

Appendix B1
Case Study Interview Guide for WIC State Agency

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WIC Nutrition Services Administration (NSA) Cost Study A National Study

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Office of Research and Analysis

Case Study Interview Guide for WIC State Agency

State:

Respondent/Title/Organization:

Phone:

E-mail:

Interviewer:

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate as one of 14 case study State Agencies for the WIC Nutrition Services and Administration (NSA) Cost Study. As you are aware, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has contracted with Altarum Institute (Altarum) and RTI International to conduct a comprehensive study of WIC NSA costs at the State and local level. Altarum is a health and nutrition policy research and consulting institute. Our work focuses on helping to improve the health and nutrition status of children, families, and adults.

The last NSA cost study was conducted in 2000 and, since then, numerous program changes have occurred. FNS is interested in understanding the various ways in which NSA funds are utilized, the range of operations covered by NSA funds, and the impact of program changes on NSA grant funds.

The funding for and accounting of WIC NSA costs is complex. As you know, WIC State Agencies receive an annual base grant with allocations for food and nutrition services and administrative support. These WIC grants must support a range of required activities at the State Agency level as well as provide for direct service delivery to WIC participants.

The WIC NSA cost study design involves data collection from FNS 798 and 798-A reports and supporting documentation, a Web survey of State and local agencies, and this case study interview. We are conducting this interview to examine the 'how and why' factors that contribute to the costs associated with operating your WIC program. As such, our focus here will be more on understanding the dynamics of various program components and policies and their influence on costs, rather than on specific numbers.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

This interview will consist of a series of open-ended questions organized by various topics focused on how your WIC State Agency makes decisions around funding both State- and local-level services. The focus of this discussion is on your NSA grant, which includes federal funding formula allocations, Operational Adjustment funds, and reallocations; however, we may discuss other federal and State funding sources, and how these funds may impact your NSA expenditures and budgeting.

We realize that these topic areas may be best addressed by various staff members who may have expertise in the respective topics. We hope that by receiving this case study guide four weeks prior to this interview, you and your staff have had some time to gather information as necessary to respond to questions so that the actual interview time is spent directly on the question-answer dialogue.

The entire interview will likely take up to one hour (*note to Interviewer: adjust time based on size of State Agency*). We encourage you to include staff members in the interview according to their topic expertise.

Your answers will be considered private. Nothing said today will be identified back to you individually in any reports prepared for this study.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let's get started.

I. Budgeting and Planning for NSA Funds

***Purpose:** To identify the process, procedures, and key decision-making points for preparing annual WIC budgets and how funding priorities are determined.*

First, we would like to discuss the process by which you develop your annual WIC budget, the factors that go into how decisions are made to allocate funds between program functions, and how priorities are set for funding.

1. Can you please describe the process that was used by your agency to develop your WIC budget for FFY 2013? In particular, we are interested in:
 - (a) What is the step-by-step process used for developing the WIC budget and submitting for approval?
 - (b) How does the development of the WIC program budget fit into your [Health Department's/Tribal Organization/ District/Territorial] budget development?
 - (c) Who is responsible for preparing the budget? What level(s) of approvals is required?
 - (d) Does your detailed WIC budget require approval by the legislature or other governing body or is it part of an overall budget that must be approved without any specific detail?

We would now like to discuss how specific elements of your WIC budget are developed.

2. One of the key decisions that must be made is how to divide the WIC NSA funds between State-level operations and local program services. Please describe the process you use to determine how much of the NSA funding will support State-level functions as compared to local-level functions.
3. With regard to budgeting for State-level functions, do individual organizational sub-units or functions within WIC have their own budget or do you manage the State-level functions in aggregate without regard to sub-unit budgets?
 - (a) What key decisions, if any, did you have to make about how to allocate your NSA funds for FFY 2013? What factors contributed to these key decisions?
 - (b) Did any State-level activity or function require re-budgeting during FFY 2013?

[IF YES:] What function and why?

- (c) You indicated in your Web survey that you have an indirect cost rate of (XX). How is this rate determined? Has it changed over the past three years or remained about the same?

4. With regard to budgeting for local WIC services:
- (a) According to your response to the Web survey, you used [METHOD] for allocating funding to local services. Do you feel this method works well?

[IF NO:] What are the drawbacks?
 - (b) Has the percentage of funds allocated between State and local functions stayed about the same over the past three years or has it changed? If the percentage has changed, why was this change necessary?
 - (c) [IF DETAILED LOCAL BUDGETS ARE REQUIRED] According to the Web survey, your local agencies/programs are required to submit detailed budgets. Can local agencies spend across budget categories without approval or must they receive approval from your office through budget modifications or other approval methods?
 - (d) Do you cap local agency indirect cost rates?

[IF YES:] What methods do you use to determine the cap?

[IF NO:] Do you have any other methods to control local agency indirect costs?
 - (e) If local WIC agencies or local service providers are not meeting caseload levels or under-spending their budgets, do you make mid-year adjustments to their budgets?

[IF YES:] What process is used?

[IF NO:] Are budgets reduced or modified in the subsequent year?
 - (f) If local WIC agencies or local service providers are serving more participants than originally budgeted or over-spending their budgets, may they receive additional funds in that same fiscal year?

[IF YES:] What process is used?

[IF NO:] Are budgets increased or modified in the subsequent year?
 - (g) Do the majority of local agencies spend all of their allocated funds?

[IF NO:] What in your opinion are the primary reasons for not spending all the funds?
 - (h) Do you provide any equipment, materials or other services to local programs that are included in the State-level functions but used mostly by the local programs (e.g., equipment, supplies, computers, training, breast pumps)?

[IF YES:] How do you determine how much goes to each local program? (e.g., demand or need, process for requests and approval, formula allocation)

- (i) Do you use any NSA funds for contracted services, such as training, MIS support or development, evaluations, local monitoring?

[IF YES:] What types of functions are supported by contractors? Is this amount larger or smaller than prior years?

[IF YES:] Why?

II. Factors Influencing NSA Costs and Expenditures

Purpose: To examine in detail the various factors that influence how NSA funds are expended, how changes in federal fund availability may impact expenditures, and how program cost shifts impact expenditures.

Now we would like to move from budgeting to discuss actual costs of operating the WIC program and examining expenditures.

5. According to the web survey, in FFY 2013 you [UNDER-SPENT/OVERSPENT] your NSA grant by [XX%]. Were these [UNDER/OVER] expenditures attributable to State-level functions, local level functions or a combination of both?
 - (a) Was this level of [UNDER/OVER] expenditure typical or were there extenuating factors in FFY 2013 that contributed to this (e.g., vacancy rates, unexpended expenditures, cost increase or decrease)? When did you recognize these factors were occurring, and how did you handle the situation?
 - (b) According to FNS, you received [\$XX] in reallocation funds in 2013. How were these funds used? Did you receive them in time to maximize their use, or did they come at a time when budget and expenditure opportunities were limited?
 - (c) According to FNS, you received [\$XX] in Operational Adjustment funds in FFY 2013. How were these funds used?
6. In your opinion, what factors do you consider the most important in driving your overall program costs and expenditure levels (e.g., caseload fluctuation, increased personnel costs, layoffs, vacancy rates or furloughs, increased contribution of NSA funds to MIS or EBT)? How much control over these factors do you believe you have?
7. With regard to NSA costs, what measures, if any, have you taken over the past three years to control program costs or address any budget issues? How well do you feel these measures have worked? Have there been any negative impacts on your program's operations? If yes, please describe.

III. Other Funds and their Impact on NSA Expenditures

Purpose: To examine the extent to which funding from FNS for special projects, EBT, MIS, breastfeeding peer support, and infant formula rebates impact NSA budgets and expenditures.

Now we want to talk about how the availability of other funds has impacted your NSA costs.

8. According to FNS you received the following sources of funding in FFY 2013 [LIST FROM THE WEB SURVEY]. Were these funds adequate to meet your needs in these areas or did you have to supplement these funds with NSA funding?

[IF YES:] How did this supplementation impact your program activities normally funded through NSA funds?

9. According to the Web survey, you also had [XXX] funds from other sources (e.g., State funds, other program funds). Did the availability of these funds impact your use of NSA funds and program services? How so?
10. Do you anticipate ongoing support in future years from these other funding sources (both federal and non-federal) or do you feel that they will be limited or unavailable? How do you anticipate this will affect future decisions related to the allocation of NSA funds?

IV. Relationships with other Programs

Purpose: To examine how coordination and cooperation between WIC and other programs contribute to in-kind or other support for WIC activities.

For our last section, we would like to discuss how coordination with other programs impacts your use of NSA funds.

11. Are there any State-level programs with which you coordinate WIC services that impact your NSA expenditures (e.g., immunization programs, Maternal and Child Health, SNAP Education)?

[IF YES:] Please describe these relationships and how these programs impacted your NSA expenditures?

12. [ASK ONLY IF STATE AGENCY REPORTED ANY IN-KIND FUNDING OR SHARED STAFF] According to the Web survey, you reported in-kind support or shared staff with other programs. Please describe how this in-kind funding is determined or how costs are allocated for shared staffing.
13. To the best of your knowledge, do your local programs receive funds from either State-funded programs, local funds or other sources that help to support WIC program services?

[IF YES:] Do most or all of your local programs receive this support or only some?

14. If local programs receive additional support for WIC services, how do you account for this support when you budget local services? Are decisions about how to use these funds left up to local programs?

15. Do you ask local programs to account for in-kind or other local support?

[IF YES:] How is it reported?

That ends my formal interview questions. Is there anything that we haven't discussed about WIC NSA costs that you think is relevant and would like to share?

Thank you so much for spending the time with us to explain the factors and influences on your agency's budgeting processes.