

MM/DD/YYYY

Appendix B-2. WIC Directors in Geographic States 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 efforts to enhance WIC program operations and services for WIC agencies and participants.

This study aims to include all 32 Tribal Organizations and 5 U.S. territories that operate WIC State agencies, the WIC directors of approximately 15 geographic State agencies that share geography with a Tribal Organization, and the local agency directors of 5 Tribally operated local agencies. The purpose of this interview is to learn about how your agency administers and implements WIC, your relationship with bordering State-level Tribal Organizations administering WIC, and your recommendations for Federal program or policy changes to improve WIC.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. A transcript will be shared with FNS for its restricted use. We will remove your name, FNS Region, agency, and other direct identifiers from the transcript. Your name will not be used in 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 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 WIC program.

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

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

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.]

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 hour (60 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 what led you to your current role with WIC?

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

Administering WIC

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.

2. Please tell me a little about how your WIC team is structured at the State agency.

[Interviewer note: For context, review State Plan FA IV A1 in advance of the interview. We don't need to know about every individual, just the different teams collaborating to administer WIC.]

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

[If insufficient staff]

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

- a. Are there existing staff positions you need to fill right now? If yes, please explain.

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

- b. 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?

4. *[If applicable, per State Plan FA IV Question A2]* I learned from your State plan that some of your State agency staff also provide direct services to participants. What kinds of direct services do they provide?

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

5. Your latest WIC State Plan indicated your agency oversees *[NUMBER from State Plan FA IV Question B1]* local agencies. How many of those local agencies are operated by a Tribal Organization?

- a. How many total clinics do you oversee?

WIC Expenses and Funding

Next, I want to ask about program costs and expenses, WIC Nutrition Services and Administration (NSA) funding, and other grants.

6. 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 list multiple factors]** Which of these factors are most challenging to manage within your current budget?

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

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

[Probes: vendor pricing, food availability, inflation, package composition]

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

10. How, if at all, does the cost of food in your State 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.]

11. 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?

Working With Local WIC Agencies Operated by a Tribal Organization [if Agency Oversees Tribally Operating Local Agencies]

12. What are the different entities that administer the Tribally operated local agencies?

[Probe: Indian Health Service [IHS], Tribal government operates WIC directly, Tribal agency or organization, other]

13. When you think about the Tribally operated local WIC agencies that you contract with, what do you see as their strengths?

14. How would you describe your State agency's relationship with the Tribally operated local agencies you oversee?

[Probe: frequency of interaction and nature of interaction (i.e., positive/negative)]

15. How often do you receive requests for technical assistance or other support from the Tribally operated local agencies?

- a. What assistance or support do they request most often?

[Probes if needed: caseload management, nutrition education, breastfeeding topics, budgeting, certification questions, applying for grants, food lists and food package related issues]

- b. Which requests, if any, are challenging for your staff to provide?

16. For your State-level WIC team, is there any staff training specific to working with the Tribally operated local agencies?

[If yes]

- a. What does that training entail?

- b. Who developed the training?

[Probe to understand whether the Tribal agencies were involved]

- c. What other trainings on working with Tribally operated local agencies would be useful for your staff?

[If no training]

- d. What trainings would be useful for your staff on working with Tribally operated local agencies?

17. When a potential participant lives in an area served by both a Tribal and non-Tribal WIC agency, do specific policies dictate where they must apply? If yes, please explain.

- a. Can non-Tribal local agencies work with participants who are from Tribal communities?
 - i. **[If yes]** What training do those local staff receive on working with Tribal participants or being responsive to their culture?

WIC Service Delivery

I'd like to shift now to learn from you about the WIC services provided to participants. This will help us understand how the experiences between Tribal Organizations that operate as State agencies and geographic States can differ even when they share a border.

- 18. How common is it for WIC clinics in your State to be co-located with other programs, such as maternal and child health, dental, or other services?
- 19. Across all clinics, what types of appointments—in person, phone call, or video call—are offered to participants?
 - a. **[If phone/video offered]** Does the agency have guidance for staff on the types of appointments they are allowed to conduct via **[phone/video]**? If yes, please explain.
- 20. I'd like to talk for a moment specifically about nutrition education. I saw in your State plan that your agency allows the following nutrition education delivery methods: **[State Plan FA II Question A3c]**. Did I capture that accurately?
 - a. **[If State Plan FA II Question A3c= "online/internet" or "other"]** Tell me more about what **["online/internet" and/or "other"]** nutrition education looks like.
- 21. Overall, what do you see as the strengths of the nutrition education services provided?
- 22. 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?
- 23. Thinking about the 2024 food package updates, how did your agency decide which items to include on the authorized product list to meet participants' needs?
[Probe, if needed: for instance, how did you decide which whole grain options to allow?]

Breastfeeding Promotion and Support Services

24. Please tell me about the different kinds of breastfeeding services your State provides to participants.
- 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, others]
 - b. How are those services provided?
[Probes: in person; by video, phone, text; one-on-one vs. group sessions]
 - c. 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 so, please describe them.
 - d. Again, thinking about all the breastfeeding services provided, what is working well?
25. *[If they don't mention a breastfeeding peer counseling (BFPC) program]* Does your agency operate a breastfeeding peer counseling (BFPC) program?
26. *[If agency has a BFPC program]* How does the peer counseling program work in your State?
- a. Who coordinates the program overall?
[Probe: State or local 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?
27. *[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

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

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

28. In your opinion, how well do the available WIC-authorized retailers meet the needs of your participants?

[Probes: variation by urbanicity; accessibility, quality, quantity, variety of items]

29. How do you decide how many retailers to authorize in a given year?

30. 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.]

31. Are there any stocking requirements for retailers beyond the Federal minimum? If yes, please describe.

32. What challenges do retailers face in meeting the WIC requirements?

[Probes: providing supplemental foods; minimum stocking requirements]

[Interviewer note: This question applies to both FNS and SA policy.]

- a. Are there particular types of retailers that struggle most? If yes, please describe.

- b. How have you been able to work with retailers to address those challenges?

33. What are the challenges you face in retaining retailers?

34. 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]

35. **[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

36. **[If we did not receive the 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?

37. Before we close, please tell me about any other WIC policy or procedure changes that would help participants in your State.

- a. And are there any other changes that would help your staff administer the program?

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

38. Thank you for your time; you have taught me so much. Is there anything else you would like me to understand about your WIC program or the Tribal Organizations you border?