

# LAUNCHING NEW DIGITAL TOOLS FOR WIC PARTICIPANTS: A GUIDE FOR WIC AGENCIES

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# OVERVIEW

- **Why** we made this toolkit
- **How** we made the toolkit
- **What's** inside
  - Types of digital tools available
  - Choices to consider before purchasing digital tools.
  - Key features
  - Data considerations
- **Example from the field – Boulder Colorado WIC Program**

# WHY NOW?

- Who in this room...
  - has heard requests from participants who want to use more technology in WIC?
  - is in the process of choosing or implementing a digital tool for WIC participants?
  - is or has put together an RFP for new technology for WIC participants?
  - Wants to implement new digital tools for WIC participants?
  - Has struggled with any of the above?



## Launching New Digital Tools for WIC Participants

A Guide for WIC Agencies

# PARTNERSHIP

- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP)
- Social Interest Solutions (SIS)
- National WIC Association (NWA)



# ENGAGING THE WIC COMMUNITY



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Altarum Institute
- Boulder County WIC (CO)
- California Children's National Hospital/Medical Center (D.C.)
- Community Medical Centers, Inc. (CA)
- Davidson County WIN (TN)
- Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
- Greater Baden Medical Services WIC Program (MD)
- Maricopa County DPH WIC Program (AZ)
- Michigan WIC
- Mississippi WIC
- National WIC Association Evaluation Committee
- New York WIC
- Osage Nation WIC (OK)
- USDA's Food & Nutrition Service
- Washington D.C. WIC
- West Virginia WIC

# SHIFTING THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN WIC



Digital tools can improve the WIC experience for participants and staff in a number of ways:

- Maximizing face-to-face time: Digital tools can simplify administrative tasks, freeing up staff to focus on counseling, education, or referrals, which benefit from a human touch.
- Keeping participants engaged: Digital tools can provide interesting new ways for WIC participants to satisfy program requirements.
- Reflecting program modernization: Digital tools can signal to participants that the WIC agency is forward-thinking and committed to being accessible to its participants.
- Overcoming transportation barriers and staffing shortages: Rural or isolated WIC agencies may not have the resources to hire and/or retain specialized staff.<sup>13</sup> Also, participants in rural or urban areas may struggle to secure reliable transportation to appointments.<sup>14</sup> Digital

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> [The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\) Special Project Mini Grant Final Report](#), Delaware Health and Social Services Division of Public Health's WIC Program and the Food Bank of Delaware (2014); [TeleWIC: Keeping up with the Times](#), California WIC Association (2018); [WIC Nutrition Education Study: Phase 1 Report](#), Sheryl Cates, Kristen Capogrossi, Linnea Sallack, Karen Deeky, Celia Eicheldinger, Shawn Karns, Samantha Bradley, Katherine Kosa, Jemma Brophy (May 2016).

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tools can help connect WIC participants with WIC staff without the need for in-person meetings, increasing flexibility for those with more challenging schedules.<sup>15</sup>

# DIGITAL TOOLS CAN HELP WITH

- Initial certification
- Appointment scheduling
- Nutrition education
- Breastfeeding support
- Shopping with WIC benefits



### FROM THE FIELD

**Participants' changing technology preferences:** Davidson County WIC in Tennessee noted that its participants, especially younger ones, often prefer text messaging over telephone reminders. Traditionally, WIC agencies make appointment reminders via telephone, but texts can be more discreet and convenient. Participants may be put off by seeing incoming calls that display "government" on caller ID; text messages, in contrast, can be extremely clear with a very direct message, which may put participants at ease.



## Appendix B

# TYPES OF TOOLS

### Types of Digital Tools

This inventory provides a brief overview of the types of digital tools available and their purposes.

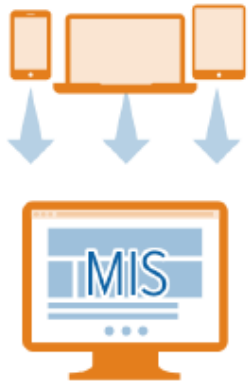
Type of Tool	Definition and Function
Mobile app	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Short for “mobile application”</li><li>• Also known as “smartphone app” or “app”</li><li>• Type of software used on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets</li></ul>
Text messaging service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Also known as “text messaging software”</li><li>• Type of software that allows users to send text messages to large groups of people</li><li>• Some text messaging services communicate only in one direction</li></ul>
Two-way text messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allows for texting messaging conversations in two directions</li><li>• Can enable recipient to reply to text message directly to original sender</li></ul>
Video calling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technology that lets people engage in live conversations over video, rather than in person</li><li>• Available on most smartphones and tablets</li><li>• Can be hosted through separate software or services (iPhone’s FaceTime feature and Skype are common examples of video calling services)</li></ul>
Websites and web-based learning platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accessible from web browsers (like Internet Explorer or Google Chrome) on multiple types of digital devices, including computers, tablets, and smartphones</li><li>• A “web portal” is a website that requires users to log in to search for information, perform certain tasks, or take other actions (online learning platforms, which provide integrated online services to support online learning, are examples of web portals)</li></ul>

# COMMON CHALLENGES

Challenge	Examples of Digital Tools That Might Help
<p>Participants are unable to make appointments during regular business hours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video calling for appointments after regular business hours</li> <li>• Remote alternatives to in-person nutrition education classes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Online nutrition education via mobile apps and/or websites/portals</li> <li>◦ Text message or phone-based nutrition education</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Participants have difficulty traveling to in-person appointments due to transportation challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video calling for appointments during and/or after regular business hours</li> <li>• Remote alternatives to in-person nutrition education classes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Online nutrition education via mobile apps and/or websites/portals.</li> <li>◦ Text message or phone-based nutrition education</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Participants do not redeem all of their WIC food benefits because they are unsure which foods are WIC-eligible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digitized APLs (“approved product lists,” or lists of WIC-eligible items) searchable on mobile apps (such as shopping assistance apps) or mobile-friendly websites</li> <li>• Shopping assistance mobile apps, which can include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Digitized APLs</li> <li>◦ UPC scanner that scans the UPC label on a food item to determine if the food item is WIC-eligible</li> <li>◦ Benefits redemption tracking (based on EBT card usage) to indicate which foods remain</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Participants do not use their WIC benefits because they do not know how to cook with specific items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shopping assistance mobile apps, which can include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ List of unredeemed WIC-eligible food items</li> <li>◦ Recipe features to find recipes that use WIC-eligible food items, which can include search</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Impact on Clinic Operations

Introducing a new digital tool will affect local WIC staff and clinic operations. Planning for the necessary changes can mitigate the short-term disruption and allow staff to view the change as an opportunity for long-term operational improvements. This section describes considerations to address during the planning period.



### Interoperability With WIC Agency Systems

Digital tools facilitate activities that support a family's ongoing participation in WIC. Digital tools that interface with the WIC agency's underlying eligibility system — the Management Information System (MIS) — can make maintaining eligibility easier for participants and reduce administrative work for staff.

But not all digital tools are designed to interface with WIC MIS, and not all WIC MIS are capable of interoperability. Some MIS legacy systems are too old to support such communication with modern digital tools. In some instances, the state WIC agency's data security standards will not allow interoperability.

#### TECH TERM

**Interoperability:** Interoperability is the ability of computer systems or software to communicate and exchange or make use of information and data.

Learning what technology capabilities exist with the agency's current system, whether the MIS can be adapted to accommodate new tools, and whether new tools would require significant (planned or unplanned) changes to the MIS can affect agency decisions about whether and what kind of digital tools to procure.

For example, digital tools for WIC nutrition education can connect to state WIC MIS to varying degrees. Current options include:

- The vendor's digital tool for online nutrition education syncs with the WIC MIS and adds information about individual WIC participants' online nutrition education activities directly to the MIS through an automated online process or in the cloud.
- The digital tool emails the local WIC agency at the end of the day a batch report listing participants who have completed nutrition education lessons. A staff person manually enters the batch data into the WIC MIS.

# THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Impact on participants and clinic operations
- Procurement considerations



## Part 2: Choosing a Product

When choosing a digital tool, there are many factors to consider, such as: Is it well-designed for participants? Can it help staff?

Not all tools will have all of the features that an agency would like. The checklist in [Appendix C](#) is meant to help agencies consider what is most important for them and the people they serve and use that information to prioritize their specifications.

### Tools That Are User-Friendly for Participants



Well-designed digital tools — ones that are easy to sign into, read, and navigate — take users' needs into account. Whether designing a new tool or selecting an existing one, WIC agencies can obtain a user-friendly tool by looking for the basic elements listed below.

#### What Is Human-Centered Design (HCD)?

Applying HCD principles to the design process can help create a digital tool that truly meets the needs of its intended users. But what is HCD?

- The foundation of HCD is that technology should serve people. In the HCD process, designers include the people they are designing for at every step: understanding who users are, identifying what problems are being addressed, brainstorming and modelling solutions, and testing the new tools during development and before their introduction into the marketplace.
- HCD takes an inclusive view of human experience and the role that products and services play in that experience. An inclusive view can include culture, social norms, political landscape, and more. Gaining such a view helps designers truly understand the people they are designing for, what their problems are, and what effective solutions might be for them.

# CHOOSING A PRODUCT

- User-friendly tools
- Compatibility with agency/staff processes
- Maintaining and updating tools



## Part 4: Assessing and Adjusting

Data analytics can be crucial in helping WIC agencies determine the efficacy of a tool and make meaningful improvements. Using a tool that incorporates data reporting and analytics functionalities can enable agencies to share positive outcomes with both internal and external stakeholders, including funders. It can also help agencies identify areas where the tool is being underutilized, which can inform staff about where to do additional outreach or to assess whether the tool is accomplishing the agency's goals.

### Setting a Baseline to Evaluate Effectiveness



Learning what metrics the vendor already has in place can help WIC agencies understand the types of data the tool tracks, how that data will be shared with the agency, and what functionality will be available to WIC staff to access the data for evaluation, visualization, and metrics. Data elements that would be useful to track include:

- Number of downloads (if a mobile app)
- Number of uninstalls (if a mobile app)
- Last activity the user performed (and when) before uninstalling (if a mobile app)
- Number of distinct daily active users
- Frequency of tool use
- Number of times users have logged in
- Length of user sessions (session time)
- Length of time users have the tool open (on their computers, smartphones, etc.)
- Features/functionality users visit the most
- Features/functionality users visit the least
- Frequency that users click on external resources or referral links within the tool

# DATA CONSIDERATIONS

- Set a baseline
- Learn from data



RFP Checklist

Specifications	Yes	No	Notes
Planning			

Procurement considerations

Consolidate and/or integrate tools

Vendor offers an all-in-one tool that covers all functions the agency wants to offer WIC participants	Y	N	
Vendor offers multiple applications and users can access them all through a single sign-on (SSO)	Y	N	

Choosing a Product

Tools that are user-friendly for participants

Friendly and inviting to all users

Clear and simple design	Y	N	
Good visual cues	Y	N	
Strong graphics and inviting appearance	Y	N	
Text is welcoming and/or personalizes the process	Y	N	
Text is culturally sensitive and affirming of different identities	Y	N	
Text provides reassurances for participants and their families (such as immigrants)	Y	N	
Text addresses needs of different WIC participants	Y	N	

# SOLICITING STRONG PROPOSALS

Specifications	Yes	No	Notes
Clearly communicates privacy and security considerations reassuring users that personal information will be protected	Y	N	
Tools that support staff and agency processes			
Allows users to pull data from tool into easy-to-read and easy-to-share reports	Y	N	
Allows users to edit content easily	Y	N	
Allows users to seamlessly work across digital devices	Y	N	
Allows users to modify tool	Y	N	
Tools that will be maintained and updated regularly			
Initial costs include ongoing updates and maintenance (and if not, additional costs are specified)	Y	N	
Ongoing maintenance can be billed as monthly subscription	Y	N	
Clear schedule for providing frequency of updates and/or maintenance	Y	N	
Vendor open to changes in frequency of updates/maintenance to meet WIC agency needs	Y	N	
WIC agency can facilitate user testing of new updates	Y	N	
Vendor will solicit ideas for new functionality from WIC agency	Y	N	
Vendor will accept input from WIC agency to help inform updates and/or desired new functionality	Y	N	
Vendor can explain its approach to incorporating user experience into updates	Y	N	

“Government programs can be so hard to navigate – I love that WIC is so technologically savvy and up to date – it really benefits my family.”



*Cora Cardoni,  
WIC Mom, Colorado*



wichealth



during the shutdown







## WOMEN, INFANTS, & CHILDREN (WIC)

Home / Families & Adults / Pregnancy & Parenting / Women, Infants, & Children (WIC)



En Español

WIC promotes and maintains the health and well-being of nutritionally at-risk pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and infants and children by providing:

- Supplemental nutritious foods
- Nutrition and breastfeeding information
- Referral to other health and nutrition services

Eligibility Food Benefits Health Benefits eWIC Apply

Apply For WIC

To be enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children – better known as the WIC Program, you will need to:

- Review the [eligibility requirements](#) to make sure you qualify.

Call the WIC clinic site nearest you to make an appointment:

### Related Links

[Breastfeeding in Boulder County](#)

[Child Care Assistance](#)

[Colorado WIC](#)

[Farmers Market Vouchers](#)

[SNAP \(Food Stamps\)](#)

[Physical Activity](#)

[Pregnancy & Parenting](#)





# CONCLUSION

# Thank you!

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