



Working Together for SPIRIT

Safeguarding the Health of Low-income Women, Infants and Children

The Facts About SPIRIT

In 2002, 13 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) in the southwest formed a consortium to develop the Successful Partners in Reaching Innovative Technology (SPIRIT) IT system to support the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. As part of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) State Agency Model (SAM) initiative—as directed by the Office of Management and Budget—it is based on the principle: “Build it once, and replicate it many times.” Development and launch of the SPIRIT SAM began in 2004 with first implementation in 2007. SPIRIT is the Management Information System at WIC State agencies (SAs) both large and small, will be implemented in six of the seven FNS regions* and is transferable to other SAs.

The initial SPIRIT consortium of 13 ITOs and 120 clinic users is expanding to 20 SAs and will soon have more than 3,500 clinic users. SPIRIT certifies and issues benefits to more than 412,000 participants (based on FY 2011 average monthly reporting) and will increase to more than 561,000 with full expansion (see table.) With this nearly 2,500 percent increase in growth in SPIRIT comes challenges. To ensure better investment decisions and improvements going forward, FNS has been working with independent third parties and stakeholders on initiatives to:

- Assess technical performance and implement quality and system improvements. This includes identifying areas to optimize design and structure in the SPIRIT MIS for clinic users.
- Implement strategic planning, including user and stakeholder evaluations of reported system issues and an improved process for SAs to prioritize resources and operations.
- Improve communications processes, venues and information access.
- Institute performance-based contracting for SAs to administer successful and viable contracts.

A recent survey of users and other stakeholders indicated participants had a favorable opinion of the SPIRIT system. As responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, FNS will continue initiatives to provide support for SPIRIT’s leadership and effectiveness in delivering benefits to those who need them most.

State Agencies	SPIRIT Participants**	Estimated SPIRIT Clinic Users***
Acoma, Canoncito & Laguna (NM)	549	8
Arkansas	93,461	785
Chickasaw Nation (OK)	3,750	30
Choctaw Nation (OK)	4,347	18
Eight Northern Pueblos (NM)	293	2
Five Sandoval Pueblos (NM)	373	4
Inter-Tribal Council (OK)	854	2
Minnesota	131,187	800
Missouri	145,767	850
Montana	20,164	140
Muscogee Creek Nation (OK)	2,793	14
Osage Tribal Council (OK)	2,807	13
Otoe-Missouria Tribe (OK)	512	5
San Felipe Pueblo (NM)	269	4
Santo Domingo Tribe (NM)	178	4
Wichita, Caddo & Delaware (OK)	4,368	17
Zuni Pueblo (NM)	802	6
Subtotal production	412,472	2,702
Alaska****	26,295	150
Maine****	26,103	100
Mississippi****	96,411	660
Subtotal	148,809	910
Totals	561,281	3,612

* <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/Contacts/fns/offices.htm>

** Official FY 2011 average monthly data as reported to FNS at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wicmain.htm>

*** Estimates were provided by WIC SAs based on participation data for July/August 2011

**** Not yet implemented

Keeping Pace with Technology

The SPIRIT system is a robust system with several key attributes:



Capability for a paperless clinic using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards with electronic signatures and scanning capabilities. Chickasaw Nation WIC Program is the first SAM system to use the EBT card



Four built-in benefit delivery systems: Checks, EBT, Vouchers and Direct Distribution



A 3.5 Microsoft .NET framework



Initiating regular (quarterly) SPIRIT software releases to enhance timeliness and accuracy with focused testing through an improved release process

Joining the SPIRIT Innovation

The SPIRIT consortium receives federal grants to enable the system to effectively support the WIC mission. The SPIRIT User Group (SUG) and an Executive Steering Committee (ESC) govern its overall structure and function. There are two options for adopting the SPIRIT system: 1) joining the SUG; or, 2) adopting the software without joining the SUG. SUG members share knowledge and experiences, manage system changes and protect the integrity of the system—for the good of all State agencies (SAs) and, ultimately, all WIC program recipients. To join the group, members must sign the “User Group Charter,” use the system core code (rather than creating any other version of the core code), share State Agency Model (SAM)-related information with other members of the group and agree to test and share test results on all new releases.

A significant user group mechanism is also the Change Control Work Group (CCWG), which is responsible for analyzing the technical and business impacts of any given system change request. Task Forces are identified as needed to address subject or module-related potential changes (e.g., Vendor, Food Package, Risk Codes, Clinic). Collaborating with the ESC, the CCWG ensures requested code changes will not have a negative impact on the system.

SAs must complete an Implementation Advance Planning Document to include a project plan, schedule and budget. Further adoption of the SPIRIT system is currently under a strategic pause to plan for future growth and requirements. Based on the technical assessment and analysis, a decision is scheduled for early 2012 to determine if further SPIRIT transfers will be allowed.

Collaboration and Training Tools

Bi-monthly SUG meetings and an annual user group conference ensure stakeholders are working together and have the proper training tools. SUG Connect (www.SUGConnect.com), a repository of valuable documents, is also available to the SPIRIT community. SPIRIT users, authorized contractors and authorized FNS personnel may request access to these tools from the SPIRIT Product Management Office (PMO).

Success Moving Forward

SPIRIT is committed to serving its current participants as well as providing a solid foundation for continued expected growth and technological improvements. Now and in the future, SPIRIT will:

- Provide a baseline to optimize use of WIC technology funds through strategic planning
- Maintain robust communications to all stakeholders
- Identify areas to optimize design and system architecture by assessing the technical functions
- Ensure compliance with state, local and federal priorities and requirements
- Enable effective reporting of trustworthy data
- Ensure maximum competition for future SPIRIT contracts
- Share performance measurement language and lessons learned
- Utilize strong, performance-based contracting requirements

Contact us for more information

FNS Regional Offices:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/contacts/fns-offices.htm>

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SPIRIT User Group Members

SPIRIT’s growth is captured in the diverse array of SAs with extensive geographic and ITO representation. From the northeast to the southwest to the midwest, WIC participants benefit from improved technologies envisioned for SPIRIT.

