



# Collection of Race and Ethnicity Data by Visual Observation and Identification

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### FNS Document #

CACFP 11-2021, SFSP 07-2021

### Resource Type

Policy Memos

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[Policy memo](#) (230.80 KB)

**DATE:** May 17, 2021

**POLICY MEMO:** CACFP 11-2021, SFSP 07-2021

**SUBJECT:** Collection of Race and Ethnicity Data by Visual Observation and Identification in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program – Policy Rescission

**TO:**

Regional Directors	State Directors
Special Nutrition Programs	Child Nutrition Programs
All Regions	All States

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), and the Civil Rights Division (CRD), are issuing this memorandum to provide guidance to state agencies and program operators on removing visual observation and identification as an allowable practice in obtaining race and ethnicity data from Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) participants.

## Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for ensuring compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 among its federally assisted programs, including CACFP and SFSP. The collection of race and ethnicity data is consistent with the Office of Management and Budget guidance on the subject. These data are used to determine how effectively FNS programs are reaching potential eligible persons and beneficiaries, identify areas where additional outreach is needed, assist in the selection of locations for compliance reviews, and complete reports as required. These requirements are established in [7 CFR 15](#) and [FNS Instruction 113-1](#), Civil Rights Compliance and Enforcement – Nutrition Programs and Activities dated Nov. 8, 2005.

## Guidance

[FNS Instruction 113-1](#) requires recipients of federal financial assistance to ask all program applicants and participants to identify all racial and ethnic categories that apply. Program operators must ensure applicants and participants are made aware that failure to provide racial or ethnic identity information will not impact their eligibility.

[FNS Instruction 113-1](#), Appendix B section F titled Data Collection 2(b) and 3(b) also states, in reference to CACFP and SFSP respectively, “Visual identification may be used by institutions/sponsors to determine a beneficiary’s racial or ethnic category...” Upon further review, USDA determined the only program with a regulatory requirement implementing the [1997 OMB Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity](#), 60 Fed. Reg. 210, 58785 (Oct. 30, 1997) to collect race and ethnicity data via visual observation and identification is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

USDA has reviewed this policy and concluded that the use of visual observation and identification by CACFP institutions and facilities and SFSP sponsors is not an appropriate method for collecting race or ethnicity data in the CACFP and SFSP programs. The agency received reports that program participants do not want to have their race or ethnicity determined for them. Moreover, a third party’s observation of an individual’s appearance is not a reliable means to capture how a participant self-identifies their own racial or ethnic identity. Therefore, USDA has determined that visual observation and identification by CACFP institutions and facilities and SFSP sponsors is no longer an allowable practice for CACFP and SFSP program operators to use during the collection of race or ethnicity data.

USDA acknowledges the challenges this change may cause in the collection of demographic data. The preferred method remains self-identification and self-reporting. CACFP institutions and facilities and SFSP sponsors should continue explaining the importance of this data to participants as they encourage them to self-identify and self-report. However, there are alternative means by which CACFP institutions and facilities and SFSP sponsors can obtain race or ethnicity data in the CACFP and SFSP programs, such as utilizing data from other sources in which the respondent has self-identified race or ethnicity such as school databases.

The CRD will update [FNS Instruction 113-1](#) to remove references to the collection of racial and ethnic identity by visual identification in the CACFP and SFSP. To reflect this change in data collections, CNP will update CACFP and SFSP policy guidance.

State agencies are reminded to distribute this memorandum to program operators. Program operators should direct questions concerning this guidance to their state agency. State agencies with questions should contact the appropriate [FNS regional office](#). Additionally, state agencies are encouraged to provide ideas and best practices to the appropriate FNS regional Civil Rights officer or program liaison.

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