

V. DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC TASKS

This section presents the 14 tasks we suggest to implement this initiative. For each task description, we provide a summary of the goals and activities that would take place, as well as a list of the key subtasks or deliverables. At the end of each task description, we present an estimated cost for each of the key actors in the task. Where applicable, task alternatives are discussed and their costs summarized. In many cases, no alternative tasks are suggested. For most of the tasks, USDA is assumed to have primary responsibility for the task activities; however, USDA could choose to contract out some or all of these activities. States' involvement is noted in brackets next to the subtask lists.

Task 1 – Conduct Initial and Subsequent Steering Committee Meetings

Conduct an initial meeting with FNS, ERS, EIAC, and ASFSA to define minimum and desired database elements and research objectives (including whether periodic downloads from federally available data are desired). To obtain continued feedback/oversight from these key constituents, select a committee to serve as a “steering committee” and establish a series of approximately four steering committee meetings throughout the duration of the project. The budget assumes that USDA will pay for travel associated with steering committee meetings. Deliverables and subtasks will include:

- A final definition of desired database elements and research objectives.
- A preliminary schedule for querying States and, possibly, district school authorities.
- Identification of steering committee members and schedule for steering committee meetings.
- A final workplan.

USDA Costs:	\$28,945
State Costs:	\$40
Total Task Cost:	\$28,985

Task 2 – Develop Contact Lists

Develop contact lists of directors of food service programs within an initial set of 20 State Departments of Education. The deliverable of this task will be a list that will include at least one contact within each of the 20 State Departments of Education. If all parties agree in the initial meeting, Task 2 will also include creating a preliminary list of district school food authorities, if this information is easily available. While a contact will be developed for each of the 20 States' Department of Education, it is recommended that only nine states be selected for the initiative tasks. Adding additional states will

require obtaining OMB clearance, which should not be necessary if only nine states are used initially. The selection of both the initial 20 States for which contacts will be developed as well as the final nine States to select for participation will be made in conjunction with ERS and FNS to ensure representation across states with varying school districts, demographics, sizes, etc. Once the website has been developed and the nine states are participating, additional states will be added.

Subtasks:

- Define an initial group of 20 States to call and the 9 states to sample (i.e., participate) in the initiative.
- Use a combination of phone calls, emails and letters to various individuals in the State Departments of Education or state food service programs to request the name of individuals to contact for the desired elements outlined in the initial meeting. [States and USDA]
- Develop a list of key contacts that will be used for the data collection effort. This may require more than one contact in each state.
- Send the members on the contact list a letter to outline the actors and objective of the collection project and define the anticipated roll of the contact.

USDA Costs:	\$8,366
State Costs:	\$2,224
Total Task Cost:	\$10,590

Task Alternative: Solicit Contact Information and Participation from the States

One possibility for determining contacts and selecting the nine initial states to participate in the initiative is to take a less proactive approach than the task above suggests and send an email or letter to States asking if they would like to participate in this initiative and to identify the appropriate contact person if so. This might lead to a less diverse selection of nine states for the first phase of the initiative, but it would reduce labor required to identify contacts.

USDA Costs:	\$5,332
State Costs:	\$2,780
Total Alternative Cost:	\$8,111

[Totals may not add due to rounding.]

Task 3 – Conduct Assessment of State-Level Data Being Collected

For Task 3, develop a structured interview form to be used to conduct interviews with directors of food service programs within State Departments of Education. Use of a

standardized form will ensure that terminology used and questions asked during each interview are consistent. Using the contact list developed in Task 2, conduct structured interviews with contacts in nine States to identify data currently reported to the State by SFAs, formats in which data are delivered, and what data are regularly aggregated and reported to the federal level. As part of the interview, it will be critical to examine how eligibility data are collected and reported at the SFA level, to what extent these data are broken out by participant demographics, and how feasible it would be to incorporate these data into the envisioned database.

The deliverable of this task will be a matrix of data elements currently available at the school district level by each of the nine states, as well as a final contact for each of the states. It may also be necessary to contact some of the school districts within the nine states to examine the variability of data between districts and the capabilities of districts to report electronically.

Subtasks:

- Develop a structured interview form to be used to conduct interviews with state contacts (to report on the data they are currently collecting).
- Determine the best method for executing the survey (e.g., phone, mail, web, etc.).
- Initiate the survey. [States and USDA]
- Compile the survey results into a document that outlines the current elements collected by the states.

USDA Costs:	\$16,046
State Costs:	\$9,318
Total Task Cost:	\$25,364

Task 4 – Collect Sample of Archived Data from States

This task will occur simultaneously with Task 3. During the interviews with each of the nine states, a request will be made for that state to provide archived data (e.g., data collected from 1998-2000). Examining the data will help identify and design the data elements that will ultimately be collected from the states. Further, it will help determine common formats and structures. For example, files can be formatted in different ways, such as comma-delimited text files, Excel files, MS Access files, etc. The phrase, “data structures,” refers to how the data are organized (for example, one file may contain district names, another enrollment information, another program participation data, etc.) During this task, the data will be collected, either via hard copy or electronically, and set aside for review in a later task.

Subtasks:

- Create an ftp (file transfer protocol) site to allow states to upload any archived data.
- Create an email address to allow states to email any archived data.

USDA Costs:	\$4,811
State Costs:	\$16,175
Total Task Cost:	\$20,986

Task 5 – Identify and Conduct Review of Existing Databases

Task 5 can occur simultaneously with Tasks 3 and 4. In this task, identify and conduct a review of existing databases and their contents, such as the Common Core of Data (CCD) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics, to determine whether any essential elements of the database can be extracted from existing databases. The product of this task will be a matrix of data elements available by database source.

Subtasks:

- Search the web for online data sources that could be used with State program data.
- Contact education researchers to find any data that have been used on prior projects that might be applicable.
- Create a document outlining the data that are currently available.
- Highlight elements from existing databases that will not need to be collected from the state contacts.

USDA Costs:	\$15,466
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$15,466

Task 6 – Analyze Data Elements, Assess Availability, and Define Core Data Set

Once the State inventory and review of existing databases are complete, all of the data elements will be analyzed to determine the extent to which they are consistent and available in electronic or hard copy format. This information will be used to design the database and computer-assisted data entry programs necessary to ensure standardized data capture. An assessment will also be made of the best time of year to collect the data. The deliverable of this task will be a matrix, by state, showing the final set of core data

elements that will be “collected” from the States on a yearly basis, with a notation indicating how the data will be derived (electronically or via a survey query, and whether they will be collected from the States or downloaded from existing databases).

Subtasks:

- Create a document that outlines the different elements available and highlight areas of similarity and difference.
- Meet to discuss and define which items will be used as the core data to be collected.
- Determine if some elements should be defined as ‘optional.’ Some elements may be desirable to collect but may not be added to the core because of inconsistencies or lack of availability.
- Draft a list of core elements.

USDA Costs:	\$20,830
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$20,830

Task 7 – Explore and Potentially Develop Options for Using Automated Uploads to Retrieve Data from States or Existing Databases

During this task, which will begin simultaneously with Tasks 3, 4, and 5, the archived data provided by the States and information collected during the interviews will be reviewed to determine whether there are any software packages or formats commonly used to warehouse the core data. If common formats are identified, applications will be developed to allow contacts to submit core data by uploading files over the Internet. Also during this task, applications will be developed to retrieve data that are currently available on-line. The deliverable of this task will be a set of applications to facilitate collection of the core data with minimal burden to the State-level contacts.

Subtasks:

- Analyze the archived data that is collected in Task 4, looking for common formats and/or identifying common software packages used by the state.
- Determine if there are enough similarities in the data that would allow the creation of an automated process to gather some of the core data from the state. This could include applications where the states upload data to the centralized website or where applications are written to retrieve data from existing databases.

- Build a set of applications for the formats that are common among the different data sets.

USDA Costs:	\$14,594
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$14,594

Task Alternative: Eliminate Use of Automatic Uploads from States

While this alternative still includes the review and potential development of tools to retrieve data automatically from existing databases, it defines an option for not building tools to automatically upload data from the States. The cost of this task would decrease; however, in not automatically uploading data from States, States would have to key the data into a worksheet (if a web-based system is used) or send the data on hard copy. If States elect to send hard copy data to USDA, USDA will have to key the hard copy data directly into a database (or into a worksheet that can be uploaded to the database), thus increasing labor hours for USDA if an automatic upload is not used. However, until USDA conducts interviews with States to determine how these data are stored, it is not clear whether the use of automatic uploads will be useful or not.

USDA Costs:	\$7,477
State Costs:	\$0
Total Alternative Cost:	\$7,477

Task 8 – Design the Website, including Defining Data Security and Access

Design the website. Include links that provide background and information about the purpose of the website and its contents, including descriptions and availability of the core data. During this task, identify and define user groups and create a security structure to restrict levels of user access. Establish procedures to manage requests for restricted levels of access.

Subtasks:

- Create images and design elements to be used in the website.
- Define structure and sections to be used on the website.
- Set up a web server to host the web site.
- Determine if a unique URL should be used and register it, if needed.
- Set up the security structure for the web site.
- Determine which content will/will not be restricted to authorized personnel.

- Establish a procedure to determine who should have access to the restricted areas.
- Build an application to manage users and security.
- Establish an approval procedure for posting content.

USDA Costs:	\$17,900
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$17,900

Task 9 – Build Computer-Assisted Data Entry Programs

To accommodate states that are not equipped to handle the automated tools developed in Task 7, an Internet-based computer-assisted data entry application will be developed to allow contacts to submit the core data. A series of browser-based worksheets will be designed to collect the data. The web application will include detailed instructions and validation features to ensure that data collected are consistent across States. Sample worksheets will also be developed to help the States gather and organize the data before data are keyed in the requested format.

Subtasks:

- Determine who will be using the computer-assisted data program.
- Create username/password for each respondent.
- Notify each respondent of the username/password and login process.
- Create a ‘paper version’ of the worksheets to collect the core data.
- Build the web application to handle entry of the data in the worksheets via a browser.
- Create a user manual to answer questions about the collection program.
- Set up an email address or toll-free number for technical support.
- Notify users of the option and allow users to request a ‘paper version’ of the worksheet if they do not have Internet access.

USDA Costs:	\$31,153
State Costs:	\$1,001
Total Task Cost:	\$32,154

Task 10 – Build Tools to Query, Sort, and Export the Data

In this task, build a web-based interface to the database to allow users to query, sort, and perform other activities on the collected program data. Initial and continuing discussions with ERS and FNS will help inform this process and ensure that users will be able to sort and query the database as anticipated. A search tool, which will allow simultaneous access by multiple users, will be developed. Download functionality will be incorporated into the Internet application. A Quality Assurance protocol will be developed to fully exercise the application and toolset prior to release to the user community.

Subtasks:

- Build an interface to allow users to select how they want to view the data.
- Determine key variables that users might want to query and sort.
- Develop an online glossary that defines each variable in the data set to be easily accessible while working with project data.

USDA Costs:	\$28,313
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$28,313

Task 11 – Design Summary Tables, Reports, and Articles to be Posted to the Web

Templates for summary reports and data views will be designed for posting on the web site, based on discussions during the initial meeting with staff identified in Task 1. Automated content management tools, which will allow selected individuals (e.g., at ERS or FNS) to post new articles, graphs, and reports to the website without programmer intervention, will be developed.

Subtasks:

- Build a tool to allow validated users to post content to the web site.
- Define the type of reports that should be presented.
- Develop a series of reports.
- Establish a procedure to validate data included in reports and to ensure that the reports are current.

USDA Costs:	\$25,188
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$25,188

Task 12 – Implement Initial Data Collection for Nine States

In this task, implement a round of data collection for all of the participating nine States. This will include all of the mechanisms that have been constructed to facilitate this process, including data entry, automatic uploading of data, and extractions from existing databases. The estimated budget includes a half-day training session at each of the nine State sites on the web-based data entry program³. It is assumed that there will be some “testing” of the final database by States and that some revisions will be made as a result of States’ comments. This initial data collection will serve to populate the database. Reports and articles can be generated based on these data. The costs are broken out by “initial” and “on-going” data collection activities, where on-going activities reflect the costs of undertaking the data collection activity on an annual basis.

Subtasks:

- Ensure that appropriate data collection mechanisms are in place.
- Develop training materials and conduct on-site half-day training sessions at each of the nine State sites.
- Implement data collection. [States and USDA]
- Conduct automatic uploads from existing databases and/or States.
- Manually enter any paper versions received from States.
- Clean and merge data.
- Produce reports and articles as desired.
- Make changes to reports, query tools, database structure as needed

³ We have budgeted the trainings as half-day on-site in-person sessions; however, it may be more cost-effective to produce a streaming video that can be accessed at any time or conduct training via teleconference instead.

	Initial	On-going
USDA Costs:	\$27,026	\$26,405
State Costs:	\$8,256	\$15,938
Total Task Cost:	\$35,282	\$42,343

Task 13 – Obtain OMB Clearance

In this task, an OMB package will be prepared and submitted authorizing the additional States to be contacted and queried for participation in the website data collection effort. The number of States to be added will depend on discussions with ERS and FNS. However, this step is necessary before additional States can be added.

Subtasks:

- Prepare a draft and final OMB package for USDA, including copies of data collection protocols.
- Make revisions to protocols as required.

USDA Costs:	\$6,742
State Costs:	\$0
Total Task Cost:	\$6,742

Task 14 – Prepare to Add Additional States

In this task, preparations will take place to add additional States to the website. Adding states will require that states be queried in much the same way as the initial nine. That is, States with the capability to provide their data electronically must be identified and States that do not have this capability will be targeted as potential users of the data entry application. For purposes of costing this initiative, this task includes developing a plan for adding states and finalizing a contact person within the remaining states. States contacted during Task 2 but not participating in the group of nine will be called to confirm the contact person; additional state contacts will be developed. USDA can make a decision at this point as to the number of states to phase in for the next round of data collection.

Subtasks:

- Developing a plan for the phased addition of states.
- Calling contacts developed in Task 2 to confirm appropriate contact person. [States and USDA]

- Developing additional contacts within all remaining states. [States and USDA]

USDA Costs:	\$8,051
State Costs:	\$3,336
Total Task Cost:	\$11,387