

USDA-WIC-PRIL-2018
USDA PRIL for Enhancing WIC Services - 2018
Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

Request for Applications (RFA): Questions & Answers

1. Any expectation of the local clinics, e.g. they have to be within one state or have to be in two or more WIC state agencies?

The Awardee is expected to "develop and manage a competitive sub-grant award process to WIC local agencies (LAs) or clinics to design and implement interventions expected to enhance participant experiences and improve retention" (RFA page 12). The Awardee is not limited to LAs within a single WIC State Agency, and it is not required that the Awardee works within multiple WIC State Agency jurisdictions.

2. What's the order of the steps to implement the intervention?
 1. Option A: Develop an innovative technology on campus and award the funding to local clinics to implement and evaluate the intervention
 2. Option B: Give the funding to local clinic and work with the local clinic together to develop the innovative technology?

The Awardee is expected to "develop and manage a competitive sub-grant award process to WIC local agencies (LAs) or clinics to design and implement interventions expected to enhance participant experiences and improve retention" (RFA page 12). Thus, the institution awarded funds through this RFA is required to award sub-grants, through an RFP process, to LA proposals that describe an intervention solution or strategy. Although the RFP process to award sub-grants to LAs requires that proposals include "a concise description of the intervention solution/strategy to be implemented" (RFA page 13), the Awardee is encouraged to collaborate with LAs once projects are selected and awarded.

3. The RFA doesn't have many descriptions on the innovative technology part. Would you elaborate whether the focus of this RFA is to develop the innovative technology or providing the funding to local clinic and let them to develop the innovative technology?

The RFA begins with describing "strategies, including innovative tools and technical resources, to promote customer service surrounding WIC nutrition services which will contribute to retention of eligible participants" and goes further to say, "interactive tools, technical resources, or innovative solutions that improve customer service in WIC clinics and/or WIC retailers [...] and ultimately encourage and improve retention of eligible children in WIC" (Page 5). Funded projects are not required to be technological in nature.

4. We have a critical question that needs your advice. We'd like to design a competitive process with multiple rounds of awards: E.g. Round A: 10 grantees, after they complete the projects, we will conduct a thorough evaluation and select five grantees to

receive Round B funding, after they complete Round B, we will evaluate and select 2 grantees to receive Round C funding. Is this kind of competitive process allowable under this RFP? Thank you so much!

Thank you for your question. While the RFP process you describe is not specifically prohibited in the RFA, it is worth emphasizing that the Awardee is expected to deliver on each requirement in the RFA with high quality, especially requirements described on pages 12 and thereafter. To reiterate, “[w]hile FNS anticipates 3-5 sub-grants to local agencies, Applicants shall propose their target number and scale of sub-grants. The Grantee will select, award, monitor, and evaluate the sub-grantee’s intervention in collaboration with the sub-grantee” (RFA, page 12).

5. Does the RFP only allow child retention or other participants retention as well? For example, if a local agency proposes some interventions to improve pregnant mother's experience and retention, does that count as eligible? Thank you so much for your clarification.

Retention of eligible children is the primary goal of this RFA; however, it is possible to have local agency-led interventions that engage pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding mothers.

6. Page 16: "FNS is particularly interested in innovations and replicable interactive tools, technical, or other practical solutions that support positive WIC participant experiences and retention in the program, especially in clinic and vendor environments, without the need for new, ongoing funding." Could you explain "without the need for new, ongoing funding"? For example, if the local agency can use some of their operating funding to buy the technology, e.g. a wic app, does that satisfy "without the need for new, ongoing funding"?

There will be no new funding for sustaining developed projects beyond the time period of the cooperative agreement once awarded. Agencies should consult with leadership regarding proper use of their operating funds.

7. To sponsor the in-person conferences in USDA/FNS headquarters, what things need to be budgeted, such as food and drinks, right? I assume FNS will provide the venue.

As stated in the RFA, the Awardee will sponsor and coordinate two in-person conferences: an orientation meeting and a closeout session at FNS headquarters in Alexandria, VA (page 15). There are no venue costs associated with meetings held in the Park Office Center building, FNS Headquarters. The orientation meeting is a kick-off meeting to include only the Awardee. The closeout session may include attendance by sub-grantees and, therefore, may also include other associated costs such as food and drink.

8. If the Applicant has an intervention/solution and issues a Request for Proposals to invite local agencies to work with the Applicant, does that satisfy the competitive process as defined in the RFA?

The RFP process for local agencies must be competitive and open broadly to WIC local agencies proposing their own interventions/solutions to design and implement.

9. Do the awards to WIC local agencies come out of the 2 million allocated for the cooperative agreement? If yes, what is the approximate award amount we should budget for? Also, if yes, are we given flexibility regarding the contracting mechanism with the WIC local agencies (e.g., grant, subcontract).

Yes, sub-grants to WIC local agencies come out of the \$2 million awarded through this RFA. “While FNS anticipates 3-5 sub-grants to local agencies, Applicants shall propose their target number and scale of sub-grants” (RFA page 12).

10. The solicitation discusses the need for IRB approval. Will the WIC agencies defer to the grantee’s IRB? What is the role of the grantee in the IRB processes of WIC local agencies?

The Applicant should demonstrate that they will secure IRB approvals as needed to carry out evaluation-related data collection activities.

11. To be eligible, must grantees have direct experience coordinating a competitive RFP process that solicits proposals from local WIC agencies OR is related experience sufficient?

All application review criteria are listed in Section V, “Application Review Information” of the RFA.

12. Can the PRIL outreach to vendors and invite vendors to work with local agencies? Can PRIL facilitate the information exchange between vendors and local agencies?

The RFA does not specifically discuss relationships with non-WIC agency stakeholders. Applicants are urged to work closely with WIC agencies to identify intervention needs. Work should conform to safeguards and confidentiality rules as discussed in the RFA (page 33).

13. In previous evaluation, we have worked closely with the agencies to ensure their proposed interventions would enable evaluations. Will this be possible in collaboration with the selected agencies for these projects?

This is possible as long as the competition for sub-grants is fair and conforms with requirements outlined in the RFA.

14. The number of projects that would be funded depends on the scope of the projects. Approximately what size did you have in mind for these projects?

While FNS anticipates 3-5 sub-grants to local agencies, Applicants shall propose their target number and scale of sub-grants (RFA page 12).

15. Can we have two rounds of solicitations via RFPs?

The RFA does not specifically limit the number of sub-grant solicitation periods. The process proposed by the Applicant should be fair and conform to requirements outlined in the RFA. Please also see the answer to Question 4.

16. We would like to require that grantees be evaluated via a randomized controlled trial (RCT). Is this going to be okay to require per your evaluation goals?

A description articulating whether the sub-grantee is able to implement an intervention in a randomized fashion or with comparison and treatment groups is required for proposals to the sub-grantee competition. All proposed sub-grant competitions must comply with requirements (RFA page 12 – 13). Requiring that sub-grantee proposed projects be evaluated via RCT is not prohibited so long as the competition for sub-grantee awards is fair.

17. In the RFA, \$2M is listed as the estimated total program funding. Does that total refer to total Direct Costs? Or does that \$2M include direct and indirect costs?

The \$2M is the amount for the total grant budget; direct and indirect costs.

18. How does FNS anticipate the Grantee will allocate total funds across the different components of the agreement - grants to local agencies, evaluation of interventions, technical assistance to local agencies, and dissemination? Specifically, what percentage of total funds should be budgeted for the 3-5 grants to local agencies?

FNS has not specified how your budget should be derived aside from the fact that it should meet the bona fide need of the proposed project. Pages 38-40 of the RFA gives guidance on the budget.

19. We will engage consultants to review proposals submitted by local agencies, as part of the sub-grant award process. At this point we have not identified the specific individuals to provide these services. For the budget narrative, will it be sufficient to identify the targeted skill set for this role rather than naming the specific individuals to be engaged as consultants

Yes; please specify requirements for the proposal reviewer role and how you plan to recruit the persons for those positions.

20. We will engage researchers, with the relevant expertise, from outside of our institution to serve as co-investigators on the evaluations of sub-grantee interventions. While we have identified one of these researchers, the others will be identified once sub-grantees are selected so that we can match their expertise to the focus area of the intervention. Can we include a sub-award within the budget without specifying the recipient institution/individual?

Yes; please outline what you're looking for and how you plan to recruit the sub-grantee.

21. The RFA indicates that the Grantee will be responsible for sponsoring and coordinating two in-person conferences at FNS headquarters. Do we need to include the cost of these two conferences in our proposal budget? Or do other FNS funds support the cost? If this cost needs to be included in the proposal budget, should we anticipate covering travel costs for all local agency personnel and other attendees, as well as the cost of facilities/food/etc for the conference?

Please see the answer to Question 7.