



Food and
Nutrition
Service

June 30, 2022

Braddock
Metro Center

SUBJECT: WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant: Notice of Funding Availability

1320
Braddock
Place
Alexandria,
VA 22314

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All FNS Regional Offices

WIC State Agency Directors
All WIC State Agencies

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ([P.L. 117-2](#), ARPA) provided the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with \$390 million, available through fiscal year (FY) 2024, to carry out outreach, innovation, and program modernization efforts to increase participation in and redemption of benefits in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

As part of the WIC innovation and modernization efforts to be funded under ARPA, FNS will fund non-competitive grants to WIC State agencies to complete projects aimed at improving the WIC shopping experience, which is a well-documented pain point for WIC participants. The primary goal of funded projects must be to improve the shopping experience, as evidenced by increasing the redemption of WIC benefits, improving customer satisfaction, and/or improving participant access to vendors, including for underserved communities and individuals.

Eligibility and Funding Levels

This is an announcement of the availability of funds for grants to be awarded in FY 2022 to WIC State agencies that meet the technical requirements outlined in this memorandum. All 89 WIC State agencies are eligible to apply for grant funding under this announcement. Only one application per State agency will be considered in FY 2022. This includes any applications submitted as a part of a multi-State agency collaboration.

A total of \$50 million is available for grants in FY 2022 – 2024, to be divided among WIC State agencies selected for funding to accomplish the goals described in this memorandum. Funding of these awards will be provided through the Grant Award/Letter of Credit process. The awards will be made via a grant agreement between FNS and the Grantee. The grants will be awarded on a non-competitive basis, subject to the availability of federal funds.

This memorandum focuses on the initial round of funding, totaling up to \$15 million for award in FY 2022, to support strategies to improve the shopping experience. FNS expects to make awards between \$250,000 and \$750,000 per State agency or per member of a multi-State agency

collaboration. A lead State agency must be selected for a multi-State agency collaboration. FNS may elect to fund an application in its entirety, may limit funding to specific items of the proposals contained in an application, and/or may negotiate with proposed applicants to stay within available funding and/or the goals of the grant. Please note, the maximum per Grantee/multi-State agency collaboration only applies to FY 2022 applications. Applicants may apply for additional funds in years 2 and 3, contingent upon the availability of funding. Subsequent memoranda will be released with additional information on future funding included in this effort.

Year 1 – FY 2022

FNS will award a maximum of \$15 million to fund either online shopping planning efforts or in-store shopping projects outlined in the “Use of Funds” section of this memorandum. Year 1 of this grant is geared towards State agencies looking to hire project management and support staff or State agencies with projects already in the planning and development stage ready to be put into action. The period of performance for this funding is from the start date of award through September 30, 2024. All funding must be obligated by State agencies by September 30, 2024.

Years 2 & 3 – FY 2023 & FY 2024 (contingent upon the availability of funding)

FNS anticipates announcing future funding opportunities to support additional in-store shopping efforts similar to those outlined in this announcement, as well as projects related to online shopping (i.e., online ordering and internet-based transaction projects). State agencies wishing to apply for funding in FY 2023 for online shopping projects should begin developing a plan to implement online ordering and/or internet-based transactions using the [Blueprint for WIC Online Ordering Projects \(the Blueprint\)](#). The Blueprint is an informational resource for Statewide EBT WIC State agencies and their partners working to implement online ordering and internet-based transaction projects. For information on online ordering and internet-based transaction waivers, see [WIC Supports Online Ordering and Transactions in WIC](#).

To inform future planning, State agencies that anticipate applying for grant funding in Year 2 and/or Year 3 for projects related to online shopping should inform their respective FNS Regional Office via email by September 30, 2022.

Requesting an ARPA Waiver

As a part of this grant opportunity, FNS may consider State agency waiver requests consistent with the authority granted by ARPA. To request an ARPA waiver, State agencies must submit a written formal waiver request with the grant application package or in advance of the submission of the grant application.

The waiver request must include:

- A brief summary of the project.

- A statement that reads as follows: “Consistent with American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), this project is intended to carry out an innovation and/or program modernization effort, to increase participation in and redemption of benefits in the program.”
- Anticipated start date (month/year) and completion date (month/year).
- The specific regulatory and/or statutory provision(s) requested to be waived to implement a successful project. For each regulatory and/or statutory provision requested to be waived, the State agency must provide:
 - The rationale for the requested waiver, identifying why the regulatory/statutory requirement cannot be met within the project and the specific flexibilities requested.
 - How the State agency will ensure the waiver, if approved, will not risk the purpose or integrity of the WIC Program.
- As applicable, any additional documentation the State agency deems necessary to support the waiver request.

State agencies should alert their respective FNS Regional Office if they expect to need an ARPA waiver to carry out a project or activity under this funding announcement. If approved by FNS for funding, the State agency will be required to submit a State Plan amendment to reflect any changes in program operations, as applicable, in accordance with 7 CFR 246.4(c).

Use of Funds

As part of this grant opportunity, FNS will provide funding to hire project management staff to assist with projects for current and future shopping experience improvements, as well as evaluators to assist with determining project baseline and outcomes. FNS will also fund projects in any stage (i.e., research, development, testing, implementation, or evaluation) that have a goal of improving the WIC shopping experience in the grocery store and reducing disparities in program delivery. To the extent possible, projects should be scalable and transferrable to other WIC State agencies. Information on anticipated annual costs to operate and maintain the project after the grant period of performance and an explanation of how the project will continue to be used and funded by the Grantee must be considered and included.

Project suggestions include, but are not limited to:

- Hiring project management and support staff to assist with planning for and/or implementation of online shopping.
- Implementing or expanding self-checkout.
- Providing shopping related resources to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), including translation of WIC approved food lists/cards into additional languages.
- Helping WIC participants find supplemental foods in store (e.g., by improving shelf labels, working with vendors to develop a “store within a store” model where WIC-

eligible products are grouped together, developing store maps, and/or coordinating strategic product placement, providing in person shopping training, implementing a shopping help hotline, developing video tutorials).

- Improving vendor customer service to WIC participants (e.g., through the development and/or deployment of WIC-specific cashier training programs and/or updating general vendor training curricula, to include customer service specific training).
- Making participant-centered changes to expand variety and choice, including improving approved product lists (APLs) and communication materials (e.g., State agency WIC-approved food lists/cards, websites).
- Improving UPC/PLU collection efforts to ensure that WIC approved foods are not rejected in the checkout line.
- Improving vendor complaint reporting procedures to ensure meaningful, participant-centered resolutions.
- Other innovative solutions to improve the WIC shopping experience.

How to Apply

To apply for a WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant, interested State agencies or multi-State agency collaborations (with one State agency identified as the lead) must submit a narrative project proposal via email their respective FNS Regional Office with cc: to SM.FNCS.WIC.Innovation@usda.gov. State agencies must use Attachment A, *FY 2022 Non-Competitive WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant Proposal Template*. Applications must be received **no later than 11:59 PM Eastern Time on Monday, August 8, 2022**. Late applications will not be considered. State agencies may reach out to their respective FNS Regional Office with questions or technical assistance requests when preparing the submission. All Standard Forms (SF) listed below can be found on Grants.gov [here](#).

FNS Regional Office	Point of Contact (email)
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office	Jaime.VanLieu@usda.gov
Midwest Regional Office	Samia.Hamdan@usda.gov
Mountain Plains Regional Office	Sandra.Clark@usda.gov
Northeast Regional Office	Michelle.D'Auria@usda.gov
Southeast Regional Office	Sandy.Benton-Davis@usda.gov
Southwest Regional Office	Darrell.Allen@usda.gov
Western Regional Office	Kacie.O'Brien@usda.gov (until 7/17/2022) Marisa.Cheung@usda.gov (after 7/17/2022)

A complete application will include:

- Attachment A, FY 2022 Non-Competitive WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant Proposal Template (to be completed by State agency)
- SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance
- SF-424A Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs
 - Please submit a budget request (SF-424 Form) for an amount between \$250,000 and \$750,000 per Grantee or per member of a multi-State agency collaboration. For multi-State agency collaborations, the lead State agency will be responsible for the funds. FNS may adjust the award amount depending on the availability of funds.
- SF-424B Assurances for Non-Construction Programs
- SF-LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

Project Description: Describe your proposed project. The project proposal **must** include the following:

- A clear description of the WIC shopping challenge, the solution the State agency or multi-State agency collaboration is proposing (including how the State agency will consider and/or include WIC participants in the development of the proposal), and how it will address the challenge, with references and/or evidence from prior research if applicable.
- Anticipated full timeline, including start date, completion date, and milestones.
- The expected results and/or benefits of the solution, and how it will meet the objectives of this grant opportunity.
- The proposed project scope and methodology, which should describe the project design, address program specific needs, procedures, timelines, and monitoring/oversight (if applicable).
- A communications plan to ensure effective communication across all stakeholders.
- A risk management strategy, to include a prioritized list of potential risks and planned strategies for mitigation (including impacts to existing systems or operations).
- A description of how the solution or project will be tested prior to implementation (as applicable).
- A description of how the project will be evaluated before, during, and after implementation.
- An analysis of the scalability of the project to support implementation in other State agencies.
- For projects that impact EBT/MIS, a list of affected State agencies and all changes to the shared core system for State Agency Model (SAM) User Groups or multi-State consortia.

Budget Proposal: The budget proposal **must** include the following:

- The amount of Federal funds requested, between \$250,000 and \$750,000 per Grantee or per member of a multi-State agency collaboration.

- A narrative description of the need for Federal funds requested in SF-424A, including calculations detailing how these funds requested were derived. Describe costs such as State personnel and fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, indirect, and other (e.g., printing).
- Details on amount of funding to be used on grant evaluation and how this amount was calculated (if applicable).
- Information on anticipated annual costs to operate and maintain the project after the grant period of performance. Identify funding sources beyond the grant period of performance and explain how the project will continue to be used and funded by the Grantee.
- For projects that impact EBT/MIS, a list of affected State agencies and all changes to the shared core system for State Agency Model (SAM) User Groups or multi-State consortia.

Award and Reporting Requirements

Grant Agreement: When awards are made, State agencies and FNS must sign a FNS-529 Grant Award form. A fully executed FNS-529 agreement, with terms and conditions, will serve as the official grant agreement.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA): The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for this grant project award is: 10.557.

Reporting: Selected applicants will be required to provide quarterly SF-425, Financial Status Reports, and quarterly FNS-908, Performance Progress Report, using the narrative portion of the form. The SF-425, Financial Status Report must be submitted in FNS' Food Program Reporting System. Performance progress will be captured under the narrative portion of the FNS-908 (to be submitted via email to the FNS Regional Office in PDF form). The Grantee will be responsible for providing periodic project updates to FNS to be reported to the Secretary of Agriculture in accordance with [Executive Order 14058](#). Upon completion of the grant, the Grantee shall submit a final summary using the narrative portion of the FNS-908 to include evaluation results of the project as they relate to improving the WIC shopping experience, as evidenced by increasing the redemption of WIC benefits, improving customer satisfaction, and/or improving participant access to vendors.

Beyond the evaluation activities of this grant and throughout the course of the project, FNS will be conducting an evaluation of ARPA-funded projects on WIC outreach, innovation, and program modernization efforts. As such, the Grantee may be asked to participate in FNS-sponsored surveys, interviews, and focus groups that are part of this larger evaluation. In its application, the Grantee shall affirm their willingness to participate in any data collection activities related to the overarching evaluation. The Grantee shall also indicate a willingness to participate in activities around sharing best practices, such as FNS Regional Office webinars, roundtables, conferences, etc.

508 Compliance: Deliverables, systems developed, and any WIC shopper-facing technology must be designed to be 508 compliant (i.e., software/applications/sites are designed to be interoperable with assistive technology). Chapter 5 of the [Revised 508 Standards and 255 Guidelines \(access-board.gov\)](#), outlines the key components to achieve such interoperability.

FNS Participation

Grants will be managed by the FNS Regional Offices. FNS Regional Offices will provide ongoing technical assistance via the quarterly FNS-908 performance progress reports and quarterly financial reports to monitor the Grantee's project activities and ensure costs are within the WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant scope. FNS may also provide periodic on-site and off-site technical assistance to provide evaluation and guidance on project activities and outputs as they relate to this project, including:

- Review of project plans and milestones;
- Review of project documents;
- Evaluation of technology, including systems and/or apps;
- Other technical assistance and program evaluation related to project objectives.

If you have further questions on this grant opportunity, please contact your FNS Regional Office.



AMY M. HERRING
Director, Office of Innovation
Supplemental Nutrition and Safety Programs

Attachment: FY 2022 Non-Competitive WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant Proposal Template

FY 2022 Non-Competitive WIC Shopping Experience Improvement Grant Proposal Template

- Proposals must be submitted via email to the respective FNS Regional Office with cc: to SM.FNCS.WIC.Innovation@usda.gov by no later than 11:59 PM Eastern Time on Monday, August 8, 2022.
- For State agencies applying as part of a multi-State agency collaboration, a lead State agency must be selected. Applications should be sent to the lead State agency's FNS Regional Office representative.
- State agencies must use the template below as it appears.

State Agency Contact Information	
State agency collaborations must complete the requested information below for each State agency in the collaboration and must mark the lead State agency as such.	
State Agency Name and Mailing Address:	<p>WIC Director: <i>Name</i> <i>Job Title</i> <i>Contact Information (Telephone, Email)</i></p>
	<p>Project Lead: <i>Name</i> <i>Job Title</i> <i>Contact Information (Telephone, Email)</i></p>
Data Collection Response	
<p>Are you willing to participate in data collection activities related to the overarching evaluation, including participating in activities around sharing best practices, such as FNS Regional Office webinars, roundtables, conferences, etc.?</p> <p>Yes / No (select one)</p>	
Project Proposal	
<p><i>Include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A clear description of the WIC shopping challenge, the solution the State agency or multi-State agency collaboration is proposing (including how the State agency will consider and/or include WIC participants in the development of the proposal), and how</i> 	

it will address the challenge with references and/or evidence from prior research if applicable.

- *Anticipated full timeline, including start date, completion date, and milestones.*
- *The expected results and/or benefits of the solution, and how it will meet the objectives of this grant opportunity.*
- *The proposed project scope and methodology, which should describe the project design, address program specific needs, procedures, timelines, and monitoring/oversight (if applicable).*
- *A communications plan to ensure effective communication across all stakeholders.*
- *A risk management strategy, to include a prioritized list of potential risks and planned strategies for mitigation (including impacts to existing systems or operations).*
- *A description of how the solution will be tested prior to implementation and evaluated during and after implementation.*
- *An analysis of the scalability of the project to support implementation in other State agencies.*
- *For projects that impact EBT/MIS, a list of affected State agencies and all changes to the shared core system for State Agency Model (SAM) User Groups or multi-State consortia.*

[Insert narrative here.]

Budget Proposal

Include:

- *The amount of Federal funds requested, between \$250,000 and \$750,000 per State agency or per member of a multi-State agency collaboration.*
- *A narrative description of the need for Federal funds requested in SF-424A, including calculations detailing how these funds requested were derived. Describe costs such as State personnel and fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, indirect, and other (e.g., printing).*
- *Details on amount of funding to be used on grant evaluation and how this amount was calculated (if applicable).*
- *Information on anticipated annual costs to operate and maintain the project after the grant period of performance. Identify funding sources beyond the grant period of performance and explain how the project will continue to be used and funded by the Grantee.*
- *For projects that impact EBT/MIS, a list of affected State agencies and all changes to the shared core system for State Agency Model (SAM) User Groups or multi-State consortia.*

[Insert narrative here.]