

Vermont WIC Family Partner Program

Evaluation

February 2025

WIC Family Partner is an individual who is a current or past WIC participant. Family Partners work together with WIC staff to help make WIC services better meet the needs of community members and families. The Family Partner role is to bring family voice and perspective to policies, projects, operations, and education throughout WIC to improve program design, delivery of services, and family and staff satisfaction.

Vermont WIC values Family Partners and seeks their participation at all levels of program creation, implementation, and improvement. In the summer of 2022, members of the WIC team worked closely with the Family and Community Partnerships Program Manager to develop an equitable and sustainable WIC Family Partner program. This team developed shared values, recruitment methodology, non-extractive ways of connecting with families, and person-centered compensation pathways. Recruitment and onboarding took place in early fall 2022 with official launch in November. Family Partners attend regular meetings and are involved in a variety of projects including survey review and development, Vermont WIC Annual Conference participation, reviewing and editing printed material, providing input into food package options, and participating in a large language access project, among others. This report summarizes an evaluation of the Vermont WIC Family Partner program.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact wic@vermont.gov.



Evaluation Questions and Design

The WIC Family Partner Program is a process evaluation with the goal of understanding onboarding, project work and impact and using information gathered to make improvements. As the WIC Family Partner program continues to evolve, and other Health Department teams endeavor to develop similar partner groups, an evaluation is needed to catalog successes and lessons learned, plan and implement improvements, and consider ways to expand. Evaluating the experience from both the Family Partner and staff

perspective will help to answer the following questions, which were developed in partnership with current family partners and WIC staff:

For Family Partners:

1. How clear is the process of becoming a Family Partner and being compensated for the role? (includes the application, onboarding, and invoicing processes)
2. At what level or to what extent have Family Partners engaged in WIC projects?
3. How has being a WIC Family Partner impacted participants? How has it impacted their perceptions and satisfaction with the WIC program?
4. How has being a Family Partner impacted the direction or final outcomes of projects they have been involved in?

For WIC staff:

5. How has working with WIC Family Partners impacted their role as WIC staff?
6. How has involving WIC Family Partners in their work impacted the quality and delivery of the final product?

The evaluation used mixed-method data collection with an emphasis on qualitative feedback. A total of nine interviews (5 with WIC staff and 4 with Family Partners) were conducted. The Community Participation Continuum was used to evaluate the level of project engagement from both the Family Partner and staff perspectives during the interviews. An inventory of projects grouped by category was analyzed for total time and cost over the study period of the first 2 years of the program, November 2022-October 2024.

Evaluation Results

Project Inventory

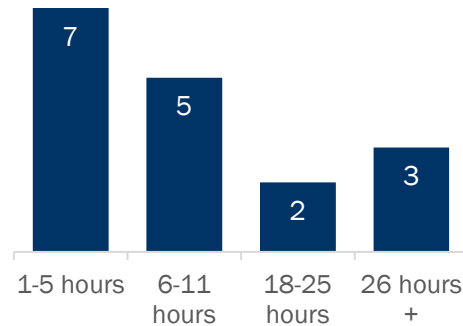
The project types that Family Partners were involved in fall into the following categories:

- Attending regularly occurring Family Partner Advisory Group meetings.
- Reviewing print or electronic resources (examples: My Feeding Plan and Welcome to WIC print resources, early development of the Participant Portal)
- Sharing experiences or providing input at one-time or ad hoc meetings (examples: Proposed WIC food package changes, NICU experiences)
- Participating in ongoing workgroups for larger projects (examples: Daily Drop app, WIC outreach)

The total time spent by 17 family partners over the 2-year period (November 2022 through October 2024) was 219 hours, costing \$5,475. Family Partner involvement ranged by the person from a minimum of 1 hour to a maximum of 45.25 hours over the 2-year time period.

The range in hours speaks to the flexibility of the program mentioned by Family Partners in the interviews, which allows them to opt into projects as their time and capacity allow. It also may reflect the ebb and flow of projects from the WIC side, where and at other times there is less need.

Time Spent on WIC projects by Count of Family Partners



Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative thematic data analysis was conducted by the WIC public health analyst and reviewed by the assistant director of WIC evaluation and quality improvement. Initial analysis was based on the themes of onboarding, project work, and impact. These themes were driven by the evaluation questions. Sub-themes were then identified based on the data collected. Transcripts and interview recordings were analyzed 3 ways - by question, by theme/theme subset, and crossover between themes. Results by theme and crossover themes are included below. Themes include Onboarding, Project Work, and Impact.

Family Partners

Onboarding

The onboarding experience for WIC Family Partners was described as straightforward, flexible, and empowering. Participants who were interviewed had been involved with WIC for several years before learning about the role through newsletters, local office announcements, or referrals. Participants said that it was a simple application process involving an online form and a short interview—followed by clear and welcoming orientation sessions. Initially, it covered basics like privacy requirements and administrative tasks (invoicing paperwork), and participants appreciated the flexibility of meetings and involvement levels, which made it easier to balance the role with personal commitments (having children). Overall, participants found being in our Family Partners program rewarding. This is because it offers a chance to earn extra income, contribute to the community, and engage in advocacy efforts (such as promoting inclusiveness in WIC’s messaging). The onboarding process seems to set the stage well.

Onboarding Thematic Subsets:

1. **Accessibility and Simplicity** – The application and onboarding processes were described as straightforward/easygoing.
2. **Flexibility** – Participants valued the flexibility built into both the onboarding process and the role itself. Accommodations like call-ins for meetings and self-paced project work were mentioned.
3. **Welcoming / Empowering** – Participants reported feeling empowered and that the initial group meetings were welcoming when they joined.
4. **Advocacy** – Some participants mentioned that the program encouraged active participation in shaping WIC’s messaging and impact.

“I felt like the orientation when we had a call with more than just me on was really welcoming and kind of put me at ease of like, oh, there's flexibility to this.” -Family Partner

“It's very empowering. You stop feeling like there's sort of this bureaucratic, invisible tape between, like, a social service you're receiving and is a participant of it. It's been really great to feel like I could bring voices to the table.” -Family Partner

Project Work

Projects that the Family Partners have worked on have been diverse and engaging. There have been opportunities to contribute to meaningful projects like the Daily Drop app and the Picky Eaters workshop. Participants appreciated the flexibility to work independently while having avenues for collaboration through meetings and discussions. Communication about projects seemed to be clear from the start, as nobody stated they had any confusion about the tasks. They felt prepared and informed. Most participants were pleasantly surprised by their level of involvement in projects and valued the opportunity to influence WIC initiatives/project outcomes. While the invoicing process is straightforward, minor adjustments, like training or reminders, could enhance the ease of tracking/documentation of hours and projects being worked on. Overall, project work has been a fulfilling way for Family Partners to make a meaningful impact.

Project Work Thematic Subsets

1. **Variety** - The Family Partners we interviewed have worked on a wide range of projects, including app development, feedback, conference participation, and material review, which shows the diverse opportunities available to them.
2. **Meaningful Contribution** - Projects like the Daily Drop breastfeeding app and Picky Eaters workshop highlighted meaningful projects our partners worked on, that directly supported families and improved Vermont WIC.

3. **Flexibility** – Similar to the onboarding section, independent tasks like proofreading were flexible (which appealed to participants with busy schedules), while collaborative opportunities through meetings and discussions added value and inclusiveness to their involvement.
4. **Effective Communication** - Clear project communication and access to clarification through calls or emails ensured participants felt confident and prepared in their roles.
5. **Invoicing and Process Improvement** - While invoicing was straightforward and compensation fair, minor challenges like tracking project titles and hours indicate potential areas for improved support, such as training or consistent reminders.

“I like all the approaches. There's definitely times that needing to be in a specific meeting might conflict with something else I've got going on. Recognizing WIC's income thresholds are fairly high. I think there's a good proportion of WIC recipients that are in the working class. So I think having the ability to do the work on your own time and be able to submit feedback is also really ideal for engaging people from different backgrounds and different ways to be involved.”-Family Partner

“I sometimes lose the e-mail and have a little bit of a hard time tracking down what projects I was involved in that month, or knowing what time period I'm looking at, like there's room for improvement, I guess I'll say.” -Family Partner

Impact

Being a WIC Family Partner has helped shape participants' views on the program, helping them understand/appreciate WIC's goals. While they feel their voices are heard and valued in shaping initiatives, better communication about project outcomes could enhance this impact. The role has increased satisfaction with WIC by offering meaningful opportunities to contribute and support their families (Income etc.). Participants encouraged others to get involved, though they suggested improvements such as consistent project availability and more community-building events to strengthen engagement further (in-person events).

Impact Work Thematic Subsets

1. **Enhanced Understanding of WIC** – Being a Family Partner provides participants with insights into WIC's operations and goals, which helps further appreciation for the program and reduces initial skepticism.
2. **Influence on Project Outcomes** – Family Partners feel like their voices are heard and they're impacting/shaping projects, but they note the need for better communication

when it comes to the outcomes of those projects, to enhance their sense of contribution.

3. **Increased Satisfaction with WIC** – Being a Family Partner has strengthened participants’ connection to and satisfaction with WIC, showing the program’s positive influence on both a personal level and the community.
4. **Opportunities for Improvement** – Participants suggested maintaining a consistent project workload and creating more in-person or community-building events opportunities to foster deeper connections.

“I think it definitely is given more insight about like everything that goes into the WIC program and all the different facets of it. And I've always had a positive experience with WIC, so I've been very lucky with that, but I think it definitely like highlights that how much people care about the WIC program and care about families and supporting them and everything. So I think it for sure solidified a positive opinion of WIC in general.” -Family Partner

“I have felt appreciated and validated by the WIC state reps that we work through with y'all like on a level I can't say I would have expected by going into it.” -Family Partner

WIC Staff

Onboarding

WIC staff members bring a wealth of experience to the program, with many who played a vital role in developing/implementing the Family Partner program. Their efforts ranged from securing funding and piloting the concept to creating materials and managing logistics for onboarding. This early collaboration is one reason the program had a successful integration. It helped demonstrate Vermont WIC’s commitment to developing a program for meaningful family engagement.

Onboarding Thematic Subsets

1. **Experience / Longevity** – Staff experience spans decades.
2. **Early Engagement** – Staff involvement (with creating the program) ranged from planning and creating processes to peripheral contributions. The WIC program also showed a deliberate development process pre-during-post COVID for getting this program up and running.
3. **Involvement** – Staff contributions included logistical support, application review, resource development, and outreach. Some were less involved but supported indirectly through family referrals.

Project Work

The project contributions by Family Partners were highly valued by staff, particularly when Family Partners shared personal stories or provided insights that shaped project outcomes and enhanced WIC programming. Communication methods vary, with email, group meetings, and one-on-one calls being used to accommodate different needs and preferences. Most staff viewed Family Partners' participation as falling within the "Involve" stage, where their input informs decisions while retaining state-level leadership. However, there is a shared aspiration to advance toward more "collaborative" involvement in future projects, recognizing the added value this could bring.

Project Work Thematic Subsets

1. **Diverse Project Scope** – Family Partners contribute to many projects, from high-level policy feedback (e.g., federal regulation changes) to localized initiatives (e.g., playgroups and app promotion).
2. **Valued Contributions** – Staff value Family Partners' input highly, especially when their feedback directly impacts project outcomes.
3. **Flexible Engagement Methods** – Staff recognize the importance of tailoring communication methods to participant preferences and project needs, ensuring effective collaboration.
4. **Potential for Deeper Collaboration** – While Family Partners are generally at the "involve" stage, their potential to move toward more collaborative roles is acknowledged.

Impact

Working with Family Partners has significantly impacted staff roles within the WIC program by building stronger relationships and helping staff better understand the families they serve. Staff members have become more proactive in contacting Family Partners for feedback, leading to better-informed decisions and more consideration of how changes affect participants. This increased collaboration ensures that projects align with family needs and strengthens the program's overall effectiveness. Additionally, Family Partner involvement has been valuable in shaping project outcomes by providing insights that our staff may not think of.

Impact Thematic Subsets

1. **Improved Project Development** – Family Partners' involvement allows WIC staff to anticipate challenges and address participant needs early in the project process, ultimately enhancing the program's quality and impact.

2. **Increased Awareness and Proactive Engagement** – The role of Family Partners has shifted staff thinking towards considering the family perspective before implementing changes, which has led to more thoughtful and meaningful adjustments.
3. **Value of Family Partner Insight** – Family Partners' contributions have directly influenced project outcomes, particularly in language access and scheduling adjustments, making programs more accessible and relevant to families.
4. **Future Growth / Expansion** – There is enthusiasm about the for the program's continued growth, expanding its reach, and improving recruitment and engagement efforts, particularly through local health agencies.

“It's just really valuable insight that they have so they should feel like they can share that with us and help shape the program because it is their experience. And it's going to make the WIC program better for all families if we do listen. So yeah, it's been amazing that we're doing in Vermont and I hope that we do it all around the country because it's really valuable.” -WIC Staff

“I think there's just so much value in hearing directly from participants about how they may read something or how may they interpret what we, and our roles are doing. Whether it's impacted my role, I think it's just it's given more working in a position where I'm not necessarily connecting with families regularly. There's like an element of excitement that I get to connect with them again and hear from them.” -WIC Staff

“I think it is very rewarding to get to know participants in this capacity because they're not there for an appointment. You know when they're at an appointment, you're asking them questions. They're answering, you know, very specific things, but they are able at least the groups that I've been involved in, they just are able to share from their perspective things that are very meaningful to them so that we can be sure that we're either making changes or providing services that will meet their need and I like I said earlier, I just, I really enjoy seeing their faces.”-WIC Staff

Level of Collaboration

Using the Community Participation Continuum (Appendix) participants described their level of participation as ranging from “involve” to “collaborate.” They mentioned initially expecting a lower level of involvement, but they were happy the level of involvement was more than expected.

Most staff placed Family Partner involvement in the “involve” category, where two-way communication allows for input on decision-making without fully shifting power. While this aligned with their expectations, some noted they'd like to see a push further toward “collaborate” on future projects. It should be noted that some of the family partners felt they were already engaging at the “collaborate” level of the Continuum.

Crossover Themes

The following ideas intersected between staff and family partners across the 3 themes:

Onboarding – The straightforward and empowering onboarding experience for WIC Family Partners highlights the dedication of WIC staff, who worked hard to design and launch a program that truly supports meaningful family engagement.

Project Work – The teamwork between Family Partners and staff has been a huge asset to the program. Family Partners have made a real impact through all the diverse projects they've worked on, while staff value the insights they bring. Strong communication and a shared vision for deeper collaboration have made these efforts more meaningful.

Impact – Being a WIC Family Partner has not only helped participants feel heard and valued but has also given staff deeper insights into families' needs, strengthening relationships and shaping more effective program outcomes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Both WIC staff and Family partners recognized the program's value in fostering meaningful engagement. They highlighted the importance of maintaining clear communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to improving WIC services. The findings emphasize the program's success in empowering families and enhancing WIC initiatives while identifying opportunities to refine processes and deepen engagement.

- Enhance communication about project outcomes to reinforce Family Partners' sense of contribution.
- Provide additional training for invoicing and tracking hours. Track hours by project type on the invoicing form.
- Explore opportunities for consistent project workloads and in-person community-building events which can lead to deeper collaboration.

Dissemination and Next Steps

Results of the WIC Family Partner Evaluation will be shared with state and local WIC staff and Family Partners in regularly scheduled meetings. The internal planning team that coordinates Family Partner work for Vermont WIC will implement the recommendations over time and data will be used in future recruitment efforts aimed at expanding the program. The report will be used to inform other Family Partner programming across the Department of Health and State Government.

Appendices

Family Partner Interview Guide

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Date:

Time:

Introduction and Consent

Hi and thank you for speaking with me about your experience with the WIC Family Partner program.

(Interviewer introduce themselves, as needed)

During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experience becoming a Family Partner and using the invoicing process. I will also ask about your experience being involved with WIC projects and how that experience has impacted you and your satisfaction with Vermont WIC. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to hear your honest feedback. These details will help inform best practices and recommendations for improving the Family Partner program. Overall themes from the evaluation will be shared with other states developing similar WIC Family Partner programs.

The interview should last between 30 and 60 minutes. You do not have to answer all of the questions and you can stop at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential, and we will not include names or identifying information in reports that we create from this interview without your written consent. If you have any questions or concerns after the interview, you can contact the project team at wic@vermont.gov.

Do you have any questions?

Do you agree to take part in the interview?

I would like to audio-record this interview to help with notetaking and to make sure I do not miss any of your feedback. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, we will take written notes only. Recordings will be stored on secure Vermont State servers and will be deleted according to Vermont records management guidelines. Do you agree to be audio recorded?

I would also like to video record this interview for possible use in a national conference presentation. This is voluntary and we would share any clips with you in advance of

including. Recordings will be stored on secure Vermont State servers and will be deleted according to Vermont records management guidelines. Do you agree to be video recorded?

Onboarding:

1. How long have you participated in WIC?
2. How did you hear about becoming a WIC Family Partner?
3. How long have you been a WIC Family Partner?
4. What was your experience with the application process?
5. Tell me about your orientation and onboarding to being a Family Partner?

Probe: What, if anything, felt unclear or confusing?

6. Now that you have been Family Partner for a while, what would you tell others about joining and becoming more familiar with the role?

Project Work:

7. What kinds of projects have you been involved in as a Family Partner?
8. Which project has been the most meaningful to you and why?
9. How do you like to engage in projects? For example, by email, in workgroup meetings or by providing one-on-one feedback.
10. Did you feel you had enough information about the projects you have been involved in?
11. [Screen share an image of the Community Participation Continuum]
- Where would you say your level of participation generally falls? Does this level of involvement align with what you were expecting when you applied to become a WIC Family Partner?
12. What has your experience been with invoicing for your time as a Family Partner?

Probe: Do you feel that the timing of payments is reasonable? Do you feel the compensation amount is reasonable?

Impact

13. How has being a WIC Family Partner changed your view of the WIC program?
14. How has your role as a Family Partner impacted the direction or outcome of projects?
15. How has being a WIC Family Partner changed your level of satisfaction with the WIC program?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about being a WIC Family Partner?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Again, your feedback will help improve our program and help other programs planning to engage in similar Family Partner work. The themes and results of the evaluation and any next steps will be shared at a future bi-monthly Family Partner meeting and internal WIC team meetings.

WIC Staff Interview Guide

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Date:

Time:

Introduction and Consent

Hi and thank you for speaking with me about your experience with the WIC Family Partner program.

(Interviewer introduce themselves, as needed)

During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experience working with Family Partners on WIC projects. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to hear your honest feedback. These details will help inform best practices and recommendations for improvement. Overall themes from the evaluation will be share with other states developing similar WIC Family Partner programs.

The interview should last between 30 and 60 minutes. You do not have to answer all of the questions and you can stop at any time. Your comments will be kept confidential. We will not include any names or identifying information in any reports that we generate from this interview without your written consent. If you have any questions or concerns after the interview, you can contact the project team at wic@vermont.gov.

Do you have any questions?

Do you agree to take part in the interview?

I would like to audio-record this interview to help with notetaking and to make sure I do not miss any of your feedback. Recordings will be stored on secure Vermont State servers and will be deleted according to Vermont records management guidelines. If you do not agree to be recorded, we will take written notes only. Do you agree to be recorded?

I would also like to video record this interview for possible use in a national conference presentation. This is voluntary and we would share any clips with you in advance of including. Recordings will be stored on secure Vermont State servers and will be deleted according to Vermont records management guidelines. Do you agree to be video recorded?

Onboarding:

1. How long have you worked for the WIC program?
2. How did you learn about WIC's Family Partner program?
3. Were you involved in the initial planning and organizing of the Family Partner program? If so, how?
4. What was your involvement with the orientation and onboarding of Family Partners?

Project Work:

5. What kinds of projects have you been involved in with Family Partners?
 6. Which project has been the most meaningful to you and why?
 7. What is your preferred method of engaging with Family Partners for projects? For example, by email, in workgroup meetings or by providing one-on-one feedback.
 8. [Screen share an image of the Community Participation Continuum]
- - Where you would you say Family Partner participation generally falls? Does this level of involvement from WIC Family Partners align with what you would expect?

Impact

9. How has working with Family Partners impacted your role with the WIC program? For example, do you think about your work differently since working with Family Partners?
10. How has Family Partner involvement impacted the direction or outcome of the projects?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about working with WIC Family Partners?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Again, your feedback will help improve our program and help other programs planning to engage in similar Family Partner work. The results of the evaluation and any next steps will be shared at a future bi-monthly Family Partner meeting and internal WIC team meetings.

Community Participation Continuum

Community Participation Continuum	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Share Power
	Led by state State holds power	Led by state State holds power	Led by state State holds power	Co-led Power is shared	Led by community Community holds power
Purpose	Share information, listen for understanding, and clarify information	Get and incorporate feedback	Ensure community needs and interests are considered	Partner and share decision-making power	Support and follow the community's lead
Communication Direction	One-way communication	One-way communication	Two-way communication	Two-way communication	Two-way communication
Works to	Address immediate needs or issues	Inform the development of state programs	Advance solutions to complex problems	Advance solutions to complex problems	Problems and solutions are defined by the community
Engagement Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Town halls ▪ Community meetings ▪ Media, Social Media ▪ Materials ▪ Website ▪ Newsletters ▪ Press releases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listening sessions ▪ Focus groups ▪ Interviews ▪ Surveys ▪ Working partner groups ▪ Public comment ▪ Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audience and user testing ▪ Advisory groups ▪ Steering committees ▪ Community conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collective impact ▪ Coalition building ▪ Partnership building ▪ Workgroups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attend community meetings ▪ Serve on community-led advisory boards ▪ Provide funding, data, & technical assistance ▪ Develop testimony & policies
Promise	We will keep you informed about our project.	We will listen to you and incorporate your feedback into our project.	We will make sure your concerns and needs are reflected in our project.	We will work with you to plan this project.	We will implement the project you come up with.
When to use	There is no alternative because of urgency, regulatory reasons, or legal boundaries.	You want to improve an existing service or program but the options for change are limited.	You need community perspective and buy-in to implement the project successfully.	Community members have a strong desire to participate, and you have the time to develop a partnership.	Community members want to own the project, and you are committed to a long-term relationship.