

Request for Approval under the “FNS Fast Track Clearance for the Collection of Routine Customer Feedback” (OMB Control Number: 0584-0611)

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: WIC National Outreach Campaign – In-depth Interviews (IDIs) among Employees of Food Shopping Vendors

PURPOSE:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service’s mission is to increase food security and reduce hunger by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet and nutrition education in a way that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence. To this end, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is developing the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) National Outreach Campaign to increase awareness of the health and nutrition benefits associated with WIC participation, with the primary goal of increasing enrollment and client/participant retention, while reducing disparities in program access and delivery.

To meet these important objectives, FNS must understand the impact of the shopping experience on the mindsets of current WIC clients/participants and identify potential avenues to improve this audience’s shopping experiences. To help answer this question, the OMB-approved WIC shopper diaries conducted in late 2023 provided invaluable information about issues WIC participants face when redeeming WIC food benefits. This research also revealed that shopping vendors (i.e., individuals who work at grocery stores, independent stores, bodegas) play a significant role in shaping WIC participants’ food benefit redemption (e.g., shopping) experiences. For example, some vendors do not clearly label WIC approved items on store shelves. In addition, WIC participants can face challenges at checkout if the vendor’s computer system contradicts a WIC participant’s benefits package or if an employee does not understand the WIC program. Circumstances like these can make the WIC participant’s shopping trip both cumbersome and frustrating. These experiences may negatively impact a WIC participant’s likelihood to re-enroll in the program. Also, as our OMB-approved survey revealed word-of-mouth as a key driver for WIC applications, such in-store shopping frustrations could be reported to potential participants, discouraging future enrollment. Hence, to truly understand the WIC shopping journey, it is vital to capture an important, additional perspective—vendors.

In addition, WIC has not conducted recent research among shopping vendors, focusing on what they know about the program, how they implement the WIC program in their store, how they train store employees about WIC, or how they address WIC-related issues that may occur at checkout.

It is also important to know how shopping vendors would prefer to receive information from WIC State or local agencies, and what materials would be most useful to enhance employee training about WIC and make the participant’s shopping experiences as efficient as possible.

To meet these research needs, FNS intends to conduct a series of virtual in-depth interviews (IDIs) with various shopping vendor employees who work at stores that accept WIC. Specifically, this qualitative research task includes 36 IDIs, split across the following vendor audiences:

- 18 – Store Managers

- 18 – Cashiers and Customer Service staff

All interviews will be 45 minutes in length.¹ These sessions allow for gleaning perspectives from a variety of shopping vendor employees who interact with WIC participants. In addition, these IDIs will serve as a primary data collection method to inform what steps FNS can take to streamline processes with vendors and reduce shopping-related issues.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS:

In total, we intend to conduct 36 IDIs. In addition to the previously-noted mix of types of shopping vendor employees, respondents will be recruited to ensure a mix of geography, locality (e.g., urban, rural/small town), and store size (e.g., big-box chain stores, independent stores, neighborhood bodegas) to the extent possible. Individuals will be recruited via our professional recruitment partners, and all respondents will receive incentives for their time.

Recruitment

Individuals will be identified for potential participation utilizing a screener document (Attachment A-1) to identify the demographics and other key criteria of the potential participants. Professional recruiters will be used to identify potential participants using a database and will then follow up with the screener online and a short recruitment phone call. The use of the database does not impose an additional burden on the respondents.

Confirmation

After completing the screener, participants who qualify will be sent an interview confirmation form (Attachment B-1 or Attachment B-2) that outlines the purpose of the research, the fact that it is voluntary research, Privacy Act information, a public burden statement, the date and time of the virtual in-depth interview, incentive information, and log-in instructions.

TYPE OF COLLECTION: (Check one)

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Comment Card/Complaint Form | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Satisfaction Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Usability Testing (e.g., Website or Software) | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Discussion Group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>In-depth Interview (IDI)</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quick census or surveys | |

CERTIFICATION:

I certify the following to be true:

1. The collection is voluntary.
2. The collection is low-burden for respondents and low-cost for the Federal Government.
3. The collection is non-controversial and does not raise issues of concern to other federal agencies.
4. The results are not intended to be disseminated to the public.
5. Information gathered will not be used for the purpose of substantially informing influential policy decisions.

¹ The 45 minutes does not include time for set-up and login, as explained later in this cover memo.

6. The collection is targeted to the solicitation of opinions from respondents who have experience with the program or may have experience with the program in the future.

Name: Ebony James

To assist review, please provide answers to the following question:

Personally Identifiable Information:

1. Is personally identifiable information (PII) collected? Yes No
2. If Yes, will any information that is collected be included in records that are subject to the Privacy Act of 1974? Yes No
3. If Yes, has an up-to-date System of Records Notice (SORN) been published? Yes No

Sensitive Information:

1. Will sensitive information, such as demographic characteristics, be collected from respondents?
 Yes No
2. If yes, explain the necessity of such information to the programmatic objective(s)?

Individuals will be identified for potential participation utilizing a screener document (Attachment A-1) to identify the demographics of the potential participants. Demographic information allows the research to ensure that it is reflective of a wide range of vendor employees. That being said, the demographic information is not calculated nor held as a quota for participation.

In addition, PII (respondents' contact information) will only be obtained by the recruiters in order to schedule the IDIs and contact participants to remind them of the research session. This information will not be shared with the government nor the research team conducting the data collection and analysis. Finally, all respondent information will be anonymous and confidential, and no PII will be recorded or included in reporting.

This project does not meet the regulatory definition of research as defined under the Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations [45 CFR part 46.102(d)(f)]. Given the determination, further IRB review and approval of this project is not required (Attachment E-1).

Gifts or Payments:

Is an incentive (e.g., money or reimbursement of expenses, token of appreciation) provided to participants? Yes No

FNS will provide an incentive of a \$75 gift card for store managers and a \$75 gift card for cashiers to participate in the in-depth interviews. Incentives have been considered a standard practice in conducting qualitative research (see, for instance, the CDC General Guidelines), helping to maximize participation, manage recruitment hours, and reduce no-show rates. Note, this incentive is for 1 hour of the respondent's time, including 15 minutes for logging into the virtual, online platform. For these interviews, recruiters ask potential participants to ensure they

can participate in the discussions uninterrupted. Additionally, as participants will use either smartphones, tablets, or laptops to log in and participate, the incentive can be used to offset any expenses incurred by using these devices.

Finally, and most notably for these audiences, incentives are more likely to secure the participation of working professionals who meet the screening requirements, especially given the more complex nature of this recruit. The study employs highly restrictive criteria for participation: First, all participants are current employees in these very specific roles, a much more selective subset than a “general population” audience. Also, their store must currently accept the WIC program and the participant must have some interaction with the WIC program during their job. The more limited pool of current store managers requires a higher incentive than the cashiers or customer service staff. Additionally, the research encourages respondents with a mix of demographics to augment learning from the interviews. Utilizing these incentive rates will make recruitment more effective and thus save government money on overall research recruitment costs. Lower incentive rates would foster fewer recruited participants and lower show rates, jeopardizing FNS’ ability to conduct research among these important audiences.

BURDEN HOURS

Table 1. Burden Hours Calculations

Category of Respondent	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden Hours
Screener (Attachment A-1)			
Shopping Vendor Employees (respondents)	72	.167 hrs	12.0 hrs
Shopping Vendor Employees (non-respondents)	1368	.083 hrs	114.0 hrs
In-depth Interviews			
Shopping Vendor Employees (confirmations) (Attachments B-1, B-2)	36	.05 hrs	1.8 hrs
Shopping Vendor Employees (consent) (Attachment C-1, C-2)	36	.05 hrs	1.8 hrs
Shopping Vendor Employees (interview respondents) (Attachment D-1)	36	1.0 hr*	36.0 hrs
Individuals (non-respondents)	36	.05 hrs	1.8 hrs
Totals	1440		167.4 hrs

*NOTE: The data collection will take 45 minutes, but respondents will need an additional 15 minutes for the technology check and to ensure they can log into the online interface correctly.

A total of 1440 individuals will be contacted in order to conduct research among 36 shopping vendor employees. The 1368 screener non-respondents are vendor employees who choose not to complete the full screener or who do not qualify for the interviews. The remaining 72 individuals will be confirmed for the interviews (i.e., meet recruitment criteria). Of the 72 individuals confirmed for the interviews, we anticipate 36 will be unable to participate. We will conduct the interviews among the remaining 36 shopping vendor employees.

The estimate of respondent cost is based on the burden estimates and utilizes the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2023 National Occupational and Wage Statistics, All Occupations (00-0000) (http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm). The hourly mean wage for functions performed by respondents across these professional categories is listed in Table 2, with a weighted average (based on the number of interviews to be conducted among each category) calculated to be \$38.48/hour.

Table 2. Mean Hourly Wage by Category

Professional Category	# of Interviews	Mean Hourly Wage ²
Store Managers	18	\$62.18
Cashiers	18	\$14.77
Mean Hourly Wage – Weighted Average		\$38.48

² http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm

With a burden of 167.4 hours at \$38.48 per hour, the base annual respondent cost is estimated at \$6,441.55. An additional 33% of the estimated base annual respondent cost must be added to represent fully loaded wages, equaling \$2,125.71. Thus, the total respondent cost is \$8,567.26.

FEDERAL COST:

It is estimated that Federal employees will spend approximately 48 hours overseeing this collection in 2024 with an average of a GS-14, step 1 wage. Using the hourly wage rate of \$66.79 for a GS-14, step 1, Federal employee from the 2024 Washington, DC, locality pay table, the estimated costs equal \$3,205.92 plus \$1,057.95 in fringe benefits for a total of \$4,263.87.

Contractor costs to the Federal Government will total \$104,200.00 over the course of this collection based on fully loaded rates. When combining the Federal employee and contractor costs, the total annual cost to the Federal Government for this information collection is estimated at \$108,463.87.

If you are conducting a focus group, survey, or plan to employ statistical methods, please provide answers to the following questions:

The selection of your targeted respondents

1. Do you have a customer list or something similar that defines the universe of potential respondents, and do you have a sampling plan for selecting from this universe?

 Yes No
2. If the answer is yes, please provide a description of both below (or attach the sampling plan)? If the answer is no, please provide a description of how you plan to identify your potential group of respondents and how you will select them?

We will be working with professional recruiting partners who have proprietary “opt-in” databases of potential research participants. These databases contain general professional information for each individual in their database. Only individuals whose professional profiles fall within the project’s general parameters will receive an online screener and a short recruitment phone call to determine if they meet all project criteria. All individuals must meet the criteria listed in the screening questionnaire (Attachment A-1) and provide consent (Attachment C-1, C-2) to participate before any research can take place.

Administration of the Instrument

1. How will you collect the information? (Check all that apply)
 Web-based or other forms of Social Media
 Telephone
 In-person
 Mail
 Other, Explain
2. Will interviewers or facilitators be used? Yes No

Trained interviewers will facilitate the discussions as described in the In-Depth Interview Guide (Attachments D-1, D-2).

Attachments:

A-1 Screener - Store Manager / Cashier or Customer Service staff IDIs

B-1 Confirmation Form – Store Managers

B-2 Confirmation Form – Cashiers/Customer Service

C-1 Consent Form – Store Managers

C-2 Consent Form – Cashiers/Customer Service

D-1 Store Manager IDI Guide

D-2 Cashier/Customer Service staff IDI Guide

E-1 IRB Determination Notice – Shopping Vendors