the time they started and the time they finished with the applicant. CFPA interviewers recorded the time applicants entered and exited the building in the time logs and also collected the following information:

- The number of trips the applicant had made as part of the current application process.
- Whether or not the applicant was applying for other benefits.
- Whether or not further visits were required to complete the application process.

Applicants who needed to return at a later date to complete their application process were given a "reminder card" corresponding to the identification number on their survey log and asked to present their reminder card to CFPA staff on their return. This system allowed applicants to be tracked over multiple visits.

Appendix C: Process Steps

The following table depicts the individual steps in the process which were recorded at the offices:

COUNTY	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Humboldt*	Turn in completed application & screening sheet	Finger imaging	Screener	Caseworker	**must go to another office to pick up EBT card
Marin	Pick up application	Return application	SAW Caseworker	Finger imaging	EBT account set up and card issuance
Sacramento	Pick up application & screening sheet	Return application & screening sheet	Finger imaging	Orientation	SAW Caseworker
Tulare	Complete application at the reception area	Receive DFA 285 or SAWS2 application	SAW Caseworker	Finger imaging	

*Applications are available in the office lobby for pick up anytime during office hours.
**Since this step of the application process took place at another office building, we were not able to incorporate the time of this step into the overall time.

COUNTY	Step 6	Step 7
Humboldt		
Marin		
Sacramento	EBT account set up	EBT card issuance
Tulare		

Appendix D: Office Locations

Addresses of the welfare offices used in the study and the dates studied. Please see Appendix E for demographics information of each office location.

Sacramento County
Research Office
3960 Research Drive
Sacramento, CA 95838
(916) 648-0894
Study Dates: September 20-23, 2004

Tulare County
Lindsay District Office
900 N. Sequoia
Lindsay, CA 93247
(559) 562-1377
Study Dates: January 10-13, 2005

Humboldt County
Main Office
929 Koster Street
Eureka, CA 95501
(707) 476-4700
Study Dates: January 24-27, 2005

Marin County
120 North Redwood Drive-West Wing
San Rafael, CA 94903
(415) 473-3400
Study Dates: May 23-26, 2005

Appendix E: County Office Characteristics

Below is a summary of each participating office's food stamp experience. This information is intended to provide the context in which these offices operate. Please note that the following data reflect the month when the food stamp study was conducted at the office location.

County and Office Location	# of FS Offices in the County	# of FS Cases in the County	# of FS Cases at the Office Location	# of FS Applications Submitted to the County	# of FS Applications Submitted to the Office Location
Humboldt [A] County-Main Office	1	4653	4653	656	656
Marin County-Redwood Drive Office					
Sacramento County-Research Office					
Tulare County-Lindsay Office	6	9670	431	1998	278

[A] Humboldt County has two outstations that distribute and collect food stamp applications. However, the outstations do not carry any cases or distribute benefits. The total number of food stamp applications could not be separated by outstation location. Hence, the total number of food stamp application submitted to the office location includes those collected via the outstations.

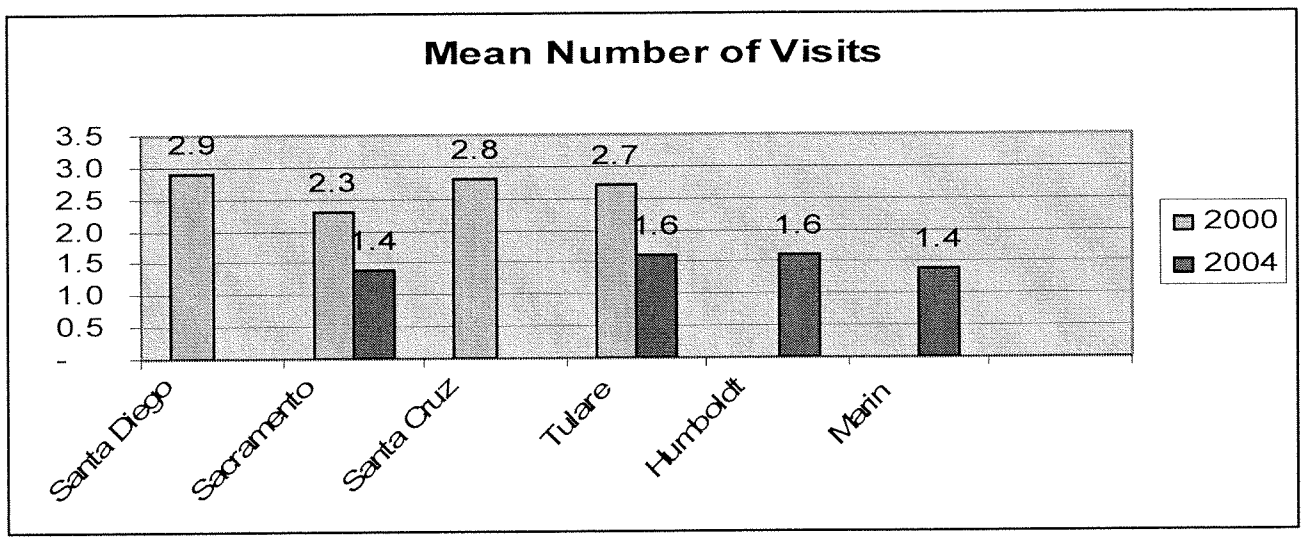
Appendix F: Comparison 2000 and 2004

This table shows the methodology used to conduct the How Long Does It Take *study in 2000 and 2004 to help readers compare the differences and similarities in the implementation and analysis of the two studies.*

2000 Study	2004 Study
Identifying Study Sites: Counties volunteered to participate in the study. Each county identified the office location.	*Identifying Study Sites:* Counties volunteered to participate in the study. Each county identified the office location.
Selecting Study Participants: Potential food stamp applicants were approached at the four offices. Screening survey used to select those who are eligible to participate in the study.	*Selecting Study Participants:* Potential food stamp applicants were approached at the four offices. Screening survey used to select those who are eligible to participate in the study.
Data Collection and Analysis: Language capabilities limited to English. The data collected were used to determine the average number of office visits, length of each office visit, and length of each application step.	*Data Collection and Analysis:* Language capabilities limited to English except at the Lindsay District office in Tulare County, where a Spanish-speaking interviewer was present. Due to the limitation of the study, only the number of office visits and the length of each office visit are analyzed.
Data Presentation: The study yielded 435 participants. Times of office visits and each application step are presented using the mean time.	*Data Presentation:* The study yielded 406 participants. Times of office visits are presented using the median time.

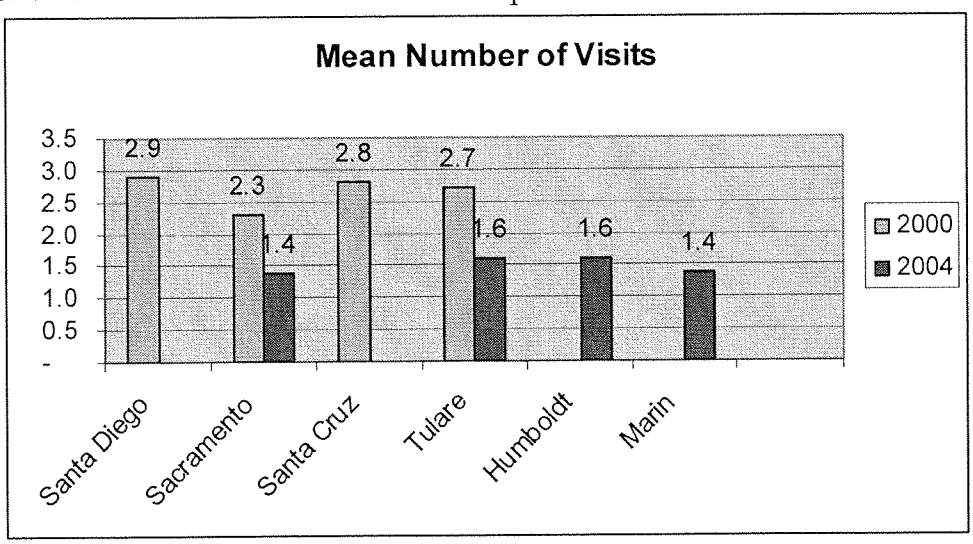
2000 Study and 2004 Study

As mentioned earlier in this report, CFPA first conducted the food stamp application study in 2000. Since then there have been several changes to the Food Stamp Program on the state level. Although four different counties and/or offices participated in the two studies, it is still useful to examine the differences and similarities between the two

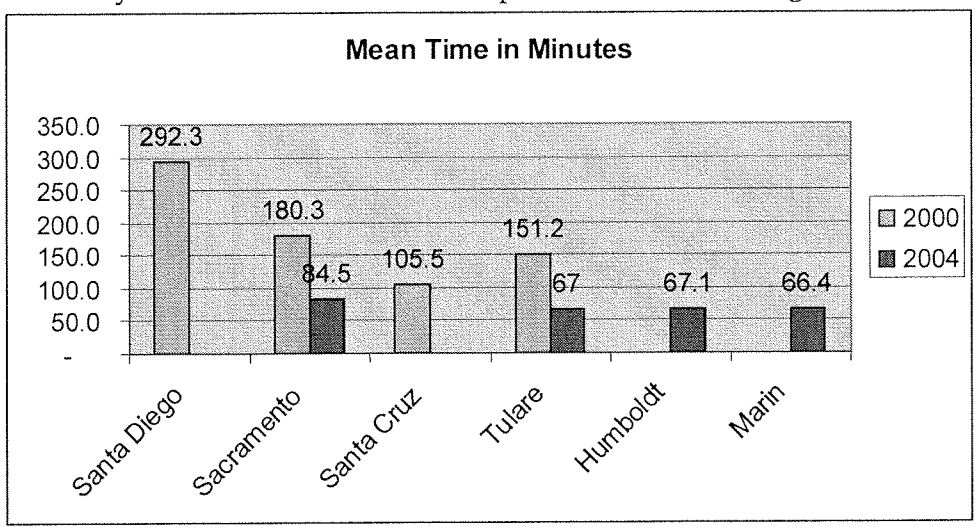


studies. We cannot use the two studies to note changes or make correlations to the recent statewide changes. However, they can help identify continuing barriers and best practices.

Table 1 shows the mean number of trips for 2000 and 2004. Table 2 on the next page shows the mean number of minutes per office visit.



Examining the results of the two studies, the results of the 2004 study shows vast improvements in both the number of trips and the overall application time. However, due to the limitations of the study mentioned above, we cannot use the two studies to draw any conclusions or make comparisons to cite changes.



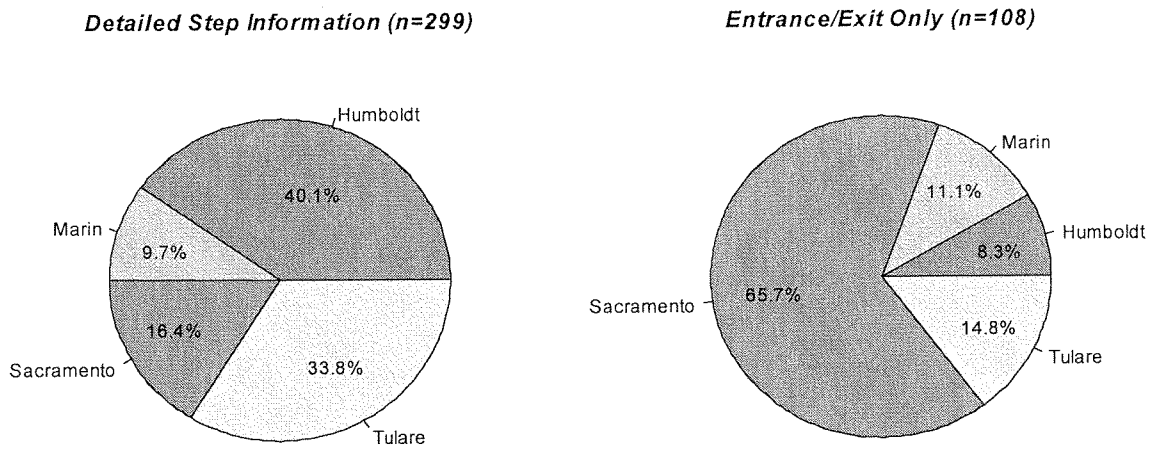
Appendix G: Additional Analysis on How Long

Data

To calculate the number of visits each applicant made to apply for food stamps, we assessed (1) the responses to a screening questionnaire (whether the current visit is the first, second, third, etc.), and (2) how many times data collection volunteers counted each applicant during the four-day observation period. Several factors limit the study's ability to pinpoint the number of days it took to complete the food stamp application process. Most importantly, the study couldn't capture (1) those who needed to return after the sampling time was over, (2) those who refused to offer the number of times that they visited before, and (3) those who returned but did not participate in the study the second time. Given these limitations, estimates of the number of visits should be taken as conservative estimates.

In all, 406 respondents met the screening criteria. Office entrance and exit times were recorded for these respondents. However, of these respondents, 108 lacked detailed time log information (i.e. information on each step in the process). Figure 1 highlights the distribution across counties of (1) respondents with at least one detailed step identified in the log (left pie chart), and (2) respondents with only entrance and exit information, but no step-by-step time logs (right pie chart). Respondents from Sacramento are overrepresented among the 108 respondents with only entrance-exit information.

Figure 1. Distribution of Counties among Sample



We present time estimates for both detailed step-by-step time logs, which we will call FSP time, and the overall entrance-exit times. Entrance-exit estimate may be longer than FSP estimates because applicants may have:

- Met with agency staff regarding non-food stamp benefits
- Spent time devoted to other non-FSP-related activities

However, in cases in which applicants carried out multiple steps in the food stamp application process simultaneously, the FSP estimate overstates the actual time spent in the office, since it adds the time for each overlapping step. For these reasons, the time measures will be presented as a range (low to high) of times for the typical applicant.

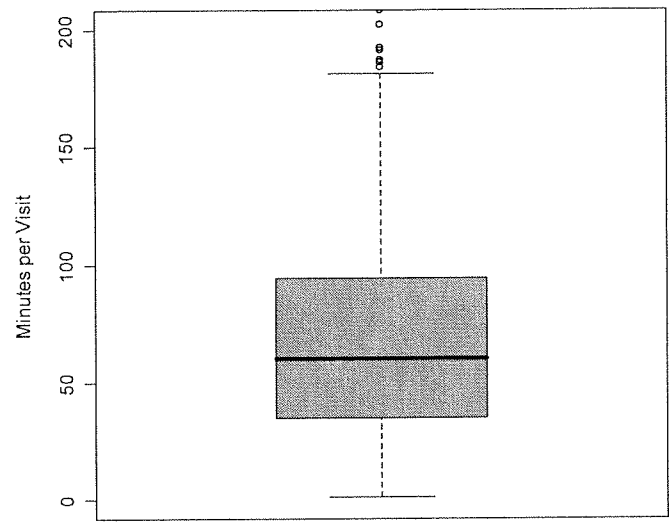
Median versus Mean

The 2000 report identified the average number of trips and time spent applying by calculating the mean. However, this method hides the fact that much of the data is strongly skewed. Although most respondents have few trips and short overall times, a significant few return to the office more than once and/or stay at the office for a long time. These high values push the mean upward. Estimates of the median—the value at which 50% of the respondents have shorter times or fewer trips and 50% have longer times or more trips—are less sensitive to such skew. See below for graphs of the median; we also present tables comparing the mean with the median.

Boxplots

We present detailed graphs of the time distributions using box and whisker plots ('boxplots') as shown in Figure 2. The figure highlights the distribution of total time per visit (in minutes) between entering the building and exiting the building. These graphs consist of a box that spans the range of time per visit for respondents in the middle two quartiles. That is, the bottom of the box cuts off at the first quartile (where 25% of the respondents spend less time per visit) and the top of the box cuts off at the third quartile (where 25% of the respondents spend more time per visit).

Figure 2. Box plot of Entrance-Exit Time per Visit for All Respondents



The dark band in the box identifies the median value; here, 60 minutes. The 'whiskers' that protrude from the box encompass almost all of the remaining observations. However, extreme values that are sufficiently far from the median are indicated with dots beyond the whiskers.

Appendix H: Additional Results on How Long

Number of Visits

In Figure 3 we highlight the number of trips to the food stamp office for all applicants with at least one entrance and exit time recorded. The sample size for each county is listed in parentheses. In almost every county, the majority of applicants made only one trip to the agency (55-73%). Applicants in Humboldt were almost equally split between one and two trips (nearly 50% for both). Nearly 40% of applicants in Tulare also returned a second time. In all counties it was relatively rare to identify third or fourth time returnees (less than 10%).

Figure 3. Number of Visits by County

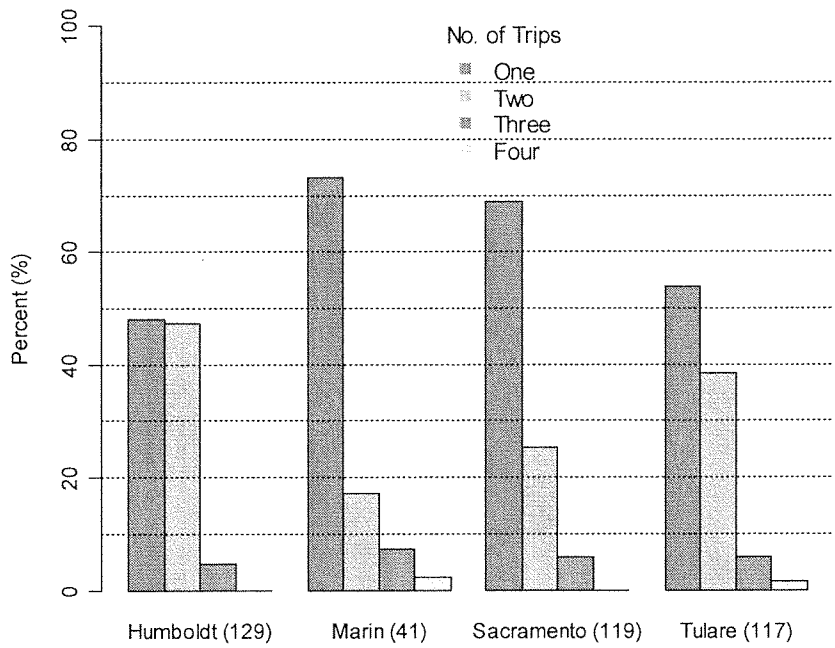


Table 1 lists the median and mean number of trips. Again, there is little evidence that the typical applicant approached during the period of study made much more than two trips and usually made only one trip.

Table 1. Summary of Number of Visits in Application Process

County	Min	Max	Median	Mean
Humboldt	1	3	2	1.6
Marin	1	4	1	1.4
Sacramento	1	3	1	1.4
Tulare	1	4	1	1.6
Total	1	4	1	1.5

These results stand in stark contrast to the results of the 2000 study, which demonstrated 2 to 3 return trips in order to complete the application process. The reasons for these differences may be several. Two of the counties are different from those sampled in 2000, which may affect the comparability of results. However, the estimates for Sacramento and Tulare, both of which were included in the original report, are significantly lower than previously estimated. The lower current estimate may be a reflection of efforts to streamline the application process at the state and local level, or speedier processing on-site.

As stated above, there may also be flaws with the data, since the study is unlikely to capture information on (1) visits before first contact with CFPA staff, (2) those who returned to complete the application after the sampling time period ended, and (3) those who returned during the application period but did not participate in the study on this return visit. Nevertheless, such errors were just as likely in the first study. Thus, the lower estimates here may be indicative of improvements in the application process at the counties.[11]

Time Per Visit

When considering how much time applicants spent applying for food stamps, we identify two separate measures:

- **FSP time** refers to the sum of the time intervals recorded for each step in the application process. Even if two or more steps occurred simultaneously, the time for each step is considered separately and added to the others to get the total time per visit. In these cases, the FSP time may be greater than the actual

[11] One additional distinction is to be found in the estimators used. In the 2000 study survival analysis was used to estimate the probability that the number of trips a person needed to make was greater than 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. The corresponding survivor function was used to estimate the mean number of trips and this may have slightly inflated the estimate of time since it explicitly accounts for censored data.

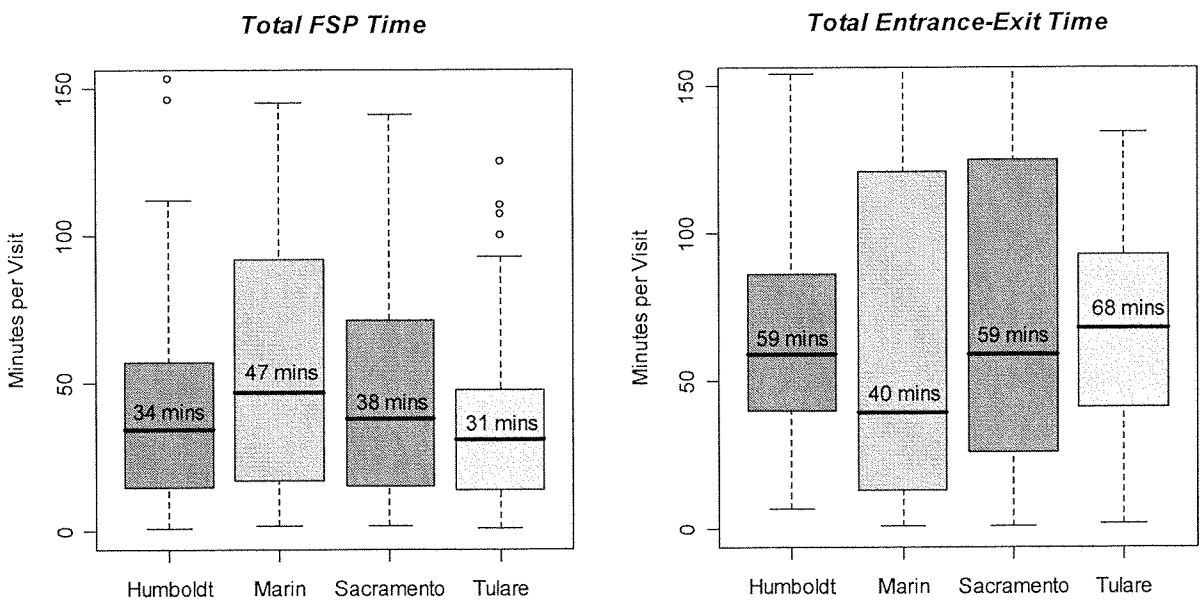
time spent on the application process. However, in cases where times were not recorded for certain steps, the FSP time may underestimate the total application time.

- **Entrance-exit time** uses only the time interval between entering and exiting the building. Since a number of factors unrelated to the food stamp application process may lengthen the amount of time spent in the office, this measure will likely overstate the time for the application process.

We use both of these measures to get the upper and lower bounds of the typical time spent on the application process.

The four counties demonstrate greater similarity with respect to the total FSP time estimates than for total entrance-exit estimates. With respect to the former, the typical applicant spends a median time of about 31 to 47 minutes per visit to complete most or all of the application process (Figure 4, left panel; Table 2). Humboldt and Tulare are more heavily concentrated around their median/mean values, indicating that most applicants in these counties will tend to spend the same amount of time during a visit. By contrast, Marin and Sacramento have a much broader distribution, reaching lengths of 3 to 4 hours to complete the steps in a single visit (Table 2).

Figure 4. FSP and Entrance-Exit Time per Visit by County



The entrance-exit time estimates demonstrate even higher average times per visit (Figure 4, right panel; Table 4). Humboldt moves from a median value of 34 minutes for the FSP time estimate to a median of 59 minutes for the entrance-exit time. A similar pattern is followed for all of the counties except Marin, which actually decreases median time by 7 minutes. This apparent anomaly for Marin can be attributed to both overlapping processes that get tallied separately in the FSP time calculation and the presence of a number of applicants with no detailed step results but very short entrance-exit time logs.

Table 2. Summary of Total FSP Time

County	Number of Observations	Min	Max	Median	Mean
Humboldt	134	1.0	348.0	34.5	40.7
Marin	30	2.0	254.0	47.0	62.8
Sacramento	47	2.0	174.0	38.0	47.4
Tulare	105	1.0	166.0	31.0	36.3
Total	316	1.0	348.0	34.0	42.3

The presence of extreme time per visit values in Humboldt, Marin and Sacramento inflate the mean values considerably in comparison to the median time estimates. In general, we estimate that typical times for visits to the offices will range from a low of 31 minutes to about 70 minutes total. Completing the application process may take roughly 30 minutes to 1 hour.

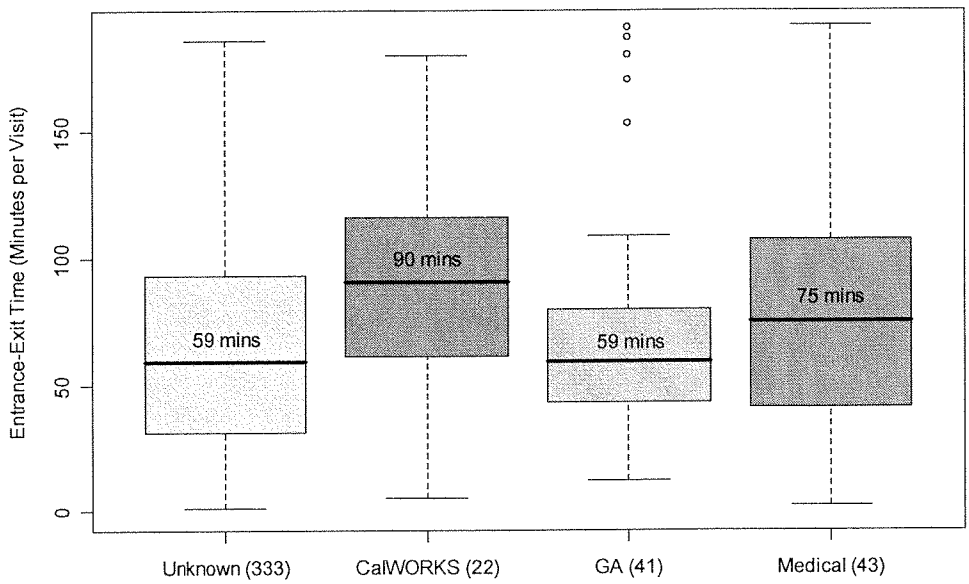
Table 3. Summary of Entrance-Exit Time

County	Number of Observations	Min	Max	Median	Mean
Humboldt	149	7.0	306.0	59.0	67.1
Marin	42	1.0	212.0	39.5	66.4
Sacramento	129	1.0	431.0	59.0	84.5
Tulare	119	2.0	134.0	68.0	67.0
Total	439	1.0	431.0	60.0	72.1

We also examine the effect of applying for multiple benefits on the time spent at the office (Figure 5). Although a large number of applicants were either applying only for

food stamps or refused to offer information on the other programs to which they applied ('unknown'), the figure shows that those applying for CalWORKS and medical benefits such as MediCAL demonstrate longer lengths of time between entrance and exit from the offices.

Figure 5. Total Entrance-Exit Time per Visit by Benefits Sought



Time per Step

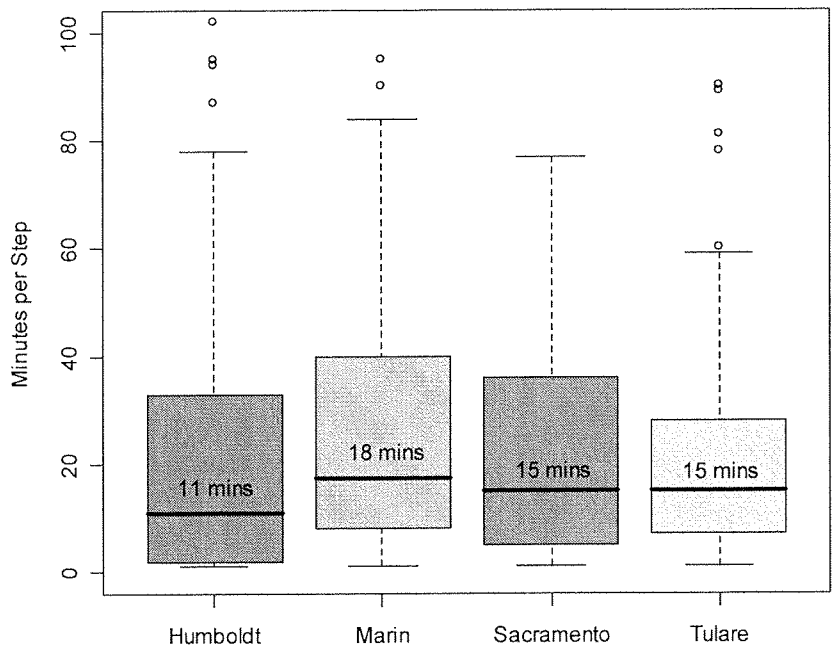
Multiple components may account for the differences in time spent applying for food stamps:

- Differences in the number of steps in the process.
- How much administrative work any single component carries.
- Overlapping times for multiple steps.

To aid comparability, we consider the time per individual step. In this approach, we decouple the steps from the person. Thus, the sample sizes reflect the number of observed steps, not the number of respondents.

All four counties were roughly similar in the median and mean time to complete a typical step (Figure 6). With respect to the median, the counties ranged from 11 to 18 minutes for a typical step in the process. Counties also demonstrated some very long intervals for completing particular processes, reaching a high of 2 to 3 hours for a single step.

Figure 6. Time per Step by County



These large intervals had a significant effect on the measure of mean time to complete a particular step. In contrast to the median, the mean values for the typical time per step range from 21 to almost 30 minutes (Table 4). But how can you lump together simple & complex steps?

Table 4. Summary of Time per Step

County	Number of Steps Observed	Min	Max	Median	Mean
Humboldt	249	1.0	174.0	11.0	21.9
Marin	66	1.0	131.0	17.5	28.5
Sacramento	94	1.0	135.0	15.0	23.7
Tulare	182	1.0	120.0	15.0	21.0
Total	591	1.0	174.0	14.0	22.6