



# WIC SPECIAL PROJECT

## INNOVATION GRANT



**The Council  
of State  
Governments**



**[WEB.CSG.ORG/WIC](http://WEB.CSG.ORG/WIC)**

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The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides nutritious supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education to low-income, nutritionally at risk pregnant and postpartum women, as well as infants and children up to age five.

Since its inception as a pilot program in the 1970s, WIC has blossomed into one of the most important and sweeping federal assistance programs, serving more than a quarter of all pregnant women and nearly half of all infants in the U.S. (Johnson et al., 2015).

WIC is widely regarded as both a cost-effective and efficacious component of the U.S. social safety net. Moreover, numerous studies have demonstrated that WIC participants see marked improvements across an array of important outcomes, such as birth weight, dietary intake and quality, infant mortality, and other related measures. Not only does WIC improve health-related outcomes, WIC also augments poverty alleviation. In 2018, WIC lifted 302,000 people out of poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

### Barriers to Participation

While WIC undoubtedly plays an instrumental role in improving the health and nutrition of low-income mothers and children, barriers to participation persist that leave many eligible families unenrolled. WIC coverage peaked in 2011 at around 65% but has dropped to around 55% today (USDA, 2016). This implies that, despite being eligible, a large swath of low-income and nutritionally at-risk families are not accessing a program that has proven effective at promoting health and nutrition, as well as curtailing economic hardship. Barriers to participation could include:

- Uncertainty about the eligibility criteria
- Long wait times at clinics
- Transportation difficulties
- Hours of operation
- Lack of time, busy lifestyles
- Difficulty scheduling appointments

## The Project

The Council of State Governments (CSG), in partnership with the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN), was recently awarded a 3-year, \$8 million grant from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to enhance the WIC participant experience in the states. By awarding \$6 million in sub-grants to state and/or local WIC agencies, the project will utilize innovative ideas and replicable tools that are rooted in evidence to support improving WIC customer service measures and eligibility determination/certification processes.

## Primary Objectives

The WIC Special Project Innovation Grant includes three overarching activities:

### 1. Identifying Innovative Enhancement Opportunities

The project partners will establish an advisory group to serve as a resource to CSG and GSCN, as well as the sub-grantees. The advisory group will comprise subject matter experts on WIC certification and eligibility policy and will assist in developing up to two certification enhancement opportunities for prospective sub-grantees to adopt in their applications.

### 2. Awarding Sub-grants to State and/or Local WIC Agencies

The project partners will issue a competitive request for application that solicits project proposals from state and/or local WIC agencies that are innovative, replicable, and improve upon any and all aspects of certification, eligibility determination, and processing of applications. The projects include an evaluation component with measurable results and must be designed in a way that the key project activities can be replicated or transferred to other WIC agencies.

### 3. Monitoring and Evaluating Innovation Projects

Each sub-grant project will be evaluated for its impact on clinic wait time, participant satisfaction, other customer service-related measures and any other variables that make sense in the context of each project. In collaboration with sub-grantees, the project partners will execute a cross-project evaluation of the implemented strategies/solutions that documents project impacts on improving the certification process in WIC. The evaluation will culminate in a final report that will be strategically disseminated so that key project activities may be replicated or transferred to other WIC agencies nationally.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

February 2020	Release of National Report on WIC Programs, Trends, Innovations and Issues
May 2020	Request for Application Opens
May 2020- January 2021	Ongoing Proposal Development Technical Assistance for Applicants
January 2021	Sub-grant Applications Due from States
March 2021	Sub-grants Awarded
2021-2022	Annual In-state Sub-grantee Site Visits
March 2021- June 2022	Ongoing Technical Assistance for Sub-grantees
Summer 2022	Preliminary Evaluations Completed; Findings Presented at Professional Conferences
December 2022	Final Report Detailing Impacts of Projects and Lessons Learned Completed and Published

— IN 2017 —



OF INFANTS  
IN THE U.S.  
PARTICIPATED IN  
**WIC**

(USDA, 2019)

