



Western Region (WR)
Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA)
Competent Professional Authority (CPA)
Training Project



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Alaska WIC Program and
The University of Alaska Anchorage

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Executive Summary

Distance or online education appears to be the most realistic and efficient method of delivering WIC Competent Professional Authority (CPA) paraprofessional training, meeting the needs of Western Region (WR) WIC state agencies. This report recommends the Alaska and Virginia WIC CPA Paraprofessional Training Programs and Central Arizona College's WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate Program because they have the strongest online training ready for immediate use or modification. They meet Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) competencies and many WIC WR specifications. These programs incorporate more interactivity, engaging learners and helping them assess their own progress.

This report finds there is a wide range of WIC state agencies training needs, available trainings, various methods of delivery and unique regional strengths and challenges. Survey results confirmed face-to-face trainings are costly, and there are problems with limited training staffs, space and paraprofessional staff turnover. Furthermore, it costs money and time to develop quality training materials.

Five major tasks presented in this document were completed to arrive at the above recommendations. A Survey Analysis Process diagram on page 14 summarizes the project's tasks. Nationwide WIC CPA paraprofessional training programs (67/82 responses) were reviewed and analyzed via on-line baseline surveys. Of the 67, 23 listed on page 17 met the criteria for a telephone interview. Other training programs identified through the survey process were also evaluated. Eight training programs, Alaska, California, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia WIC and Central Arizona College exhibited the greatest potential for immediate use by WR WIC state agencies. They received in depth evaluations based on: Content and Competency Areas; Instructional Design Components; Training Policies and Program Design. Furthermore, ten United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Distance or online education appears to be the most realistic and efficient method of delivering training

Executive Summary

This report finds there is a wide range of WIC state agencies training needs

funded Food Assistance Programs were interviewed. A complete report and survey results are available in Appendices D through I on the Alaska Family Nutrition Programs web site <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/nutri/>.

The final recommendations of this project serve as a starting place for planning ways to realize collaborative cost savings. For successful collaborations in online training development and delivery, there needs to be a strategic plan that addresses software compatibility, quality online training principles, trainers' training needs, potential trainee pool, and access to the training content. Without such planning prior to collaboration, the format of training, including software and delivery systems, can become a barrier to sharing information from state to state. Additionally, states may need guidance in the appropriate use of online training, how to blend online training with face-to-face training, and how to create quality online content. With careful collaborative planning there is great potential for higher quality training at a reasonable cost for the WR WIC state agencies.

Scope of Work

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) WIC Western Region (WR) awarded the State of Alaska WIC Program (AKWIC) Operational Adjustment (OA) funds to conduct a nationwide review of paraprofessional training programs available within WIC state agencies and other USDA-funded Food Assistance Programs.

This project entailed:

- Developing a survey to evaluate WIC state agencies Competent Professional Authority (CPA) training programs for paraprofessionals and other USDA-funded Food Assistance training programs throughout the United States (US)
- Conducting, reviewing, and analyzing the survey
- Completing an in depth review of WIC state agencies CPA training programs for paraprofessionals that exhibit the greatest potential for use by WR WIC state agencies
- Soliciting feedback from WR WIC state agencies regarding their training needs
- Providing recommendations of CPA training programs for paraprofessionals ready for immediate use or modification meeting Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) WR specifications
- Preparing a final written report of findings and presenting this information at the Fall WR State Nutrition Coordinators' meeting

Purpose & Goal

Summarizing various training materials available may allow WIC state agencies to share resources

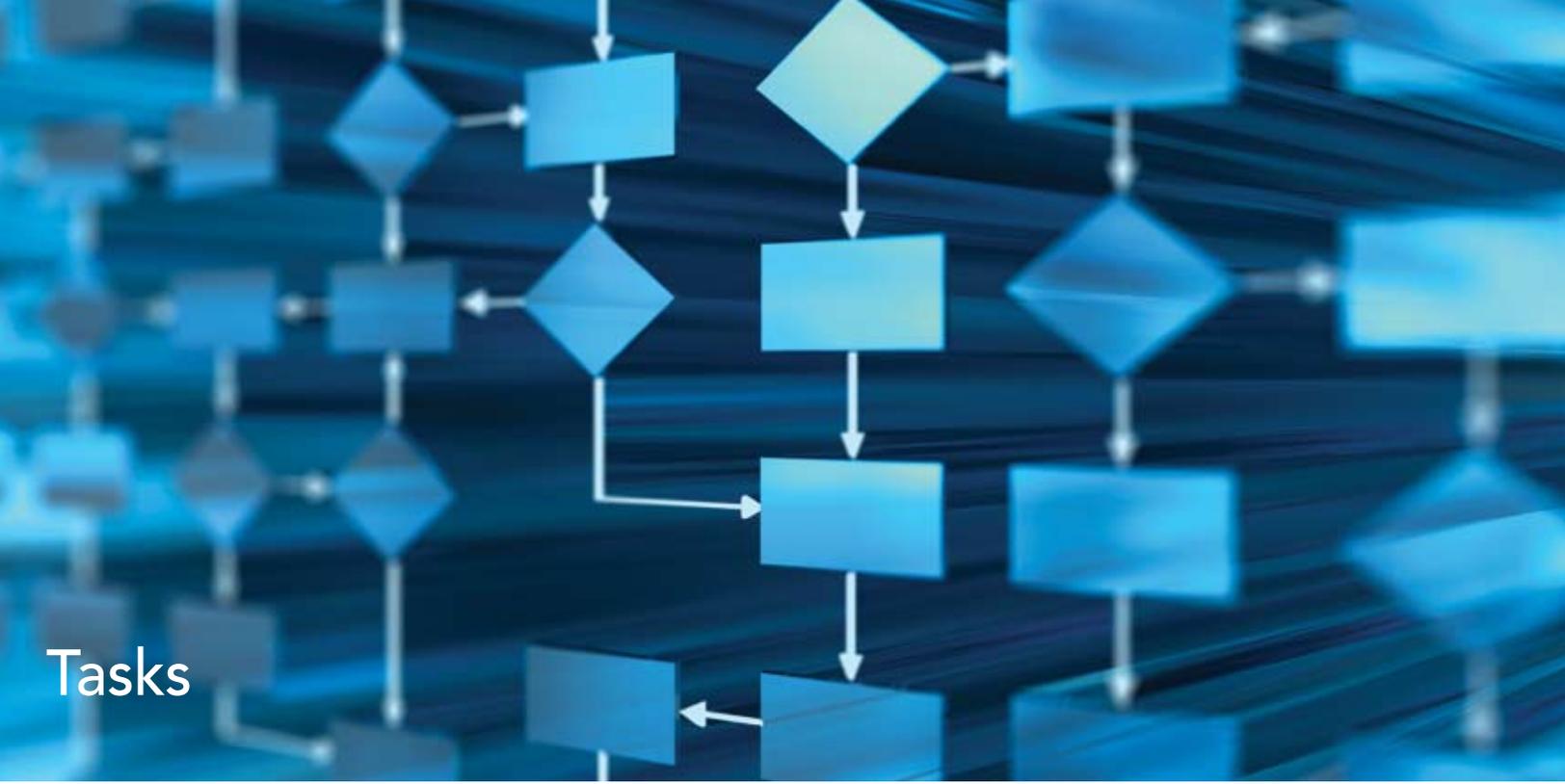
Purpose

WIC Nutrition Services Standards and VENA staff competencies include standards for state approved WIC CPA training programs. However, there is wide variability of how CPA training is offered in each state and often there is little streamlining of resources. Summarizing various training materials available and formats utilized may allow WIC state agencies to share resources or ideas for delivery methods thus providing more efficient and thorough training.

The State of Alaska WIC Program (AKWIC) and the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) collaborated on an Operational Adjustment (OA) project to find, evaluate and assess existing WIC CPA or comparable training programs for paraprofessionals, throughout the US.

Goal

The goal of this project is to recommend two to three WIC CPA training programs for paraprofessionals that are ready for immediate use or modification meeting VENA WR specifications.



Tasks

Task 1: Develop a Telephone Survey

Initial Survey

An online survey was chosen to collect baseline data in order to maximize consistency and efficiency of data collection from WIC state agencies. The following areas were addressed in the initial survey:

- Presence of paraprofessional training and whether any type of certificate is offered/available
- Whether there is college or post-secondary education credits associated with training completed
- Delivery method of the training program
- Specific technological or equipment required for the training program
- Competency areas covered in the training program
- Time required for completion of the training program
- Availability of the training program to other WIC state agencies

FNS Nutrition Service Standards (Appendix A), VENA Essential Staff Competencies (Appendix B), competencies identified by the WR Nutrition Coordinators at their March 2007 meeting (Appendix C), and WR VENA self-evaluations related to training were utilized to identify competencies to include in the survey process.

A pilot survey was developed and disseminated to the WR WIC state agencies. The Zoomerang survey tool was used for the pilot online survey. At the spring WR

A pilot survey was developed and disseminated to the WR WIC state agencies

Task 1: Develop a Telephone Survey Cont...

Nutrition Coordinators meeting in March 2007, the agencies who responded to the pilot survey were given a questionnaire to evaluate it. Results of the pilot survey evaluation were used to modify and improve the survey prior to disseminating it to all WIC state agencies nationwide. Health Systems Research (HSR) was consulted for recommendations on the final online survey. See Appendix D for the online survey questions.

For the purpose of this project, it was essential that trainings that received further review had potential for adaptability by other WIC state agencies

In-Depth Telephone Interview

Health Systems Research (HSR) was consulted for assistance with development of the in-depth telephone interview protocol. Four domain areas were determined to be most important to assess in the telephone interview. These domains are:

1. Content Area
2. Quality Related to Development and Maintenance of Training
3. Quality Related to Adult Learning Principles
4. Adaptability of Training

Content Area

Nineteen competency areas were assessed in the online survey. More detail regarding training on these competencies was explored in the in-depth telephone interview.

Quality of Training

Quality of training was evaluated in several ways. Staffing structure such as staff time allocated to training and staff qualifications were assessed. Systems for providing regular updates to training were assessed as well as methods of identifying and evaluating competency.

The other area of quality that was assessed was related to the format in which training was delivered. Questions were developed to determine whether the training materials and format allowed for learner interaction, appealed to different learning styles, and allowed learners to incorporate their own experiences into the training.

Adaptability of Training

For the purpose of this project, it was essential that trainings that received further review had potential for adaptability by other WIC state agencies. It was also important that adaptations could be made in a cost-effective manner. Questions related to adaptability focused on the format training materials were in (CD, online, print, PDF), copyright issues, train-the-trainer potential for training programs, and interest the agency had in collaboration with other WIC state agencies. See Appendix E for the full telephone interview protocol.

Task 2: Survey WIC State Agencies, USDA Food Assistance Programs, and other Organizations

Initial Survey

The initial survey for WIC state agencies was disseminated to all 87 State and Intertribal Organization WIC agencies using the Survey Monkey online survey tool. WIC state agencies that did not respond to the online survey were emailed individually a minimum of two times to request a response and an attempt to call these agencies was made. A response was obtained from 63 out of 87 agencies surveyed (72.4%). Each individual online survey was reviewed to determine WIC state agencies requiring an in-depth telephone interview.

In-Depth Telephone Interview

WIC state agencies who trained on at least three of the competencies of interest and who had training in a distance or train-the-trainer format were selected for this interview. Although it is recognized that WIC state agencies which train in an entirely live format may have a strong training program, for the purpose of this project, this format would likely not be immediately available or easily adaptable by another WIC state agency. Thirty two WIC state agencies of the 63 who responded to the initial survey (50.8%) were selected for an in-depth telephone interview. When these WIC state agencies were contacted, it was identified that some of them actually utilized another WIC state agency's training program. In these cases, only the one with the original training program received the full, in-depth telephone interview. Other WIC state agencies were contacted as needed to clarify information on the initial survey. Either a faculty member from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) or a State of Alaska WIC staff member contacted each WIC state agency to conduct the in-depth telephone interview.

In Depth Program Review

During the telephone interviews, each WIC state agency CPA paraprofessional training program was assessed for potential to be adaptable or useable by the WR. Those exhibiting strong potential for use received an in depth review of their program materials and training policies. How programs were ranked will be discussed further in the section on Task 3: Review and Analyze Survey.

The following flowchart illustrates how WIC state agencies moved through the survey process and criteria used to determine those that would receive further review.

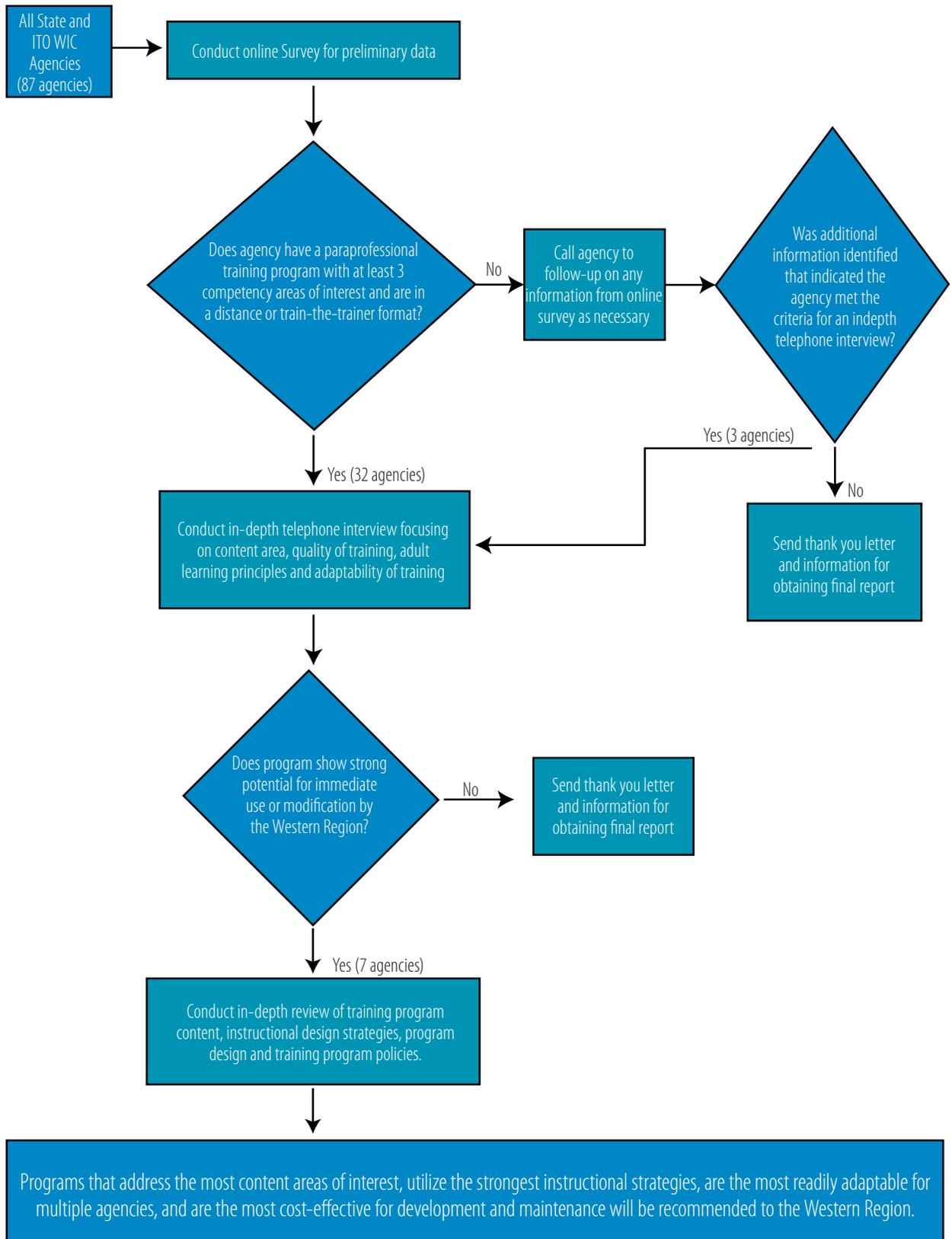
The initial survey for WIC state agencies was disseminated to all 87 State and Intertribal Organization WIC agencies

Western Region (WR) VENA CPA Training Project

Survey Analysis Process

Survey of Other USDA Funded Food Assistance Programs and Other Organizations

The Cooperative Extension program from each state was contacted to inquire about paraprofessional staff training. If paraprofessionals were utilized and trained at their agency, they were asked to complete a survey regarding training. Other organizations were identified based on the surveys from WIC state agencies. Organizations identified as a partner in training were contacted for information about the training they provide.



Initial Survey

Following attempts to reach all WIC agencies, 63 out of 87 agencies responded to the initial online survey (72.4%). Of these responses, 49 came from State agencies (89% response rate) and 14 came from Inter-Tribal Organizations (ITO) agencies (44% response rate). The complete results of the initial survey can be found in Appendix F. Some of the key findings will be provided here.

Based on responses provided in the initial online survey:

- 65% of agencies train paraprofessional staff
- 29% of those providing paraprofessional staff training partner with some other agency, institute, or contractor
- Less than 50% of states train in the following competency areas:
 - multi-cultural awareness (45%)
 - cultural competencies related to the population served (42%)
 - adult learning techniques (42%)
 - cross-cultural counseling skills (40%)
 - motivational interviewing (28%)
 - group facilitation (27%)
- Training methods include:
 - group live training (82%)
 - paper and pen modules (74%)
 - individual live training (65%)
 - downloaded modules or manuals (29%)
 - interactive online (internet or CD Rom) (29%)
 - video conferences (18%)
 - other (12%)
- There is wide variation in the time required to complete training from 1-25 hours up to greater than 125 hours.

In-Depth Telephone Interview

The in-depth telephone interviews allowed deeper exploration of programs as previously outlined. Some general observations were made in addition to some specific items from each agency interviewed.

General Observations

- Many agencies use OA funded projects as a primary source of their training budget. This could make continuity of training challenging.
- Many agencies are working to develop and include VENA essential staff competencies in their training programs. This is one area that has potential for collaboration.
- Agencies are increasingly using technology to help deliver training (internet, CD ROM) however, most often this entails posting a PDF self-paced module online rather than actual online instruction.
- Training staff generally does not feel they have a good forum for collaboration and sharing materials. WIC Works is available, but WIC state agencies do not seem to use this to the maximum potential.
- Online materials can be difficult to adapt when different software is used for development.

Individual Agency Observations

A complete summary of the telephone interview conducted with each agency and the rationale for whether a program was considered for further review can be found in Appendix G. A brief overview of each program will be provided here.

The table below provides an illustration of how each agency was scored in the in-depth telephone interview stage. Agencies who were contacted for an interview, but did not actually have a paraprofessional CPA training program currently in place did not receive a score for this phase of the project.

DOMAIN AREA	Content	Development & Maintenance	Adult Learning Principles	Adaptability
	Depth and/or breadth to content	Infrastructure related to development and maintenance	Adult learning principles exhibited	Potential for use or adaptation
Oklahoma	10	10	10	10
Massachusetts	10	10	10	10
Alaska	10	10	10	10
California	10	10	10	10
Oregon	10	10	10	10
Virginia	10	10	10	10
Texas	10	10	10	10
Maryland	10	10	10	10
Colorado	10	10	10	10
ITC Arizona	10	10	10	10
Navajo Nation	10	10	10	10
Washington	10	10	10	10
Missouri	10	10	10	10
North Dakota	10	10	10	10
Idaho	10	10	10	10
Montana	10	10	10	10
Ohio	10	10	10	10
Arizona	10	10	10	10
America Samoa	10	10	10	10
Florida	10	10	10	10
WCD Enterprises	10	10	10	10
Wyoming	10	10	10	10
Kentucky	10	10	10	10

In-Depth Review of WIC Paraprofessional CPA Training Programs

The program design domains were selected to help evaluate whether a particular training program met the Western Region needs

An in depth review of seven WIC state agencies' paraprofessional CPA Training Programs were conducted because they exhibited the greatest potential for immediate use or modification meeting VENA Western Region specifications. The in depth review assessed the following domains:

- Content Areas / Competencies
- Instructional Design Strategies
- Training Policies
- Program Design

Content areas and competencies reflect VENA essential staff competencies, FNS Nutrition Service Standards, and WR specifications for staff competencies discussed at the March 2007 WR Nutrition Coordinator meeting, and WR VENA self-evaluations related to training. Effective instructional design strategies were adopted from Anderson, T., & Elloumi, F. (2004). Theory and Practice of Online Learning. Retrieved January 26, 2006 from http://cde.athabasca.ca/online_book. Although this text is specific to online learning, these teaching strategies are core to student learning regardless of the delivery method so can be applied to all training programs evaluated for this project. The training policies and program design domains were selected to help states evaluate whether a particular program may meet its needs.

The following table shows a very basic overview of characteristics present in each program. Specific details for the individual programs can be found in Appendix H.

Area	AK	CA	MA	OK	OR	TX	VA
Content Areas / Competencies							
Principles of life-cycle nutrition	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Nutrition assessment process	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Anthropometric data collection techniques	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Hematological data collection techniques	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Communication	√	√	√		√	√	√
Multicultural awareness	√	√	√		√	√	√
Critical thinking	√	√	√		√		
Nutrition risk determination	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Food package prescription and nutrition tailoring	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Appropriate referrals	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Basic nutrition education and breastfeeding promotion and support	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
The need for an individual care plan and its development for low-risk and high-risk participants	√	√		√	√	√	√
Educational and counseling methods/techniques, including cross-cultural counseling skills	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cultural competencies related to the participants population served	√	√	√		√	√	√
Customer service practices	√	√	√		√	√	√
Issues specific to maternal and child nutrition	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
State Information Systems		√	√	√	√		
Environmental and family dynamics		√	√	√	√		
Program integrity (client, staff, vendor)	√	√			√		√
Program overview (certification periods, categories, food instrument use, income determination)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Competency in technology					√		
Basic office equipment (copier, phone, VCR/DVD)							
Writing care plans	√	√	√	√	√		√
Outreach		√		√			
Civil Rights	√	√		√	√	√	√
Confidentiality	√	√		√	√	√	√
Instructional Design Component							
Types of interaction available and encouraged:							
learner ↔ content	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
learner ↔ instructor	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
learner ↔ learner	√	√	√			√	
instructor ↔ content	√	√	√	√	√	√	
instructor ↔ instructor	√		√	√	√	√	√
content ↔ content	√						√
Expected outcomes are stated for learner	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Key to Colors and Abbreviations	
	VENA Competencies
	FNS Nutrition Service Standards
	Western Region Specifications for CPA competencies in addition to FNS Nutrition Service Standards and VENA competencies (per March 2007 meeting)

Review of WIC CPA Training Programs Cont...

Reasons for completing lesson is stated for learner		√			√		√
Support is provided during learning process	√	√	√	√	√		√
Structure of training allows learner to receive immediate or timely feedback	√		√	√	√	√	√
Material is sequenced in a way that allows learner to connect new information being presented to information already presented	√	√	√	√	√		√
Learners are provided opportunity to assess current knowledge prior to beginning a lesson					√	√	
Important information is highlighted or emphasized	√	√	√		√		√
Learners are provided opportunity to reflect on information (through items such as embedded questions)	√		√			√	
Learners are given opportunity to collaborate with other learners	√		√				
Learners are given opportunities to check their progress or assess their own learning during the lesson	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Simulations of real-life situations are provided	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Learners are asked to apply information to real-life situations	√	√	√	√	√		√
Multiple sensations are used by the learner Textual Verbal (auditory) Visual (visual layout/appeal) Kinesthetic / tactile	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Learners are given opportunity to link information being presented to their own life or personal/professional experiences	√	√	√		√	√	
Learners are given the opportunity to evaluate information being presented and construct their own knowledge	√					√	
Training Policies							
Preceptor / mentor guidelines or policies available	√	√		√	√		√
Trainee allowed to "test out" of training	√	√			√		
Final test required for certification / competency evaluated Knowledge Practical/ "Hands-on"	√		√	√			√
Program Design							
Use of activities with preceptor/mentor/ supervisor at Local Agency	√	√	√	√	√		√
Trainees required to conform to specific time schedule ("classes" start/stop at specific time) Synchronous Asynchronous	√		√				
Contract with agency outside of WIC utilized	√			√			
Different levels of paraprofessional certification are available			√				

Review of Other USDA Food Assistance Programs and Other Organizations

Other USDA Food Assistance Programs and Other Organizations providing training in the areas of interest were reviewed. It was identified that some agencies do provide excellent training however, their topic areas were not as closely related to the needs of the Western Region WIC Programs

WIC Works Resource System

- The WIC Works Resource System has a variety of training on specific competencies identified as important by the WR (see Appendix C).

Task 4: Summarize Feedback Survey Results

Following the in-depth review of WIC CPA paraprofessional training programs, the Western Region WIC state and ITO agencies were provided a feedback survey online. Nine of thirteen (69%) agencies responded to the survey. The survey questions and results can be found in Appendix I. The goal of the survey was to more closely identify the specific needs of the Western Region so that 2-3 WIC CPA paraprofessional training programs could be recommended.

Based on the feedback surveys that were completed, the following conclusions have been drawn related to the needs of WIC states agencies in the Western Region:

- WIC state agencies are interested in both a complete training program and pieces of training that could be utilized.
- The majority of WIC state agencies have some type of training model, but are looking for ways to improve it.
- Most agencies have limited ability to bring paraprofessional CPA trainees into one location for training.
- Local Agency Nutritionists have little time to work with trainees.
- Most agencies have websites, videoconferencing capabilities, high speed internet access, computers with sound, email, and DVD players available for trainees.
- Few states have secure training budgets in the form of a NSA budget line item.
- WIC states agencies generally need new staff trained quickly (less than 6 months, some need less than 3 months)

Task 4: Summarize Feedback Survey Results Cont...

Comparing these needs to the programs that received an in depth review, the following criteria have been identified to select the 2-3 programs most easily used or adapted by the Western Region WIC state agencies:

- Programs that cover most competency areas required by an entry level CPA paraprofessional and are already in a standardized format.
- Programs that utilize higher level technology to increase the amount of learning that a trainee can do with limited interaction with Local Agency Nutritionists or preceptors.
- Programs that have content available via the internet.
- Programs in which trainees can complete the materials in less than six months.
- A brief discussion of each agency that received an in-depth review of materials will be provided here related to these criteria.

Alaska

Alaska's content covers most competency areas of interest. They utilize the Blackboard Learning Management System for delivery of courses. A formatted curriculum exists that identifies where each competency is included in the training program. Alaska WIC has utilized technology to enhance the interactivity of the modules to include video clips, interactive case studies and self-assessment questions, and Flash learning objects. Work with a preceptor is still necessary, but there is some interactivity in the online portions of training. The majority of Alaska's modules are available to guest users via the internet. There is one class within Alaska's curriculum that requires registration and is offered at a specific time, which could limit how quickly a trainee could complete training depending on how frequently this course is offered.

California

The California WIC modules cover the majority of the competencies of interest and are organized in logical "Tasks" that a paraprofessional CPA would be conducting. The modules are online in a PDF format and do not utilize technology to allow interactivity within the modules. All interactivity would be with the Local Agency Nutritionist or supervisor. The modules are posted on the internet, but these are to print and there are not any online learning opportunities. The program could be completed quickly as long as there was time in the Local Agency.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts WIC covers many of the competency areas of interest. All training is conducted in a live format. Therefore, technology is only used in the form of live computer training. There are not training opportunities available via the internet. The training program requires individuals to come to live training so that training schedule, in addition to time available in the local agency, would determine how quickly a trainee could move through training.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma WIC training program covers most competency areas of interest.

They use the Blackboard Learning Management System for delivery. With this, they utilize that technology to allow multiple choice quizzes to be immediately graded to give the user feedback. They also make use of streamed video content in some courses. The majority of content is available to guest users over the internet. The courses are all self-paced and therefore could be completed as quickly as desired, as long as there was local agency staff to assist with the hands-on activities.

Oregon

Oregon WIC provides training in most competency areas of interest. However the modules for many of the areas have not yet been updated. The modules are posted online in a PDF format for print, but technology is not utilized to allow online learning. The modules are set up in a self-paced format to allow a trainee to complete them at their own pace.

Texas

Texas WIC has content on many of the competency areas of interest, but it is not organized into a standardized training program. Much of their content is available via satellite courses however these are only available to view in Texas WIC clinics. Emulating this would take considerable state staff time and the technology to have the satellite system. Some self-paced modules are available in PDF format online, but no actual online learning is incorporated. In Texas, the satellite courses are offered frequently which would allow a trainee to work through training reasonable quickly, but if a similar program was implemented in another state, the courses may not be offered as frequently.

Virginia

Virginia WIC covers the majority of competencies examined. The modules were developed to be in a general format, so there are little state-specific materials. However, updates are being made with state-specific content. Technology is utilized to allow interactivity within the module including self-check type questions, case studies, and some streamed video. The content is available via the internet with a username and password that could be provided by Virginia WIC. Virginia WIC is currently using the Blackboard Learning Management System, but is looking to move outside of that system. The modules are designed in a self-paced format and therefore could be completed at the trainee's pace.

Central Arizona College

Central Arizona College offers a specific "WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate," within their Nutrition & Dietetics Careers. The WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate provides the opportunity for individuals to develop skills and competencies in the areas of food, nutrition and health necessary for careers in public health nutrition. The Curriculum matches VENA competencies. The home page is <http://www.centralaz.edu/x647.xml> and a complete listing of all nutrition courses is available at <http://www.centralaz.edu/x653.xml#Online>.



Task 5: Provide Final Recommendations

Based on the considerations discussed, the Alaska and Virginia WIC Programs and the Central Arizona College “WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate”, are believed to have the strongest online delivery and could be utilized in a similar format by other states.

The results of the feedback survey indicate that WIC states agencies in the Western Region generally have limited staff time and budget for developing and conducting training both at the State and Local Agency levels. Many states also have a relatively small number of trainees making it difficult to deliver training in a format that is not self-paced (the training is then not offered frequently enough to get trainees through the program in a timely manner). However, the format of printed, self-paced modules requires all interaction to be held at the Local Agency which poses a staff time problem.

Distance or online education appears to be the most realistic method of delivering training that meets the needs of the Western Region WIC state agencies. In order for distance learning to be an effective teaching strategy, technology must be carefully selected and appropriately utilized. Distance education and online learning have been defined in a variety of ways. In its simplest meaning, distance education simply implies that the learner and instructor are not in the same location. This could range from correspondence study to highly interactive online instructional strategies. Anderson & Elloumi’s (2004) define online learning as:

“The use of the internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience.”

This definition underscores that online learning is more than making content available on the internet, but rather using the internet as a medium of instruction.

This project has reviewed a wide range of training programs. The programs that



were reviewed most in depth due to their potential for use or adaptation by the Western Region WIC state agencies were Alaska, California, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and the Central Arizona College. Massachusetts trains in an entirely live format, making it less conducive to meeting the training needs of the Western Region. Texas utilizes technology that is very specific to the Texas WIC Program, also limiting its direct use by the Western Region. California WIC has very strong content areas, but the format is limited to printable documents. Oregon WIC has updated some modules which contain quality, up-to-date content, but are also only available in printable format (no online interactivity). Central Arizona College offers on-line college credit courses specific for a “WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate,” within their Nutrition & Dietetics Careers. Alaska, Oklahoma, and Virginia all use the Blackboard Learning Management System to deliver online training. Of these programs, Oklahoma and Alaska are currently available to anyone through guest user access, with quizzing items only available to registered users. The Virginia modules are available if a username and password is requested from Virginia WIC. The Alaska and Virginia programs and the Central Arizona College “WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate”, incorporate more interactivity within the modules to engage the learner and help the learner assess their own progress.

Based on the considerations discussed, the Alaska and Virginia WIC Programs and the Central Arizona College “WIC Nutrition Assessment Certificate”, are believed to have the strongest online delivery and could be utilized in a similar format by other states. California, Oregon, and other agencies have specific modules with excellent content that could be incorporated into other training programs.



Future Directions and Considerations

The goal of this project was to do a thorough review of WIC state agencies paraprofessional training programs in order to recommend 2-3 programs to the Western Region that could be immediately used or easily adapted for WIC paraprofessional staff training. Over the course of this project, it became clear that there is a wide range of training needs, currently available training, and methods of delivery. Each state and region has unique strengths and challenges.

Traditional face-to-face group or individual training has become increasingly challenging in many states due to the cost of this type of training, limited training staff and space, and paraprofessional staff turnover. Agencies are looking toward alternative delivery methods for training. The time and expertise needed to develop training materials are substantial.

The implementation process of VENA has required all states to evaluate the training they offer and often look to enhance their training programs. This creates a unique environment for collaboration. States are generally feeling a need to seek available resources as opposed to creating all their own. The final recommendations of this project seem to more appropriately serve as a starting place for planning ways to collaborate and maximize the use of limited resources.

A transition toward online delivery poses challenges in maintaining the quality of training and ensuring compatibility of various training components. If the Western Region WIC state agencies are moving toward increased online delivery of staff training, it is imperative that funding and systems be established to create quality online training. Self-paced modules are one format of online delivery, however they do not allow for the most effective teaching strategies to be utilized. Courses which have a more structured schedule, with time lines and access to an instructor have the potential to improve learning.

Examples of online teaching strategies available to instructors of a course with a specific schedule that is not available in self-paced modules include:

- Due dates to assist with organization and motivation for learners
- Synchronous communication such as teleconferences, chat sessions, and online meeting sessions
- Opportunities for learners to build a community among themselves and learn from the experiences of other learners



- The ability to have discussions that stimulate critical thinking skills, cultural sensitivity, application of information, and improved communication
- The opportunity to invite guest “lecturers” to the online “classroom”

Particularly with the transition to more online training, there is great opportunity to realize cost savings by collaboration. The format of training, including software and delivery systems, can become a barrier to sharing information from state to state if this is not considered prior to collaboration. If incompatible software is used it may be difficult or impossible for states to directly share training pieces. Additionally, states may need guidance in the appropriate use of online training, how to blend online training with face-to-face training, and how to create quality online training courses or modules.

A significant issue in the Western Region is the small learning groups (trainees requiring training at the same time) in each state. If core standardized training was available online to all Western Region WIC state agencies, the specific “courses” could be offered more frequently therefore allowing trainees to receive a higher quality program while still completing training in a timely fashion.

For example, if one agency offered a course that was not self-paced and was offered on a specific time schedule with required weekly assignments, it would be challenging to offer this frequently enough to train staff in a timely manner. If trainees from multiple states were included, the training could be offered multiple times throughout the year, allowing for more flexibility in training schedule.

For successful collaboration in online training development and delivery, there needs to be a strategic plan that addresses software compatibility, quality online training principles, training needs of the trainers, potential trainee pool, and access to the training content. With careful planning there is great potential for higher quality training at a reasonable cost.



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