Appendix F1: Letter to State WIC Agencies

Letter to State WIC Agencies (Preliminary Notice of Funding Opportunity)

[FNS logo]
[Abt logo]

[date]

Dear [Name of State WIC Agency Director or Chief],

As you know, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has contracted with Abt Associates, Inc. to conduct a national study of the *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program in local WIC Agencies (LWAs) across the country. Now that the first phase of this research is complete, the study is entering Phase 2, the purpose of which is to determine the impact of an enhanced model of the *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program on breastfeeding outcomes.

We will recruit approximately eight volunteer LWAs to participate in this second phase of the study. We would appreciate your help in encouraging eligible LWAs to participate. (*Please note that this study is different from FNS' study of the impact of the new WIC food packages on participants' breastfeeding outcomes. We are not asking any LWAs to participate in both studies unless they would like to be considered).* Once the study is approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), we will issue a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), inviting LWAs to apply for grant funding to participate in the study. In the interim, however, we would like to give you some preliminary information about the study.

First, however, we thank you for your support of Phase 1 of this research. Your participation resulted in an implementation study that has provided FNS with an understanding of how funding for the *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program is being used, of variations in strategies for program implementation, and of service delivery. The report may be found here: http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/published/wic/FILES/WICPeerCounseling.pdf. Below, we outline plans for Phase 2 of the study.

Preliminary Notice of Funding Opportunity

The next phase of this study (Phase 2) aims to identify the impact of early post-partum contacts with peer counselors on first-time mothers' breastfeeding exclusivity and intensity. The specific intervention to be tested will consist of two "enhancements" to a local WIC agency's existing *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program:

1. Providing in-person or telephone peer counseling to willing WIC participants when they are in the hospital for delivery; and
2. Providing in-person peer counseling to willing WIC participants within the first 10 days after they have given birth.

First-time expectant WIC participants who agree to participate in the study will be randomly assigned to receive their local WIC agency's existing peer counseling services (the control group) or the enhanced peer counseling services (the treatment group). The study focuses on first-time expectant mothers in the belief that the *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program has the potential to have the greatest impact on this group, rather than mothers who have had previous children, who may be inclined to use the same infant feeding practices they used for their previous children.

All women participating in the study will be asked to complete two 20-minute surveys by phone (conducted by Abt Associates). Each woman will receive $20 for completing each survey, one conducted before their baby is born, and another conducted after their baby's birth. An additional $5

gift card will be offered to any woman who calls a dedicated toll-free number to report her baby's birth date within two-weeks of the baby's birth.

To be eligible to participate in the study, LWAs should meet the following criteria:

1. Offer an existing *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program that has been implemented in at least one WIC clinic or service delivery site for a minimum of 12 months by June 1, 2011;
2. The LWA's *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program must not already require peer counselors to contact WIC participants who are in the hospital for delivery of their infants;
3. The LWA's *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program must not already require peer counselors to hold in-person meetings with WIC participants within the first 10 days after birth;
4. Under the existing *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program in operation at the LWA, peer counselors must have an assigned caseload of WIC participants to whom they are matched (*In a caseload model, there is one-to-one matching of peer counselors is to individual WIC participants and this relationship is maintained over the duration of the WIC participant's enrollment in the peer counseling program*.)
5. Have the capacity to deliver the enhanced peer counseling services to a *minimum* of approximately 12 to 14 first-time mothers per month;
6. The LWA must be willing to participate in a study of the intervention, in which Abt Associates will randomly assign willing WIC participants to receive either the agency's existing *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program or the enhanced *Loving Support* Peer Counseling Program. Participation in this study will include:
    a. Successfully implementing the intervention during a two-month Demonstration Period and participate in the study for 12 consecutive months following this Demonstration Period;
    b. Two site visits to the LWA by members of the Abt research team, who will interview key LWA staff to learn more about the existing program and implementation of the intervention. The first site visit will take place the Demonstration Period. At that site visit, Abt staff will also work with WIC staff on study protocols to be used during the post-Demonstration Study Period.

Those LWAs that successfully demonstrate the capacity to deliver the enhancements to a target number of WIC participants during a two-month Demonstration Period will be considered for participation in the 12-month Study Period. The study will invite up to 8 LWAs and 1,800 WIC participants (approximately 225 per LWA, half assigned randomly to control, half to treatment group). Participating LWAs will receive grant funds on a pro-rated basis per WIC participant assigned to the treatment group to whom peer counselors successfully deliver the enhanced Peer Counseling services. These funds are intended to help offset the costs of the Demonstration Period, enrolling women and delivering the intervention to those assigned to the Treatment group during the Study Period, and other aspects of participating in the study. If eight LWAs are selected to participate in the study, then the average total grant to each LWA would be $20,000. However, the exact amount will depend on the the size of an LWA's peer counseling program and its capacity to deliver the intervention to half of the study participants assigned to the treatment condition.

Once the study has received approval from OMB, we will send you a Funding Opportunity Request (FOA) and ask that you distribute it to LWAs in [STATE]. After sending this FOA to State WIC Directors, we will then send the FOA directly to 250 LWAs in the U.S. states that we have pre-identified as likely candidates for the study. (As soon as we have identified this group of LWAs, we will let you know which of these 250 LWAs in your state will be receiving the FOA directly. If the State WIC director has any special concerns or wants Abt staff to be made aware of information that

will help them in their recruitment efforts, we will ask you to contact Abt's Study Director.) In addition, Abt will copy the State on its correspondence to the LWAs. The FOA will describe the purpose of the study, the anticipated relationship between Abt Associates and the LWA, and the amount of grant funds available to each participating LWA to support their implementation of the study.

For more information:
The research team at Abt Associates will be hosting a webinar (on three different dates) to provide more information and address any questions or concerns about the planned study on the dates below for interested local or State WIC agencies. Participation in a webinar is optional; questions and answers from each webinar will be posted online when the FOA is released. Instructions for participating in these webinars accompany this letter.

[URL of webinar]	
[date of first webinar]	[time]
[date of second webinar]	[time]
[date of third webinar]	[time]

Your cooperation and support of this study will be invaluable to the future of peer counseling in WIC. If you have any questions, you can contact the Abt Associates Project Director, Carter Epstein, at carter_epstein@abtassoc.com or (617) 349-2543. If you would like to speak to the FNS study contact, you can email or call Joseph Robare at xxxxxx@fns.usda.gov or 703-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

NAME OF DIRECTOR

Director, Supplemental Food Programs Division

Attachment: Webinar instructions

Cc: Regional Offices