



Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion: AHEAD in WIC

Results from the National Landscape Scan – Hiring and Promotion

NWA's MISSION

The National WIC Association (NWA) provides its members with tools and leadership to expand and sustain effective nutrition services for mothers and young children.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the National WIC Association (NWA) received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to support a two-year project aimed at Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity & Inclusion (AHEAD) in WIC. One of the key goals of AHEAD in WIC was to systematically build capacity among WIC agencies and staff to incorporate a health equity framework into WIC research, policy, and practice. As part of the AHEAD project, NWA worked with Nutrition Equity and Justice Partners, a nutrition and health equity consulting company, to conduct a national landscape scan targeting WIC stakeholders to identify emerging and promising practices being implemented at the state and local level to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Specifically, the purpose of the landscape scan was to:

- 1) Learn more about the existing policies, procedures, and practices being used to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in WIC and
- 2) Help NWA understand gaps, systems/training needs, and areas for expanding collaborations to achieve a more equitable WIC environment for staff, clients, and other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade, there has been increased awareness about the need to build a diverse and inclusive culture in community nutrition programs to ensure equitable access nutrition services. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has made a commitment to promoting equity and inclusion through federal nutrition assistance programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse client population. This one-pager presents results from the landscape scan related to barriers and facilitators to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in hiring and promotion.

For NWA, health equity is the ability of all individuals to achieve optimal health, irrespective of their identity, race, ability, or class. This requires equitable access to nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, chronic disease prevention and management services, safe living environments, and good jobs with fair pay. It necessitates removing obstacles to families' short- and long-term health and well-being including poverty, discrimination, institutional racism and other forms of bias expressed through housing, healthcare, education, labor, and other public policies.



METHODOLOGY

The national landscape survey was conducted from November 2020–February 2021 via Survey-Monkey. Questions on the survey were informed by previous EDI surveys and frameworks and the existing EDI literature. Respondents were asked about their knowledge, capacity, prioritization, and clinic approaches for promoting EDI and to provide personal demographic information and general information about their WIC agency. In addition, state and local WIC Directors were asked to provide information about agency-level policies and procedures being implemented to support EDI efforts (e.g., updated mission and vision, hiring, training, contracting, etc.). Survey questions covering each EDI topic area were separated into sections (e.g., EDI in client services, training and education, hiring, etc.). Participants were informed that they were not required to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable. All State WIC Directors were sent an introductory email about the AHEAD in WIC project and were asked to complete the survey, as well as share with state and local WIC staff. Additionally, surveys were widely distributed through NWA newsletters, workgroups, and listservs.

A total of 1510 WIC directors/staff started the survey. Consistent with recommendations to maximize data quality in online surveys, respondents who completed at least 50% of the questions in each specific section were retained in the analysis.¹ This yielded a final nonprobability sample size of 980 respondents for the section on hiring and promotion.²



Table 1: Demographics of respondents (n=980)

Age in years	
18-24	1.4 %
25-34	21.1 %
35-44	20.7 %
45-54	24.3 %
55-64	26.2 %
65+	5.2 %
Time working at WIC	
Less than 1 year	5.2 %
1-3 years	15.4 %
4-6 years	13.6 %
6-8 years	7.1 %
8-10 years	4.6 %
Over 10 years	53.5 %
Educational attainment	
≤ High school degree	6.5 %
Some college, no degree	13.0 %
Associate degree	7.9 %
Bachelor's degree	44.4 %
Master's degree	25.9 %
Professional degree	1.7 %
Race	
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	19.3 %
White or Caucasian	60.7 %
Black or African American	7.6 %
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.3 %
Asian	5.1 %
Gender identity	
Cisgender Female	89.9 %
Cisgender Male	5.0 %
Trans	1.0 %
Other gender identity	1.0 %
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual or straight	90.3 %
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Asexual	3.8 %
Disability status	
Has a disability	4.1 %
Does not have a disability	92.9 %

RESULTS

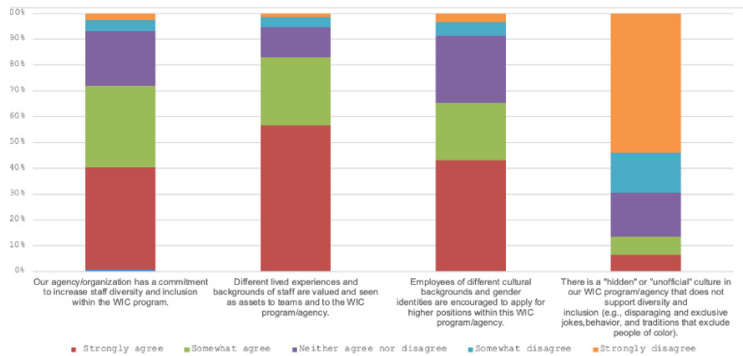
Diversity and Inclusion Related to Hiring in WIC

Survey respondents were asked if they felt their organization/agency has a commitment to increase staff diversity and inclusion within the WIC program. Most respondents “strongly agreed” (39.4%) or “somewhat agreed” (31.7%) that their organization was committed to increasing staff diversity and inclusion. However, responses varied by agency type. A greater percentage of staff at Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and Local WIC Agencies compared to State WIC Agencies “strongly/somewhat agreed” that their organization has a commitment in increase staff diversity and inclusion. Consistent with these results, a greater percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native respondents compared to respondents from other racial/ethnic groups reported that their organization/agency was committed to increasing staff diversity and inclusion.

Similarly, most respondents “strongly agreed” (42.9%) or “somewhat agreed” (22.4%) that employees from different cultural backgrounds and gender identities are encouraged to apply for higher positions within their WIC agency. Consistent with these perceptions, less than 1 in 7 respondents felt there is a “hidden” or “unofficial” culture in their WIC program/agency that does not support diversity and inclusion (13.4%). However, a smaller percentage of Black/African Americans “strongly agreed/somewhat agreed” that employees from different cultural backgrounds and gender identities are encouraged to apply for higher positions and a greater percentage reported their WIC agency has a hidden culture that does not support diversity and inclusion.

Survey respondents were also asked about practices being implemented within their WIC agency to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in hiring and promotion. Most respondents “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that staff with different lived experiences and backgrounds are valued and seen as assets within their WIC program/agency (82.8%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements below about diversity and inclusion within your WIC program/agency.



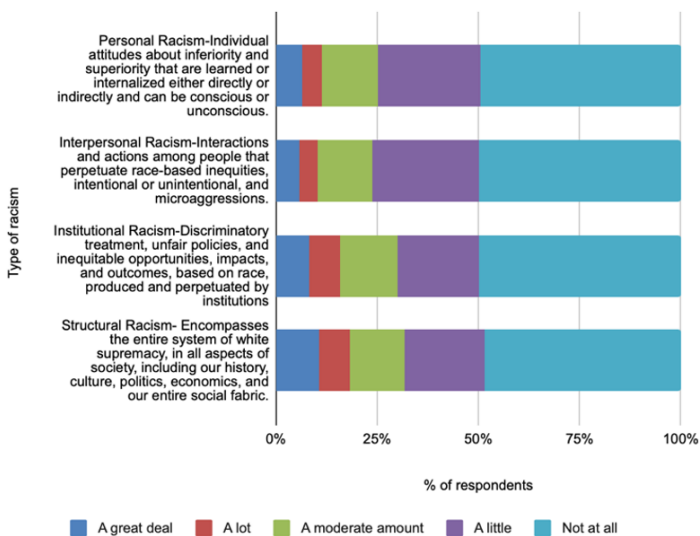
Racism in Hiring

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they believe various types of racism impacting hiring and promotion within their WIC program. Eighteen percent of respondents reported that hiring and promotion is impacted by structural racism “a great deal” or “a lot.” Conversely, about half of respondents indicated that hiring and promotion is “not at all” impacted by structural racism. Similarly, fewer respondents reported that institutional (15.5%), interpersonal (about 10.1%), and/or personally mediated racism (11.3%) impacted hiring and promotion (Figure 2). A greater percentage of Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native respondents reported that the various levels of racism impacts hiring and promotion within their WIC program compared to other racial/ethnic groups. For example, about 50% of Black/African American respondents reported that institutional racism impacts hiring and promotion “a great deal”, “a lot”, or “a moderate amount”, compared to around ¼ of White/Caucasian respondents.



Open-Ended Response Related to Hiring and Promotion
“Our agency hires workers with different backgrounds and languages.”
- WIC Nutritionist, WIC Local Agency

Figure 2: How do you feel that various types of racism impact the hiring and promotion in your WIC program?



Open-Ended Response Related to Hiring and Promotion

“Starting with hiring minorities to managerial positions. I believe that this way, even participants can relate that our agency is not practicing racial discrimination and that anyone can lead the agency based on their knowledge, skills and ability and not the color of their skin.”

- Program Coordinator at a WIC Local Agency

CONCLUSION

Most respondents felt their WIC agency was committed to diversity and inclusion, valued people with different lived experiences, and encouraged people with different lived experiences to seek promotion. Nevertheless, these responses were not consistent across agency types and racial/ethnic groups. These findings illustrate the need for WIC agencies to improve policies and procedures to promote EDI within hiring and promotion and to ensure that all staff feel valued regardless of their background. Most respondents felt that different types of racism do not affect hiring and promotion at their WIC agency; however, those who did feel like it had an impact felt that structural racism and institutional racism had a greater impact compared to interpersonal and individual level racism. These findings indicate that there are opportunities for WIC agencies to implement policies that address institutional/structural racism within WIC agencies. Additionally, WIC agencies could advocate against structural racism in the broader community by implementing policies that address institutional/structural racism more broadly which affects the lives of WIC staff and clients. In closing, advancing EDI through hiring and promotion is an important aspect of increasing equity in the overall WIC environment.

REFERENCES

- 1 Kees, J., Berry, C., Burton, S., & Sheehan, K. (2017). An analysis of data quality: Professional panels, student subject pools, and Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(1), 141-155.
- 2 980 was the total number of respondents that completed at least 50% of the survey; sample size varies slightly based on the question as not all respondents answered every question.