

Making Reinvestment Work

Joan Chase of the State of Alaska facilitated the meeting. The panel consisted of Debra McWilliams, Food Stamp Director for the State of Maryland; Alan Shannon, Payment Accuracy Coordinator for USDA FNS, Midwest Region; and Jody Cornwell from the Missouri Division of Family Services. They shared vital information and strategies, which they had employed to have successful reinvestment projects that improved payment accuracy.

Jody Cornwell presented Missouri's strategies for reinvestment. They included the importance of the front-line supervisor's role in ensuring payment accuracy, development of management-focused training to maintain or enhance staff self-esteem, listening and responding to staff with empathy, encouraging staff involvement, and providing staff support without removing staff responsibility.

Debra McWilliams from Maryland promoted a strategy to "stay out of reinvestment by keeping the error rate down." To do this, states need to have a broad spectrum of strategies that include use of data to track project outcomes, establishing a Payment Accuracy Analyst position, and developing a service improvement system that will identify problems and issues. These strategies will help states to monitor and track issues on an on-going basis.

The final speaker was Alan Shannon from FNS. He emphasized that reinvestment is a different kind of animal which we are not used to dealing with. Alan reiterated that if caseloads are too high, then reinvestment will have only a band-aid effect. States need to involve local and regional offices to get to the root of payment errors or else reinvestment projects won't have an impact. Federal regulations in 7 CFR Section 275.23(a)(11)(ii) and language in a state's settlement agreement specify the parameters for a state's use of reinvestment funds.