

APPENDIX G GETTING READY FOR WIC EBT

State agencies that wish to develop an EBT system are encouraged to begin the planning process early. There are some activities that may be performed by the State agency prior to the formal planning process and may not require an expenditure of funds. There are a number of activities that State agencies should undertake prior to submission and approval of a Planning Advance Planning Document (PAPD). The following list is a compilation of examples of recommended activities:

- **Find Out Lessons Learned.** Have you talked to other State agencies with EBT experience? What lessons learned may help you avoid the risks involved with implementing EBT (risk management)?
- **Research EBT.** Review the FNS WIC web site for EBT and information system (IS) information found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/EBT-MIS.HTM>. Additional detailed information can be found on the WIC EBT Document Library website at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/apd/Library/WIC_EBt_docs.htm.
- **Obtain Retailer Support.** Have you established a vendor advisory group for EBT? How often will this group meet? Have you discussed with your retailers the need to integrate WIC functions in their cash register systems, i.e., system integration, the costs and development timeline in relation to your projected pilot and expansion plans?
- **Obtain State Support.** Do you have the support of State officials? Are there State legislative requirements? Do you need to coordinate with other programs? Does your State have requirements for electronic cards? What types of contract support will be necessary (planning, evaluation, project management, quality assurance, EBT processing services, software design and maintenance, operations maintenance) and what procurement vehicles are available to obtain these services?
- **Obtain IT Support.** Are there internal IT requirements or standards for system development? What technical support will the State agency require? How will that be obtained?
- **Determine How you Will Manage EBT.** Are resources available to hire a project manager (recommended)? Are staff available who can devote a significant amount of their time to the project, i.e., develop requirements, document review, coordinate with stakeholders (State, Federal, participant advocates, contractors, and retail vendors), and system development and testing?

Types of WIC EBT Planning Activities Requiring Contractor Assistance

Before developing a Statement of Work/Request for Proposals to obtain a planning contractor, the State agency should review existing documentation on WIC EBT, available on the FNS web site:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/apd/Library/WIC_EBt_docs.htm. A considerable amount of information already exists, including stakeholder concerns about EBT, EBT functional requirements, feasibility studies, cost/benefit analyses, etc. Thus, States should not use planning funds to pay for the development of documents that are already in the public domain, but rather to focus on the particular needs of the State agency relative to EBT. Contractor assistance may be needed to address the following topics:

- **Affordability.** Is EBT affordable in my State? Using an EBT Cost Model at http://www.fns.usda.gov/apd/Library/WIC_EBt_docs.htm (see Cost Analysis Guidance section), identify



the current operational costs of your paper-based system at the State level and at the local level. What operational functions (e.g., check exception handling with vendors, etc.) will be eliminated or reduced with an electronic delivery system? What functions might increase such as database maintenance and support? What are the underlying assumptions in determining affordability?

- **EBT Readiness.** Is your WIC system EBT-ready? To facilitate approval for EBT, the State agencies' IS must be EBT-ready, i.e., it must be robust, modern, and have the functions needed for eventual EBT development and implementation. For information on EBT functionality, see the FNS WIC website: http://www.fns.usda.gov/apd/WIC_FRED.htm
- **State MIS Gap Analysis.** What is my current system functionality and what changes will be needed to the system to make it EBT ready? What changes will be needed to make it fully ready for EBT operations? Does the gap analysis favor system upgrades or system replacement? What are your choices for system transfer? What current business processes would need changing?
- **Staffing.** What is the optimal number of staff needed at the State agency to manage a project of this magnitude? What staff expertise is needed and what EBT functions would need to be performed by that staff?
- **Technology.** What are the costs and benefits of on-line technology compared to costs and benefits of off-line technology? What technology can the State's infrastructure support? Do you have remote sites where telecommunications (i.e., phone, internet, and network) would be difficult to provide which may impact the selection of technology? What are the pros and cons of the various options for transaction processing?
- **Risk Analysis.** What are the risks inherent in WIC EBT project development and implementation? Are there risks specific to your State agency? What are the risks in order of magnitude? What are the strategies for managing risks?