The WIC MIS Modernization Strategy

Project Overview

The WIC MIS Modernization Strategy project is a four-year cooperative agreement between USDA FNS and the National WIC Association (NWA), in partnership with Nava Public Benefit Corporation (Nava PBC) and Code for America.

The project goals and objectives are:
1. Assess the current MIS landscape
2. Develop a near-term transitional plan for improvements to current MIS
3. Develop a long-term MIS planning, product, and market strategy
4. Assist USDA and State agencies in implementing the strategy

> **Management Information Systems (MIS)** are the backbone of each WIC State agency's administrative, assessment, and reporting functions. The MIS is responsible for collecting and managing a wide array of data, covering nearly all aspects of the program.

Frequently Asked Questions

1 **What is "MIS modernization?"**

Modern MIS are:

- Participant-and user-centered
- Cohesive and interoperable with other tools and systems supporting WIC delivery
- Flexible and adaptable over time
- Efficient to procure and maintain
- Enabled and sustained by a robust provider ecosystem

2 **Is NWA working to build a single MIS to be used by all WIC State agencies?**

No. The goal of the project is to ensure that State agencies can choose from multiple modernized systems and services, *not* to build a single MIS. Through this project, the NWA team will *not* be developing an MIS product. The team *will* document current MIS and an ideal future state to inform next steps, which may include development of concepts or models in later phases. The project aims to create an infrastructure that supports a more robust and innovative ecosystem of MIS solutions and providers.

3 **How will the project team engage WIC participants and State and local agencies while developing the MIS Strategy?**

The team will engage interested parties in the following ways:
- NWA formed an MIS Workgroup composed of State and local agency staff who work with MIS and other WIC policy and modernization experts. The MIS Workgroup will provide input and direction throughout the project.
- NWA will seek regular input from the organization's Participant Advisory Council (PAC) to ensure that recommendations support relevant improvements to service delivery. The PAC includes 14 current or recent WIC participants who are recruited from across the nation and lend their expertise to inform the internal and external work of NWA.
- NWA will seek input from the following NWA Committees: State Agency Section Standing Committee, Local Agency Section Standing Committee, Vendor Section Standing Committee, and the Evaluation Committee.

4 **My State agency is currently in the middle of an MIS modernization project or is planning one in the near term. Will this project impact our plans?**

No, this project is designed as a long-term strategy effort and is not intended to interrupt your agency's current or planned MIS modernization projects. On the contrary, current or planned State efforts are valuable opportunities to inform and enhance longer-term MIS planning. By observing and learning from agencies with new initiatives, we can incorporate promising practices and innovative approaches into this effort.

We recommend considering the guiding principles outlined below when planning new MIS projects, adjusting established project plans, implementing MIS improvements, or considering multi-year re-procurements.

Please reach out to Chloe Dillaway, cdillaway@nwica.org, if you would like to discuss your modernization efforts in more detail with the project team.

5 **Where can I find updates on the project's progress?**

Project updates will be shared in NWA's Center for Innovative Practices in WIC (CIP-WIC) Newsletter, at NWA and other conferences, and via NWA webinars, among other channels. For more information about this project, please email cipwic@nwica.org.

Scan here to sign up for the CIP-WIC newsletter!

MIS Modernization Guiding Principles

Modernizing WIC MIS will be a marathon, not a sprint. While we collectively plan for the long term, existing systems still need plenty of critical maintenance and enhancement. We encourage State agencies and their current or future technology partners to consider the following principles in planning and executing near-term projects – and maximize their potential contribution to longer-term modernization.

1 **Ensure streamlined, secure integration**: Systems and services should be linked through modern integration tools like application programming interfaces (APIs) -- programs that make it easier for technologies to 'talk' to each other. This facilitates interoperability, flexibility, scalability, and smoother collaboration with other systems.

2 **Consider modular design**: Big, bulky systems struggle to meet the varied and evolving needs of WIC programs. Modular MIS break up different functions so sub-systems can be fine-tuned to the tasks at hand. This means components can be developed, tested, and updated independently, ensuring quicker iteration and easier maintenance. This also gives State agencies the agility to add or adjust features that meet changing program requirements and customer needs.

3 **Use human-centered design principles**: Any technology project – big or small, MIS or otherwise – should center users and participants at all stages. Prioritize the needs and experiences of users and people receiving services throughout the design, testing, and implementation process to create effective and accessible solutions.

4 **Apply lessons learned from other agencies and projects**: While every State agency has distinct needs and challenges, many MIS and related projects take similar approaches. Explore recent, related efforts for insights or reusable components that can accelerate progress – and let NWA know how we can better facilitate knowledge-sharing among States facing similar needs or challenges.

5 **Focus on smaller projects or proofs of concept**: Committing to large, multi-year contracts or inflexible scopes of work can delay or even detract from modernization priorities. Near-term MIS projects should embed agility and adaptability as a way of doing business. Demonstrating success with smaller, targeted efforts can build evidence and confidence -- and then shape larger, data-driven investments.