

MM/DD/YYYY

Appendix B-1. WIC State/Local Agency Directors of Case Study Agencies Discussion Guide

Thank you for joining today. My name is [name], and I'm a researcher at Westat. I'm joined today by my colleague [notetaker's name], who will be taking notes during today's discussion.

Westat is conducting the *WIC Tribal Organizations and U.S. Territories* study on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Through this study, FNS aims to learn more about variations in operations between Tribal Organizations, U.S. territories, and geographic States. The results of the study may inform revisions and enhancements to WIC policies, operations, and services across agencies.

This study aims to include all 32 Tribal Organizations and 5 U.S. territories that operate WIC State agencies, the WIC directors of geographic State agencies that share geography with a Tribal Organization, and the directors of 5 Tribally operated local agencies. The purpose of this interview is to learn about how your agency administers and implements WIC, your program's strengths and challenges, and your recommendations for Federal program or policy changes to improve WIC for your participants.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If you consent, a redacted transcript will be shared with FNS for its internal use and will not be shared publicly. We will remove your name, FNS Region, name of your Tribal Organization or U.S. territory, and other direct identifiers from the transcript. The information collected during site visits will be summarized in aggregate across all agencies that participate. Names and other direct identifiers will not be used with any direct quotes included in the final report or other dissemination materials. However, the name of your WIC agency may be used in the final report or dissemination materials (for example, to highlight promising practices). Because of the small number of staff operating WIC in these agencies, we cannot guarantee the information you share will be completely anonymous.

Participation in this study is voluntary and involves minimal risk, though you may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You may refuse to answer any question, choose to make a comment off the record, or stop the interview at any time without penalty to you or your program.

We previously emailed the informed consent form, which included more information about the risks, the benefits, and how your data will be used and protected. Do you have any questions about this form or the information I shared today?

[Interviewer note: Answer any questions; provide hardcopy of informed consent form if participant requests.]

Great, I will keep our conversation to 90 minutes, until [time]. Does that still work for you?

Finally, we would like to record today's interview to ensure we accurately capture the information you share. The recording will not be shared with FNS or anyone outside the study team. Do we have your consent to record?

[Interviewer note: Pause for consent; start the recording.]

Thank you. Now that I have started the recording, for the record, can I ask you to reconfirm that you consent to participating in this interview and to having it audio recorded?

[Interviewer note: Pause for consent.]

[Interviewer reminders:

- › *Allow time for introductions (for director/staff and yourself).*
- › *Give space for storytelling.*
- › *Facilitate a conversation that feels natural rather than a checklist of questions.*
- › *Avoid speaking over the person, cutting them off too soon, or interrupting them.*
- › *Allow time for the director/staff to reflect and process the question after asking.*
- › *Review the agency's State Plan in advance to assist with tailoring this guide.]*

Public Burden Statement

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service in learning about variations in WIC operations between Tribal Organizations, U.S. territories, and geographic States. FNS will use the information to inform program or policy changes that may reduce operational barriers and enhance services for WIC participants. According to the Paperwork

Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-XXX. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1.5 hours (90 minutes).

Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the following address: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Evidence, Analysis, and Regulatory Affairs Office, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314, ATTN: PRA (0584-XXXX). Do not return the completed form to this address.

Introduction

1. First, could you share a bit about how long you have worked for WIC and what led you to your current role with WIC?

[Probes: years with WIC in general, years in current role]

2. **[Local agency directors only]** Before I ask questions about WIC services, it would help to have a bit of context about the area and participants you serve. Can you tell me how your local agency defines its service area?

[Probes: individuals residing on Tribal lands or within the Tribal jurisdiction, individuals residing on the reservation, specific counties, specific ZIP Codes]

Administering WIC **[State Level Only]**

We reviewed your WIC State Plan to learn all we could in advance. I'd love to learn a little bit more from you to help me understand how WIC is staffed and funded.

3. Please tell me how your WIC team at your agency is structured.

[Probe: different types of staff]

- a. When there is a vacancy on your team, where do you usually look for qualified candidates to fill those positions?

4. To what extent does the current staffing level meet your agency's needs for administering WIC?

[Interviewer note: With the next two questions, we're asking first about openings for existing positions on their team (i.e., for which they have funding and approval to hire) and then about any additional new positions they'd want to create.]

- a. **[If insufficient staff]** Are there existing staff positions you need to fill right now? If yes, please describe.

[Probes: nutritionists, registered dietitians, nurses, lactation counselors, others]

5. If you had the ability and resources to create additional new positions, what other types of staff would you add to your team to administer WIC?

6. Do any staff at your agency who administer the program also provide direct services to WIC participants?

- a. **[If yes]** What kinds of direct services?

[Probe: nutrition assessment, breastfeeding support, etc.]

7. How many CPAs currently work for your agency?

[Interviewer note: CPA = competent professional authority. After hearing the response, confirm the number of full-time equivalents, or FTEs.]

8. **[Tribal directors only]** Before we move to the next section, I have a specific question about income eligibility documentation in your State agency. Your State Plan indicates that you **[do/do not]** allow the alternate income option for assessing income eligibility for Native American applicants. Did I capture that correctly?

[Interviewer note: See State Plan FAVIII Question A5f to determine whether the State agency uses this option. For further information about the alternative income option for Native American applicants see 7 CFR 246.7(d)(2)(viii).]

- a. **[If they allow it]** Is this option used for the majority of Tribal applicants?
- b. **[If they do not allow it]** What do you see as the barriers to implementing the alternate income option?

WIC Expenses and Funding

Next, I want to ask about your program costs, cost sharing, and grants.

9. What are the main factors contributing to the overall costs of operating your WIC program?

[Probes: staffing, system costs (management information system, electronic benefits transfer system), modernization efforts, outreach, indirect cost rates]

- a. **[If they list multiple factors]** Which of these factors are most challenging to manage within your current budget?

[Remaining questions in this section are only for WIC directors of State-level agencies]

10. Do you believe your current NSA grant is sufficient to meet your program's needs? Why or why not?

11. What are the key factors influencing your agency's overall food costs?

[Probes: vendor pricing, food availability, shipping costs for U.S. territories, inflation, package composition]

12. Has your agency implemented any cost-saving strategies over the past few years? If yes, please describe.

13. How, if at all, does the cost of food in your **[Tribal Organization/U.S. territory]** influence what's included in your approved product list?

- a. Do you require least expensive brand to reduce food costs?

[Interviewer note: Manufacturers often ask to have their products approved as eligible for purchase with WIC, but State agencies may choose not to authorize certain foods if the cost is too high (for example, not authorizing organic milk).]

- b. And how, if at all, does the availability of food influence what's included in your approved product list?

[Interviewer note: what we are getting at here is that agencies in remote areas and the U.S. territories may make choices based on which foods are readily and consistently available for purchase in their area.]

- 14. Please tell me about any WIC costs your agency shares with other WIC agencies.

- a. *[If they share costs]* What have been the benefits and drawbacks of sharing costs with other agencies?
- b. *[If they do not share costs]* Do you have any interest in sharing costs with other WIC agencies? Why or why not?

- 15. How often, if at all, does your WIC agency apply for grants or other funding opportunities from FNS?

[Interviewer note: In some responses, you may hear the term NOFO, which means "notice of funding opportunity."]

- 16. When you review a potential FNS funding opportunity, how do you decide whether to apply?

[Probe: reporting requirements, time period, amount of funding, flexibility of funding, process to obtain leadership approval to apply]

- a. What might deter you from applying?
- b. Similarly, what might encourage you to apply?

- 17. What support, if any, would you like to receive in applying for FNS funding going forward?

[Probes: raising awareness of available funding options, applying for funding, complying with funding requirements]

Improving Data for the WIC Eligibility and Coverage Rates Reports [State-Level Tribal Organization Virtual Interviews Only]

*[Interviewer note: These questions are asked during the interview of State Tribal Organization directors participating in **virtual** interviews; State Tribal Organization directors of site visit agencies are asked these questions during the planning calls. Applicable responses will be pre-populated for the questions answered in the pre-planning call.]]*

[Interviewer note: Complete table 1 based on the responses to the questions that follow the table. Do not directly ask the table 1 questions in the interview.]

I would like to learn more about the community members you serve. FNS will use the information from the following questions to improve data gathered for the FNS annual WIC Eligibility and Coverage Rates report. With these questions, we would like your input on how to assess the program's reach in [Tribal Organization] and whether that kind of information would be useful to you.

Table 1. Interviewer checklist (to be completed as participants respond to the discussion questions that follow)

Category	Response
Does the Tribal Organization limit WIC eligibility to individuals residing on or near Tribal lands?	☐ Yes ☐ No
What programs confer automatic income eligibility? (Note: Do not include Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, which confer adjunctive income eligibility.)	☐ List here: ☐ None
Does the Tribal Organization have MOUs with other WIC State agencies?	☐ Yes, explain what the MOU covers: ☐ No

MOU = memorandum of understanding; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

18. How does your agency define its service area?

[Probes: individuals residing on Tribal lands or within the Tribal jurisdiction, individuals residing on the reservation, specific counties, specific ZIP Codes]

a. Does your service area align with the boundaries of your [Tribal lands/reservation]?

b. Would you be able to share a map of your service area?

19. From your State Plan, I understand that in addition to Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, individuals can use proof of participation in the following programs to prove automatic income eligibility for WIC: [list programs from State Plan FAV III Question A4d]. Did I capture that correctly?

20. If someone isn't eligible to apply for WIC through your agency due to the established service area but could be eligible through a nearby WIC program, what do you tell them?

[If needed, give this example: A person might not be eligible for WIC through the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians but could be directed to Mississippi WIC.]

21. To what extent are you able to reach everyone who is eligible for WIC?

22. Do you gather information to help understand the extent to which you are reaching potentially eligible women, infants, and children?

[If yes]

a. What data do you use? How do you use it?

[Probes: Tribal records, IHS records, birth records]

i. Would you be able to share these data with FNS or its research contractor for a future WIC eligibility estimates study?

ii. What concerns do you have about sharing the data? Would any concerns be alleviated by sharing only aggregate-level data versus individual data (for example, number of children born versus a record for each child)?

23. We have heard that some State agencies establish memoranda of understanding with other WIC State or local agencies. Does [Tribal Organization] currently have an MOU with another State agency?

[If yes]

a. With which State agency(ies)? With which local agency(ies)?

What is the purpose or intended goal of this/these MOU(s)?

[Probes: to provide co-scheduled, overlapping, gap-reduction, or otherwise collaborative services]

- b. What is listed in the MOU for each agency's target number of individuals?
- c. What data did you use to establish the goals or limits stated in the MOU?
- d. How often do you review the data and revise the goals?
- e. How frequently do you renegotiate the MOU? Why would you renegotiate?

[Probe for time limits, population shifts]

- f. Do you have any other informal agreements with other State or local agencies that address whom you will serve or how you will work together?

24. The WIC Eligibility and Program Reach report currently includes several measures of how well WIC programs reach eligible individuals in geographic states: coverage rate (percentage of the total eligible population that receives WIC benefits), eligibility rate (percentage of the total population in each participant category estimated to be eligible for WIC), and counts of participation. As FNS works to create measures of program reach specific to WIC Tribal Organizations, which of these, or other, measures would be meaningful to you?

25. What suggestions do you have to help us think through how to develop program reach measures for [Tribal Organization]?

[Probes: data to use, specifics about your WIC population, overlap with other WIC State agencies]

[Interviewer note: Please show the respondent the following map (figure 1) and ask the next question.]

26. FNS's current WIC Eligibility and Program Reach report includes maps that display estimates for each geographic State agency. If we develop an appropriate reach metric for [Tribal Organization], would you like to see [Tribal Organization] included on a map in the report?

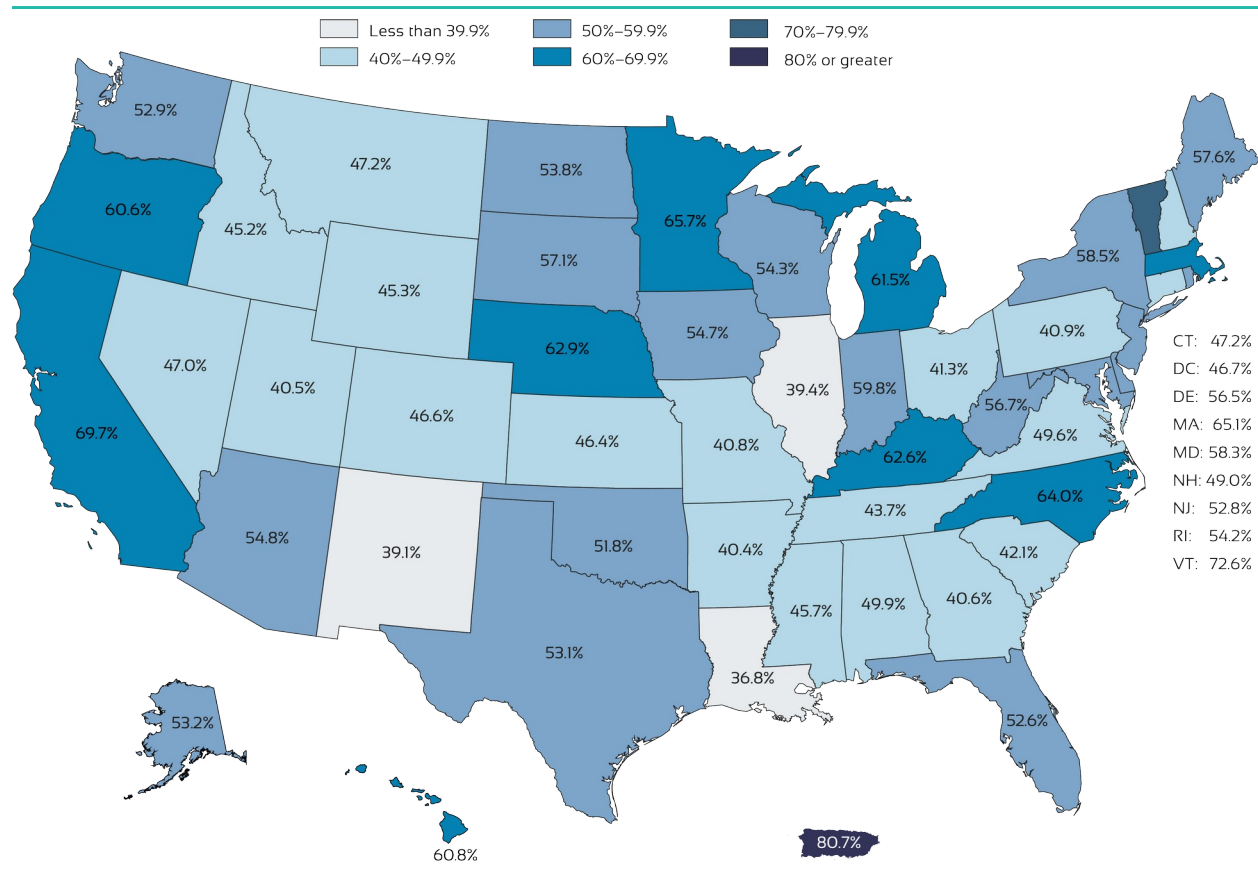
- a. [If no] That's perfectly reasonable. To help me understand, could you share your concerns about being included on a map?

[If yes]

- b. How would you like to see [Tribal Organization] represented on the map?
- c. Are there any other graphics or ways that you'd like to see [Tribal Organization]'s reach metrics represented? If yes, please describe.

- d. Do you have examples of maps that have done a good job of representing [Tribal Organization]?

Figure 1. WIC coverage rate for total eligible individuals by State: Calendar year 2022



WIC Service Delivery

I'd like to shift now to learn from you about the WIC services provided to participants, from general appointments to nutrition education to referrals and tailoring food packages.

27. [If we don't know number of clinics] I tried to look up the total number of clinics in [name of Tribal Organization/U.S. territory] but could not find it. Can you tell me how many clinics there are?
28. How many WIC clinics are co-located with other programs, such as maternal and child health, dental, or other services?

[Interviewer note: An estimate is fine if they do not know exactly.]

29. **[For agencies with more than one clinic]** If a clinic does not provide services to the applicant (e.g., if the applicant resides in another clinic's service area), is the individual referred to another local WIC clinic?
30. Across all clinics, what types of appointments—in person, phone call, or video call—are offered to participants?
- a. **[If applicable]** How have your participants responded to the option of **[phone/video]** appointments?
 - b. **[If agency offers multiple modes]** Which mode of appointment do participants request most?

31. How would you describe the typical mix of staff positions at one of your clinics?

[Probes: clinic director/manager, administrative staff, frontline providers]

- a. How common is it for clinic managers to provide direct services to participants?
- b. Which staff positions do clinics most need to fill?
- c. What would make it easier to recruit and retain WIC staff?

[Interviewer note: Respondents will likely speak about salary levels; if there's time, try to explore what else might make it easier.]

32. Before I ask about specific types of WIC services, I've been thinking about how every community has different customs or practices related to caring for pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and young children. For instance, in some communities, the extended family is involved in caring for infants and postpartum mothers, and they may attend WIC appointments. Breastfeeding customs can vary across communities and influence the kinds of support women want. In what ways do you think current customs or practices in your community align with the practices that WIC encourages?

[Probes: infant and young child feeding practices, breastfeeding]

- a. In what ways are community customs or practices *not* well aligned with the practices encouraged by WIC?
 - i. What flexibility would you like to see in WIC policies or procedures to help the program better align with these practices in your communities?

33. **[Local agency directors]** I'd like to talk for a few minutes about nutrition education. How is nutrition education typically provided to participants?

[Probe: mode - in person, online LMS, other; one-on-one versus group sessions]

34. [State agency directors] I'd like to talk for a few minutes about nutrition education. I saw in your State plan that your agency allows the following nutrition education delivery methods: [State Plan FA IV Question A3c]. Did I capture that accurately?
- a. Is nutrition education typically provided one-on-one or in group sessions?
35. [If they have more than 1 clinic] How, if at all, does nutrition education vary across clinics?
- [Probes: topics covered; mode - video versus phone versus in person; staffing; technology]*
- a. What are the reasons for that variation?
- [Probe: staffing, technology]*
36. Is the nutrition education provided by local agency staff, via contractors, or arrangements with other agencies?
- a. [If agency staff AND contractors] Are there differences in nutrition education when it's provided by local agency staff versus a contractor? If yes, what are the differences?
37. Overall, what do you see as the strengths of the nutrition education services provided?
38. And what do you see as the challenges to providing nutrition education to your WIC participants?
- a. [For any challenges] What solutions have you found?
39. Switching now to think about how staff refer WIC participants to other services, what do you think works well about the referral process?
- a. And what do you see as the challenges to referring WIC participants to other services?
- [Probes: staffing, technology]*
- i. [For any challenges] What solutions have you found?
40. [Tribal directors, when WIC is under IHS] How are non-IHS patients referred to WIC?
41. [Tribal directors, when WIC is *not* under IHS] How do IHS providers refer patients to WIC?
- [Probe: Can they make an electronic referral from their IHS system to the WIC system?]*

42. [If agency has multiple clinics] I'm also curious to hear about any differences you see across clinics in terms of how they refer clients for other services during appointments.

a. What are the reasons for those differences?

[Probes: client factors, clinic factors, challenges, and facilitators]

43. Shifting again, when you think about the WIC food packages, which were updated in 2024, how well do they align with the local food preferences and customs of your participants?

a. In what ways do they not align with your participants' preferences and customs?

b. [State directors only] How did your agency decide which items from the 2024 food package updates to include on the authorized product list to meet participants' needs?

[Probe: food categories where there is a lot of tailoring, such as dairy and whole grains]

c. What changes would make the food packages more useful for your participants, and why?

Breastfeeding Promotion and Support Services

44. Please tell me about the different kinds of breastfeeding services your agency provides.

a. Which types of staff provide those services to WIC participants?

[Probes: designated breastfeeding experts (DBEs), international board certified lactation consultants (IBCLCs), peer counselors, nutrition staff, lactation counselors, registered dietitians (RDs), paraprofessionals, others]

b. How are those services provided?

[Probes: in person; by video, phone, or text; one-on-one versus group sessions]

c. [If agency has more than 1 clinic] Does every clinic provide the same breastfeeding supports? Why or why not?

d. Thinking about all the breastfeeding supports provided to your participants, what are the biggest challenges to providing those services?

i. Have you found any strategies to help address those challenges? If yes, please describe them.

- e. Again, thinking about all the breastfeeding services provided, what is working well?
- 45. [If agency doesn't mention a breastfeeding peer counseling (BFPC) program] Does your agency operate a breastfeeding peer counseling program?
- 46. [If agency has a BFPC program] How does the peer counseling program work across [the Tribal Organization/U.S. territory]?
 - a. Who coordinates your peer counseling program?

[Probe: State-, local-, or clinic-level staff]

 - i. Is coordinating the peer counseling program their sole focus or just one of their responsibilities?
 - b. What are the strengths of your peer counseling program?
 - c. What challenges do you face in maintaining your peer counseling program?

[Probes: number or ratios of BFPCs, engaging/training new peer counselors, monitoring]

 - i. What strategies have you found to overcome those challenges?
 - d. What additional resources might help support your peer counseling program?
- 47. [If agency does not have a BFPC program] Would you consider applying for WIC breastfeeding peer counseling funding to establish a program in the future? Why or why not?

WIC Retailers [State Level Only]

Finally, I'd like to learn more about the retailers that serve WIC participants in your communities.

[Interviewer note: Review the following sections of the State Plan prior to the interview: FA1 B2a: Delegation of Vendor Training; FA1 A2a: Vendor Application Periods; FA1 A3a: Vendor Selection and Authorization; FA1 G1: Coordinator with SNAP]

- 48. [If unknown] How many WIC-authorized retailers operate across [Tribal Organization/U.S. territory]?
- 49. How do you decide how many retailers to authorize in a given year?

[Interviewer note: we learned from introductory calls that this won't be applicable to all agencies. For instance, one territory said they authorize everyone and some Tribal Organizations said this decision is up to the Geo State they share geography with.]

50. In your opinion, how well do the available WIC-authorized retailers meet the needs of your participants?
- [Probes: accessibility, quality and quantity of items, variety of items, traditional or cultural foods]*
51. What are the different ways that participants can identify WIC-approved foods in the store?
- [Probes: WIC shopping app, shelf tags, food list].*
- a. For retailers authorized by multiple WIC agencies, how do participants know which food items are approved for purchase by their affiliated program?
- [Interviewer note: here we're asking about retailers that may be authorized by WIC agencies from both a geographic State and State-level Tribal Organization they share geography with.]*
52. **[If agency checked any optional vendor selection criteria in State Plan FAI Question A3a]** Beyond the Federal minimum requirements, I see your agency require retailers to **[insert requirements from State Plan FAI Question A3a]**. What was the reason the agency decided to add that requirement?
53. What challenges do retailers face in meeting the WIC requirements?
- [Probes: providing supplemental foods; minimum stocking requirements]*
- [Note to interviewer: This question applies to both FNS and State agency-level policy.]*
- a. Are there particular types of retailers that struggle most? If yes, please describe.
- b. How have you been able to work with them to address those challenges?
54. What are the challenges you face in retaining existing retailers?
55. What policy flexibilities might help authorize new WIC retailers and retain current retailers in your communities?
- [Interviewer note: FNS, State, and local policies are included]*
56. What types of WIC-approved food items are the easiest for retailers to keep in stock? Why do you think that is?
- a. What types are the hardest, and why?
57. **[If unknown from State Plan]** Do any of your authorized retailers offer alternative shopping options for participants?
- [Probes: online ordering with delivery or curbside pickup, self-checkout]*

- a. [If yes] How easy or difficult has it been for retailers to offer these alternative shopping options?

Closing

- 58. [State agency directors only if we did not receive food list in advance] I have a food list from [year] on file. Is that the most recent food list available? If not, could you please email me the latest food list?
- 59. Before we close, please tell me about any other WIC policy or procedure changes that would help participants in [Tribal Organization/U.S. territory].
 - a. Are there any other changes that would help your staff administer the program?

[Interviewer: We welcome responses about potential changes at the local, State, and Federal levels.]

- 60. [Local agency only] Finally, how would you describe the relationship you have with [geographic State that lists the ITO as a local agency in the LAD]?
[Probe: frequency and nature of interaction (i.e., positive or negative)]
 - a. In your opinion, how could State agency staff better collaborate with your local agency?
- 61. Thank you for your time. You have taught me so much. Is there anything else you would like me to understand about your communities or your WIC program?