

VENDOR AUTHORIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

Process for Vendor Selection and Authorization

The WIC program is funded by federal tax dollars. Because of this, serving as an authorized WIC vendor is a public trust. Vendor authorization is the process by which the State Agency assesses, selects, and enters into agreements with stores that apply or subsequently reapply to be authorized as WIC vendors. Authorization to participate in the program as a vendor is a privilege, not a right. As a steward of public funds, Georgia WIC must balance the need for participant access with the duty to obtain the lowest fair prices for WIC foods and to prevent fraud.

Number and Distribution of Authorized Vendors

The Georgia Women, Infants and Children Program shall not discriminate against an applicant or vendor on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability or other impermissible basis as set forth in applicable state or federal law. Federal regulations require that Georgia WIC establish standards for vendor authorization to secure a sufficient number and distribution of vendors that will ensure reasonable participant access and permit effective management of the program. Georgia WIC may establish criteria to limit the number of stores it authorizes as long as the limiting criteria are applied consistently (7 C.F.R. § 246.12(g)(2)).

The primary method for regulating the number of authorized vendors is through the use of a vendor-to-participant ratio. The vendor-to-participant ratios are determined prior to each application/authorization period. For vendor authorization, exceptions to the vendor-to-participant ratio conclusions may be considered under the following circumstances:

- The need to ensure that each food instrument issuance clinic site in the state has an authorized vendor within a 16-mile radius for metro designated counties or 20-mile radius for non-metro designated counties.
- The need to provide adequate service to participants in a population center of at least ten (10) individuals who have no access to an authorized vendor within a 20 mile radius of the population center.
- The need to provide adequate service to participants when circumstances make it necessary. Those circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - A. New clinic site opening;
 - B. Participant caseload increases;
 - C. New participant population center recognized;
 - D. Store closings, either voluntary or due to catastrophe;
 - E. Problems with WIC Program compliance;
 - F. Problems caused by non-compliance with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) regulations.

Application Acceptance Periods; Re-application Limitations After Application Denial

The Georgia WIC Program accepts applications for WIC vendor authorization throughout the federal fiscal year, commencing on October 1st. An assessment of the vendor-to-participant ratio will be conducted at the outset of each federal fiscal year (October 1st- September 30th), preceding each application/authorization period. This evaluation is essential to ensure compliance with federal regulations regarding the regulation of the number of authorized vendors as outlined in the Number and Distribution of Authorized Vendors.

If an application for authorization is denied, the applicant will be barred from reapplication for period of one (1) year with the exception of the Denial Reasons listed below. Denial periods vary based on the reason that an application is denied. At the time that a notification of Denial is issued, applicants will be notified of their reapplication date. Irrespective of the reason for denial, once denied, an applicant who wishes to be reconsidered must allow their Denial Period to expire and re-submit a new application after that date has passed. Applications are not re-considered until new application materials have been submitted.

1. Processing eWIC transactions prior to Authorization. The denial period is three (3) years.
2. Business Integrity and Related Denials. For Business Integrity or Integrity-related reasons, the denial period will be two (2) years.
3. All Other Reasons for Denial. The denial period is one (1) year.

Selection Criteria and Continuing Compliance with Selection Criteria

The selection criteria represent the minimum requirements to be considered for authorization as a Georgia WIC vendor. All applicants¹ and vendors must meet or exceed all of the selection criteria at the time of authorization and maintain compliance throughout the agreement period. Vendors are also required to adhere to any changes in the selection criteria made by Georgia WIC during their agreement period, or face termination. Georgia WIC may reassess any authorized vendor at any time during the vendor's agreement period using the selection criteria in effect at the time of reassessment and must terminate the agreement of any vendors that fail to meet the current criteria.

Georgia WIC will deny an application or terminate the vendor agreement if it is determined that the applicant provided false information in connection with the application.

¹ An applicant is defined as: anyone deemed associated with the ownership, management or operation of the applicant entity, including owners, officers, partners and, stockholders, registered agents, the immediate family of owners, officers, or partners. Any facts leading the agency to suspect that an applicant or vendor has a business or close personal connection with a WIC vendor that has a sanction history will be thoroughly investigated.

During the application process, Georgia WIC may request additional information that must be provided within the time period specified in the request.

All requested information must be provided in order to process the application. This includes, but is not limited to, Bill of Sale, Articles of Incorporation, Driver's License or State issued ID card, Social Security card, food sales, etc. Applications will not be processed until all information is received by Georgia WIC. Vendor applications that are held pending receipt of additional information will expire ten (10) days after the date of the written request for information.

Failure or difficulty in meeting any of the selection criteria may be used as just cause for denial of a vendor application for authorization. Applicants who are denied authorization may reapply after the expiration of the appropriate denial period.

Exception to WIC Limiting and Selection Criteria

The Georgia WIC Program reserves the right to make exceptions to (waive) the limiting and/or vendor selection criteria to address inadequate participant access to supplemental foods. However, competitive pricing and meeting the minimum WIC approved food stocking requirements are **not** waivable, per federal regulations 7 CFR § 246.4(a)(14)(ii).

Inadequate Participant Access

Federal regulations require that the State Agency ensures that all WIC participants have adequate access to purchase their WIC food items. By ensuring adequate access to authorized vendors, the Program assists WIC participants in meeting their nutritional goals. Participant access is not defined as participant convenience or preference. Inadequate participant access would cause a hardship to participants. Denial based upon the selection criteria may be waived (see "Exception to WIC Limiting and Selection Criteria"). The Georgia WIC Program will review participant access on a case-by-case basis.

Inadequate participant access is determined and documented on a case-by-case basis when considering whether the Georgia WIC Program should:

1. Retain a retail store in lieu of termination or disqualification;
2. Make an authorization exception decision;
3. Waive the selection criteria for the initial authorization of an applicant.
4. Provide financial assistance to obtain eWIC capability (i.e. provide a Point-of-Sale device for WIC transactions) and assist with ongoing maintenance and operational costs.

Inadequate participant access will be determined at the discretion of Georgia WIC when:

1. In a county identified as metro or including a metropolitan area, there is no authorized grocery vendor within 16 driving miles or geo-mapping distance from another authorized grocery vendor.
2. In a county defined as non-metro or rural, there is no authorized grocery vendor within 20 driving miles or geo-mapping distance from another authorized grocery vendor.
3. Geographic barriers exist that would prevent participants access to authorized vendors within the designated driving distance.

Georgia WIC must authorize an appropriate number and distribution of vendors to ensure adequate participant access to supplemental foods. Two of the six mandatory vendor selection criteria, as well as all Georgia WIC criteria, must be waived to authorize vendor applicants needed for participant access. For more information, see the chart below.

Selection Criteria	Must Be Waived
Minimum variety and quantity of supplemental foods (MSR)	No
Competitive price (CPSC)	No*
Current SNAP disqualification/CMP for hardship	Yes
Business integrity	Yes
Incentive items	No
EBT Capability	No**
All State agency criteria	Yes

* Georgia WIC will work with vendors that do not meet CPSC to negotiate the best possible prices for supplemental foods.

** This selection criteria applies only after EBT implementation. Georgia WIC must follow WIC EBT regulations and guidance related to equipping vendors that are needed for participant access.

Note: Should an applicant location be identified as an area where there is inadequate participant access, it does not absolve an applicant from the responsibility to comply with the terms of the application process as outlined, as a condition of authorization.

How to Become a WIC Vendor

To become an authorized WIC vendor, vendor applicants must comply with the selection criteria established by the USDA and the Georgia WIC Program.

The established selection criterion for authorized WIC vendors is as follows:

1. Complete, Accurate and Truthful Information and Documents. All applicants and vendors must provide complete, accurate and truthful information and supporting documents during the application process or whenever requested. If it is later discovered that an applicant or vendor has misrepresented or omitted material information or documents, the application will be denied, or the vendor agreement will be terminated. Failure to submit any documents or information requested by Georgia WIC within the required time frame will also result in a denial of the application or termination of the vendor’s agreement.
2. Previous Sanction or Violation History with SNAP or WIC Program. Applicants who have pending or current Terminations or Disqualifications (or were assessed Civil Money Penalties in lieu of Disqualification) that have not expired will not be authorized. Applicants who were assessed a Civil Money Penalty In lieu of Disqualification will not be authorized during the time period corresponding to the original Disqualification. Similarly, vendors who submit new applications

after violations have been identified (during the course of an audit, investigation, etc.) or who may be awaiting the outcome of an appeal will not be authorized. If it is later determined that an applicant had unexpired sanctions at the time of authorization, the vendor agreement will be terminated immediately.

3. Previous Applicant History. An applicant's prior application history with the program will be reviewed. Applicants whose information or documents are inconsistent with a previously submitted application or applicants who have engaged in serious fraudulent conduct or misrepresentation in connection with a previous application will be thoroughly investigated and will be denied if it is determined that the previous circumstances still exist. An applicant whose denial period has not expired may not be considered for authorization until after the denial period has expired and a new application has been submitted.
4. Competitive Prices. All applicants and vendors are required to submit and maintain prices that are at, or lower than, other vendors currently participating in the program.

Applicant – The prices, for the products listed on the application, will be reviewed and compared against the maximum prices allowed in the proposed Peer Group for vendors currently participating in the program. If a prospective vendor's prices **are more than ten (10) percent higher** than the maximum prices of actual vendors in the applicant's proposed Peer Group **on more than three (3) items** – the applicant will be notified that its pricing is not competitive and the applicant may receive technical assistance. Applicants will be given one (1) additional opportunity to re-submit prices after the initial notification. Upon the second submission, those applicants failing to submit prices that are lower than the allowable maximums will be denied authorization.

If this is a cost plus 10% store, the final price must be submitted on the price list as well as posted on the shelf or on signage in the aisle. This is the pricing that is used to determine competitiveness.

Authorized vendor – Vendors are required to submit and maintain prices that are at, or lower than other vendors currently participating in the program, within their designated peer group. Vendors must submit shelf pricing twice a year or semi-annually, at a minimum. If a vendor's prices **are more than ten (10) percent higher** than the maximum prices of others in its Peer Group **on more than three (3) items** – the vendor will receive a written notification that its pricing is not competitive. WIC vendors are required to maintain competitiveness during the entire agreement period. Vendors may be assessed at any time and those whose prices remain non-competitive for three (3) additional assessments, the vendor agreement will be terminated for a period of twelve (12) months.

A cost plus 10% store must post the final price on the shelf or on signage in the aisle. Pricing must be submitted for all WIC eligible items sold or anticipated being sold at the store location.

5. Acquisition of permit as a vendor in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Compliance with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Regulations. All vendors and applicants must acquire and maintain authorization as a SNAP retail provider. All applicants and vendors must adhere to the SNAP program rules and must remain in good

standing. Information submitted by the SNAP program will become a part of an applicant or vendor file and communication from the SNAP program that indicates a vendor's non-compliance with its rules and regulations will form the basis for a denial or removal from Georgia WIC Program. Applicants and vendors with a history of non-compliance with SNAP's rules and regulations will be denied or removed from the Program. Also, Georgia WIC will not authorize or reauthorize any applicant once the program has been notified that a retailer has been assessed a Civil Money Penalty (CMP), disqualified or terminated by SNAP. Failure to maintain a SNAP permit for any reason whatsoever, including terminations due to voluntary withdrawal or for non-redemption will result in a denial or termination from Georgia WIC unless necessary to ensure participant access. Retailers who have been assessed a Civil Money Penalty from SNAP will also be denied or terminated from Georgia WIC. Pharmacies and military commissaries are exempt from this requirement.

6. Authorized SNAP Vendor. Be an authorized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) retailer (pharmacy vendors and military commissaries are exempt from this requirement). A vendor applicant shall not become authorized as a WIC vendor if the store is currently disqualified from SNAP or the store has been assessed a SNAP civil money penalty for hardship and the disqualification period that otherwise would have been imposed has not expired.
7. Business Integrity. All new applicants and vendors must demonstrate business integrity. Georgia WIC will consider business integrity and history of the following: owners, corporate officers, partners and affiliates, or the immediate family of owners, corporate officers, or partners. Georgia WIC will also consider the business integrity and history of anyone involved in the operation of the business or the corporate entity, including managers, stockholders or registered agents. Any of the foregoing people that have a history of fraud, embezzlement, trafficking or has engaged in any activity that Georgia WIC deems to be indicative of a lack of business integrity will not be authorized. This includes but is not limited to the following:
 - a. Criminal conviction or civil judgments during the past six (6) years against the applicant, the applicant's owners, officers or managers for any activity indicating a lack of business integrity such as fraud, antitrust violations, embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, receiving stolen property, making false claims, or obstruction of justice.
 - b. Official records of removal from other federal, state or local programs will also be considered.
8. Business Integrity/Background Checks. All new applicants will be subject to background checks to determine the applicant's business integrity as part of the screening process. Georgia WIC may rely on an investigation using outside sources or upon information already known in a vendor or applicant's file. For each of the following people, entities or locations - owners, corporate officers, partners and affiliates, or the immediate family of owners, corporate officers, or partners and anyone involved in the operation of the businesses or the corporate entity, including managers, stockholders or registered agents, the below information must be disclosed:
 - i. Criminal records (current charges and/or past convictions or forfeited collateral for any crime).
 - ii. Official records of removal from other Federal, State, or local programs including whether above mentioned people or corporation ever had a license denied, withdrawn, or suspended or been fined for license violations, such as, business, pharmacy or health licenses. This includes instances where there has been a relinquishment of a license or voluntary withdrawal from a program.

- iii. Judicial determinations in civil litigation reflecting adversely on the integrity of the above-mentioned people, corporation, or affiliate(s).
 - iv. Evidence of attempt to circumvent disqualification from WIC or SNAP a civil monetary penalty imposed for violations of WIC or SNAP.
 - v. Evidence of prior fraudulent behavior of the above-mentioned people, corporation, or their managers.
 - vi. Other evidence reflecting the business integrity history of the above-mentioned people, corporation, or affiliate(s).
 - vii. Previous involvement with any business who has submitted an application (regardless of subsequent authorization) to the WIC or SNAP program and the outcome of such application.
 - viii. Previous violation history or Above-Fifty Percent assignment of the retailer.
9. Minimum Inventory of WIC-Approved Foods. Each vendor is required to stock and maintain daily the minimum inventory of approved WIC foods as well as a substantial amount of non-WIC foods. The inventory must be in the store or the store's stockroom. WIC minimum inventories must be within the manufacturer's expiration dates during the application process, including the pre-authorization visit, for the following WIC approved food items: **Milk, Eggs, Infant formula, and any potentially hazardous foods** (*meaning foods with time and/or temperature controls for the safety of the product*) **that are labeled "Keep Refrigerated"**. Expired foods do not count towards minimum inventory and is a sufficient ground for denying the application. **Note:** All observed concerns with sanitation and food safety will be immediately reported to the Georgia Department of Agriculture and may result in an application denial.

The minimum inventory requirements can be found at <http://dph.georgia.gov/vendor-information>. **Pharmacies and military commissaries are exempt from minimum inventory requirements.** The vendor must carry other foods outside of the WIC minimum inventory and WIC approved foods. It is expected that all applicants will meet and maintain minimum inventory requirements after the date stated on their application and at all times after the pre-approval visit is conducted. Applicants who have not met their minimum inventory requirements after their pre-approval visit has been conducted may make a written request for a second visit. Applicants must provide detailed reasons and corroborating evidence to support their reasons at the time the request is made. Requests will be granted for those who can show that: (1) sufficient merchandise was ordered but the supplier (due to no fault on the part of the retailer), was unable to deliver the merchandise; or (2) sufficient merchandise was in stock within forty-eight (48) hours of the visit but through unexpected customer purchases were depleted before the pre-approval visit; or (3) merchandise became damaged or destroyed after delivery; or (4) for other reasons beyond the control of the retailer.

10. Authorization Training. A vendor applicant must attend training and pass the post-training evaluation with a score of 80 or above. Georgia WIC will provide an initial training session in an interactive format, in person or virtual, prior to authorization, and at least once every two or three years thereafter during the corresponding vendor re-authorization period. Georgia WIC will provide vendors with at least one alternate date on which to attend interactive training. Attendance at training will be documented, a checklist of items discussed must be signed by the vendor and a Post Vendor Training Evaluation test will be given. A passing score of eighty (80) points or higher is required to become authorized. Vendor applicants cannot attend the initial

authorization training session until an application for authorization has been submitted and the vendor has registered to attend.

Upon request, the Georgia WIC Program will provide language assistance or accommodation to ensure meaningful access to training for vendor applicants and vendors with a language barrier or a disability.

An owner, manager, or other authorized store representative must complete training approved by Georgia WIC Program on eWIC procedures. The vendor must ensure that all cashiers and staff are fully trained on eWIC requirements, including training in the acceptance and processing of eWIC transactions.

11. Pre-approval visits. Only those vendor applicants that pass initial screening will receive on-site or virtual pre-approval visits from Georgia WIC representatives to verify the information listed on the application and inventory. For non-corporate vendors, pre-approval visits will not be conducted until the vendor has attended training and passed the evaluation with a score of 80 or above. For corporate vendors, only one (1) authorized representative from the store is required to attend training. At least one (1) pre-approval visit is required for each applicant location to verify the items listed on the application. The first pre-approval visit will be conducted at the date and time announced by the Georgia WIC staff. Georgia WIC reserves the right to follow up on any items in the application or observed on site at any time during the application process and may conduct additional visits to the applicant's store as required without notice. Georgia WIC may conduct a portion of the pre-approval visit virtually as an alternative to an onsite visit to facilitate the approval process. Failure to cooperate with Georgia WIC during the pre-approval process will result in application denial.
12. Re-Scheduling Announced Pre-approval visits. In the event that an applicant suspects that they may not be prepared for their announced pre-approval visit, they may re-schedule the visit twice during the application process. The applicant must contact the Georgia WIC office **IMMEDIATELY** to prevent denial of the application by calling 1-866-814-5468 or (404) 657-2900. The vendor will only be allowed to change this date twice—but must be completed within a thirty-day period or the application will expire and be denied.
13. Non-Profit Vendor. Non-profit vendors are not authorized in Georgia.
14. Required Minimum Store Hours. To ensure adequate access to food items for participants, the store (with the exception of military commissaries and pharmacies) must be open for business at least eight (8) hours per day, six (6) days per week, and must be open during the hours specified on the Vendor Application. In the event an applicant or vendor's hours are changed, they must notify Georgia WIC within twenty (20) days of the change. Military commissaries and pharmacies must be open for business at least five hours per day, five days per week. There should be no barriers to participant entry to the store during opening hours (e.g. required store membership or controlled access or entry to the store).
15. Suitable Store Location. For new stores applying to Georgia WIC for the first time, the minimum square footage requirement for vendors is 3,000 square feet of continuous retail food sales space open to the public, excluding all administrative and storage space.

Note: Not all areas of an applicant or vendor's store are counted towards the minimum square footage requirement. The square footage areas that are not "continuous retail food sales space open to the public" and are used for other purposes that are irrelevant to the purpose of the Georgia WIC Program **will not be** considered as a part of the minimum square footage requirement.

See Federal Regulations 7 C.F.R. § 246.12, which states: "Retail food delivery systems are systems in which participants, parents or caretakers of infant and child participants, and proxies obtain authorized supplemental foods by submitting a food instrument or cash-value voucher to an authorized vendor." The program utilizes grocers as part of its retail food delivery service.

No portion of the store may be located inside of a separate building, nor may any portion be located inside of a facility that is not food retail in nature (e.g. suite on the upper floors of an office building, inside of a community center, daycare, floral shop, etc.). The applicant must provide proof of a lease for at least a three-year period, or proof of ownership of the store location. There must be a store sign to identify the store with the name of the business clearly marked.

16. Licensed by the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Each store must have a valid Retail Food Sales Establishment License in the current owner's name and be in compliance with all state, municipal, and local sanitation standards. A current Health certificate must be posted in the store. Pharmacies and military commissaries are exempt from this requirement. Stores that are on the border of Georgia and another state must have a comparable food sales establishment license from that other state's Department of Agriculture. **Note:** All observed concerns with sanitation and food safety will be immediately reported to the Georgia Department of Agriculture.
17. Compliance with Georgia WIC Program Policies and Procedures. For existing vendors, any violations found during the re-authorization process may result in denial of the application for re-authorization. Vendors and applicants will be required to comply with all federal and state WIC policies.
18. Store Acquisition. Georgia WIC will not approve or continue the authorization of a store location that was sold or assigned to circumvent an unexpired sanction, claim or civil money penalty. Nor will Georgia WIC approve or continue the authorization of a store location that was later transferred to anyone involved in the ownership, operation, management or corporate structure (including registered agent) of location with unexpired sanctions, claims or civil money penalties.
 - a. The transfer or sale of a retail location with unexpired sanctions, claims or civil money penalties will be closely investigated before the location is authorized. In the event a vendor purchases or acquires a retail outlet that was in the process of being disqualified or which was disqualified from the WIC Program at the time of acquisition, the vendor's application for that outlet location shall not be considered until Georgia WIC makes a determination that the sale was a bona fide, arms-length transaction and that no one involved in the ownership, management, operation or corporate structure (including registered agents) will remain involved in the newly purchased store. If it is later determined that the applicant failed to abide by this provision, the vendor will be immediately terminated and subject to a claim.

- b. Ownership transfers of an authorized location to anyone related to the ownership, management or operation² of vendor retail outlet having unexpired sanctions, claims or civil money penalties at the time of the transfer is prohibited. It is later determined that there was a failure to abide by this provision, the vendor will be immediately terminated and subject to a claim.
19. Above 50% Criterion. All applicants, except pharmacies and military commissaries, will be assessed to determine whether they derive, or have the potential to derive, more than fifty (50) percent of their eligible food sales revenues from WIC food instruments. Vendors that meet the above 50% criterion will not be authorized unless denial of authorization for that applicant would result in inadequate participant access.
20. Infant Formula Suppliers. All vendor applicants are required to purchase infant formula solely from the suppliers selected and approved by Georgia WIC. The Program does not allow vendors to purchase infant formula from other program vendors. Only purchases from the approved list of manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers will be permitted. Records of infant formula purchases must be maintained for a minimum of three (3) previous years plus the current year (or until any pending investigations are closed). In the event of an investigation, only purchase invoices from those permitted suppliers will be considered as legitimate. The list of authorized manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers are posted on the Georgia WIC vendor website. The program may also require vendors to supply the program with written permission to confirm their infant formula purchase history with suppliers.
21. WIC Acronym and Logo. A WIC vendor or applicant may not use the WIC acronym, the WIC logo, or close facsimiles thereof, in total or in part, either in the official name in which the vendor is registered or in the name in which it does business. The WIC vendor or applicant may not use the WIC acronym, the WIC logo, or close facsimiles thereof, in total or in part, in an unauthorized manner on packages, product labels, proprietary materials including pamphlets and brochures, or in any form of marketing, promotional material or advertisement of the store.
22. Purchase Invoice Receipts. Vendor Applicants must submit, upon request, purchase invoice receipts, bills of lading or recent invoices that show the purchase of items intended for sale in their stores. Failure to submit the requested documentation within the time frame stated in the request will result in denial of the vendor application.
23. Automatic Clearing House (ACH) Application. Vendors who are authorized for participation in Georgia WIC will receive an ACH enrollment form. Vendors will have five (5) business days from the date of receipt of the form to enroll. Failure to enroll in ACH within the allotted timeframe may result in termination of the vendor agreement.
24. Provision of Incentive Items. Georgia WIC will not authorize or continue the authorization of a vendor that advertises, promises, provides, or indicates an intention to provide prohibited incentive

² A person associated with the ownership, management or operation of the applicant/vendor entity, includes owners, officers, partners and, stockholders, registered agents, the immediate family of owners, officers, or partners. Any facts leading the agency to suspect that an applicant or vendor has a business or close personal connection with a WIC vendor that has a history of violations will be thoroughly investigated.

items to customers. Incentives include, but are not limited to, free or complimentary gifts, home delivery of foods, store memberships, and other free or discounted services.

25. Pharmacies. A vendor who is placed in the Pharmacy Peer Group is only permitted to redeem special infant formulas and medical foods as specified on the Georgia WIC vendor website. All Pharmacy peer group vendors must be licensed and remain in good standing with the Georgia State Board of Pharmacies to provide prescription drugs and special medical foods in Georgia. Pharmacies are not required to maintain a SNAP permit, nor are they required to undergo an Above Fifty-Percent assessment.
26. Sign a WIC Vendor eWIC Agreement with the eWIC processor or a third-party processor (TPP) certified by the eWIC processor.
27. Be eWIC capable and pass certification testing performed by the Georgia WIC Program, when requested.

Vendor eWIC Enablement and Certification

In order to process eWIC transactions, vendors must obtain and be certified to use the appropriate Point-of-sale (POS) terminal(s) and/or software. Georgia has selected Conduent as the eWIC processor to facilitate all vendor enablement and certification processes. Conduent will contact vendors to discuss any follow up needed from the results of the vendor survey completed, obtain additional information and documents required for certification of the vendor's integrated POS system, and arrange for the setup of the single function equipment and any associated software required to process eWIC transactions in Georgia, as applicable.

To become authorized as a Georgia WIC vendor, a retail location must have their integrated POS system certified to accept eWIC by Conduent or a third- party processor certified by Conduent. or acquire a single function device provided by Conduent during the time specified by the Georgia WIC Program (statewide eWIC implementation) will result in termination of the vendor's WIC Vendor Agreement unless the vendor is needed for participant access. If the vendor location is needed for participant access, the location will be provided single function stand- beside equipment, following the guidelines for minimum lane coverage.

Vendors in need of assistance with the certification process, including completion of contract documentation and set up of single function devices, may contact Conduent using the information listed below.

Retailer Helpdesk (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week): 1-844-309-5652

Email Address: austinebt@conduent.com

Vendors should also contact Conduent for:

- Assistance with updating contract documentation (only applicable to vendors with stand beside devices provided by Conduent),
- Transaction history, settlement information, disputes, and reconciliation procedures,
- Support on system adjustments and resolution of out-of-balance conditions,
- POS terminal and scanner training, troubleshooting and replacement (only applicable to vendors with stand beside devices provided by Conduent).

Vendors with integrated systems should contact their third party-processor (TPP), if they need assistance with the areas listed above.

Please send eWIC program-related questions to the Georgia WIC Vendor Relations Unit at 404-657-2900 or via email at wic-vendor.relations@dph.ga.gov. Program vendor staff will answer your questions promptly.

The Authorized Product List (APL)

To appropriately configure an eWIC system to approve WIC supplemental foods for purchase, vendors must be provided the authorized product list also known as the APL. The APL file is a list of authorized food items established by Georgia WIC.

The first production level APL will be provided to vendors with integrated systems in early May 2022. Updates will be made to the APL, as necessary, prior to the go-live date for eWIC in the pilot region and provided to vendors accordingly.

The APL file must be downloaded daily to the vendor's cash register system to ensure accurate WIC eligible food items are available for purchase.

- Integrated vendors will obtain the file from Conduent's FTP site.
- Stand beside devices are configured to automatically receive the APL file if they are left on and have connectivity (via analog phone line or wired internet connection).

Regardless of the type of eWIC system used, vendors must ensure that the APL is downloaded to each eWIC device/outlet in their store at least once every 24 hours.

Produce Mapping

1. Georgia WIC is requiring integrated vendors to map produce to a Georgia WIC approved Price Look-Up (PLU) code.
2. Any WIC approved fresh fruit or vegetable without an International Federation of Produce Standards (IFPS) approved PLU must be mapped to an IFPS-approved PLU. This includes produce items with a UPC bar code.
3. It is the store's responsibility to map all required fresh fruits and vegetables. If produce mapping is not completed, the WIC transaction will decline.
4. Stores should reach out to their Electronic Cash Register (ECR) provider for instructions on how to map produce items.

Guidelines for Processing eWIC Transactions

Vendors must process eWIC transactions, accurately, in a timely manner and in accordance with the terms of the Georgia WIC Vendor Agreement, the eWIC Processor Vendor Agreement, the FNS EBT operating rules, standards and technical requirements, WIC Program Rules, and state and federal regulations, and statutes.

Transaction processing with the eWIC card is a more streamlined process because there are no printed FIs/CVV's to complete. It is important that a vendor owner, manager or other authorized store representative complete training on eWIC procedures prior to using the system. Furthermore, the vendor must ensure that all cashiers and staff are fully trained on eWIC requirements, including training in the acceptance and processing of eWIC transactions. The procedures used for eWIC processing are determined by the type of POS system used by the vendor.

Integrated Retailers

Retailers use eWIC software to submit transactions through a certified Third-Party Processor (TPP) such as, Fiserv Solutions, Inc. (First Data Corporation) or Worldpay US, Inc. A TPP is a full-service provider for transaction processing, reconciliation and settlement for all payment types supported by the retailer (including eWIC). TPPs charge retailer fees based on the type of service selected (i.e., per transaction fee). Questions regarding settlement or transaction processing should be directed to your TPP or corporate office.

Integrated eWIC Purchase Flow

1. An APL is downloaded nightly to the retailer's ECR system.
2. Items are scanned (no need to separate WIC items).
3. The universal product codes (UPCs) and price look-up codes (PLUs) are verified against the APL file.
4. Items are checked against the WIC family's benefit balance.
5. Items scanned are transmitted to Conduent's WIC Connect system for approval.
6. WIC Connect responds with approval and remaining benefit balance.
7. Once completed, if there are any non-WIC items remaining, the WIC family will be given the opportunity to pay the remaining balance with another form of tender.

Note: Depending on the retailer's ECR system, the card swipe and PIN entry could occur at the beginning, middle or end of initiating the WIC purchase transaction.

The transaction guidelines for integrated systems may vary slightly based on the POS system used. Vendors with integrated systems should refer to the guidance provided for their POS system for more comprehensive instructions on how to transact eWIC using their system.

Single Function Stand Beside POS Retailers (GA WIC provided equipment)

Single Function Stand Beside devices are often utilized by small chains or single store merchants.

The full cost of WIC single-function equipment will be borne by Georgia WIC prior to statewide implementation. There is no equipment cost to the retailer for an initial single function point-of-sale (POS) terminal lane or lane(s) if minimum lane coverage analysis reveals additional lanes must be equipped, for a maximum of 4 lanes. Each stand beside in the lane requires dedicated power and an analog phone line or wired internet connection. Equipment maintenance and retailer support is provided at no cost. There is no fee to the merchant for transaction processing.

There is a need to scan items twice at the POS and in the retailer's ECR system. The eWIC stand beside device can only process Georgia WIC transactions. All items purchased with WIC benefits will be a separate transaction from non-WIC items purchased by the WIC customer.

All retailers authorized after statewide implementation must demonstrate they are eWIC capable.

Stand Beside POS Terminal - eWIC Purchase Flow

1. Cardholder swipes their eWIC card.
2. Cardholder will then enter his/her PIN.
3. Cashier scans the UPCs or enters the PLUs into the stand beside POS terminal and scans each item on the register as well.
4. Cashier enters or confirms the food item price on the stand beside.
5. Cashier completes the transaction on the stand beside POS terminal.
6. The stand beside POS terminal prints a receipt that has the remaining benefit balance details for the cardholder.

Receipt of Purchase Requirements

The printed receipt provided to the WIC customer is a record of what was purchased at the vendor's store. Vendors must provide WIC customers with printed receipts in accordance with receipt requirements listed in the *USDA, FNS, WIC EBT Operating Rules* which can be accessed using the link below:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/wic/WIC-EBT-Operating-Rules-September-2014.pdf>

Additional eWIC Transaction Requirements

When performing eWIC transactions the vendor must:

1. Provide to the WIC customer only the approved Georgia supplemental foods, fruits, and vegetables contained in the APL, after it has been determined that the WIC customer has an available balance on the date of the transaction.
2. Refrain from scanning codes from UPC codebooks or reference sheets.
3. Transmit the current shelf price of all WIC-approved supplemental foods purchased in the correct sizes, quantities and the total dollar amount of all WIC-approved supplemental foods purchased.
4. Ensure that the checkout process for eWIC allows a reasonable degree of security for protecting the PIN used by the WIC customer.
5. Perform eWIC transactions using cashiers in standard checkout or self-checkout (SCO) lanes.

Additional SCO Information:

1. All SCO terminals must be Level 3 certified to accept eWIC by our eWIC Processor prior to WIC participants completing transitions at the SCO.
2. SCO terminals must be certified separately from the vendor’s standard POS terminals.
 - a. Failure to certify SCO terminals by the Georgia eWIC processor prior to completing eWIC transition(s) will result in the Georgia WIC Program’s recoupment of funds for any eWIC transition(s) conducted at SCO terminals.
3. Vendors that offer the use of SCO for eWIC transactions, must provide training to all store cashiers and appropriate store personnel.
4. Vendors must employ a cashier to be present in the SCO area during the completion of an eWIC transaction should technical assistance and transaction issues occur.
5. If a balance inquiry option is not available with the vendor’s SCO terminal, the vendor must allow for balance inquiries to be completed at another terminal within the store.

Payments to Vendors for eWIC Transactions

Vendors will receive payment for all eWIC transactions processed in their store through an Automated Clearinghouse (ACH) system in which payments are directly deposited into their bank account.

With eWIC, each food item will have a maximum allowable reimbursement level. The maximum allowable reimbursement level is also known as the Not to Exceed (NTE) amount. If a vendor submits an item price that is above the NTE, their payment will be decreased to the NTE amount for the item. Vendors are required to provide their bank account information to the eWIC processor to ensure payment for eWIC transactions.

A sample of the Georgia eWIC card is shown below.



Lost eWIC Cards

To report a lost or stolen card, call Customer Service number 1-844-309-5653. If found, return to: P.O. Box 81129, Austin, TX 78708.

eWIC System Installation, Upgrades and Maintenance

Vendors must also comply with the following policies regarding eWIC system installation, upgrades and maintenance:

1. Connect the vendor's POS system for each eWIC device/outlet covered by the WIC vendor agreement to the state's eWIC system at least once each 24-hour period to download reconciliation files and the Georgia WIC Authorized Product List (APL).
2. Maintain a Georgia eWIC processor certified POS eWIC system that is available for WIC redemption processing during all hours the store is open.
3. Request the Georgia eWIC processor to re-certify the vendor's POS system if the vendor alters/revises the system in any manner that impacts the eWIC redemption/claims process after initial certification is completed. The following applies:
 - If the POS eWIC system is reconfigured or modified by the vendor and/or other parties in such a way that the eWIC POS system no longer exhibits the required system accuracy, integrity, or performance required and under which requirements the eWIC POS system was certified, the state will not accept a redemption.

- The vendor is liable for all costs of all recertification events. Failure to seek recertification when the vendor's POS system is altered/revised shall subject the vendor to the financial liabilities for all transactions processed. For vendors with integrated systems, obtain eWIC card readers to support eWIC transactions within their store(s). The vendor must ensure that the eWIC card readers they obtain meet all eWIC and Georgia eWIC processor requirements. The vendor must: Purchase eWIC card terminals that are capable of properly reading eWIC card transactions. Ensure that the eWIC terminal(s) will be supported by integrated software that is fully capable of supporting WIC in-lane transactions.
 - The vendor's POS system must meet state certification requirements, including interoperability and Georgia eWIC processor requirements, prior to being placed in operation to accept eWIC transactions.
 - Acknowledge that the performance of maintenance, cost of maintenance, and cost of future replacement of terminals is the vendor's sole responsibility.
4. Not charge to the Georgia WIC Program:
- Third-party commercial processing costs and fees incurred by the vendor from eWIC multi-function systems and equipment.
 - Commercial transaction processing cost and fees imposed by a TPP, that the vendor elects to use to connect to the eWIC system of the state.
 - Interchange fees related to eWIC transactions.
 - Ongoing maintenance, processing fees or operational costs for vendor systems and equipment used to support eWIC after the WIC Program has implemented eWIC statewide, with the exception of vendors needed for participant access who require WIC-specific point-of-sale (POS) machines, accessories, and replacements or repairs associated with such devices.

Sign the WIC Vendor eWIC Agreement of the state WIC Program's eWIC Processor or TPP that has been certified by the state WIC Program's eWIC Processor. Failure by a vendor to sign and retain a WIC Vendor eWIC Agreement with the eWIC Processor or TPP will result in termination of the WIC Vendor Agreement. For any period of time during which a vendor becomes aware that or anticipates that it will not maintain the required WIC Vendor eWIC Agreement with the eWIC Processor or TPP, vendors must provide written notice to the Georgia WIC Program immediately, and no later than 24 hours from the time the vendor becomes aware of or anticipates such period of time during which they will not maintain a WIC Vendor eWIC Agreement. Vendors in need of assistance with the vendor enablement or certification process may contact the state's eWIC processor.

Vendors will also contact the state's eWIC Processor for:

- Assistance with setting up a stand-beside POS system.
- Assistance with updating stand-beside contract documentation.
- Stand-beside POS maintenance, training, troubleshooting, and replacement.
- Transaction history, settlement information, disputes, and reconciliation procedures.
- Support on system adjustments and resolution of out-of-balance conditions.

Invoice Assessment

Applicants and vendors must submit, upon request, invoices, receipts, or bills of lading which show the purchase of **all** items intended for sale in their stores. This includes WIC food items, non-WIC food items, household products, and miscellaneous items. Invoices must reflect the name and address of the wholesaler, supplier or distributors, date of the purchase, list of the items purchased, size, stock number, quantity, unit price and total dollar amount for the quantity purchased. Itemized cash receipts must include the name and address of the store or a code number by which the store can be identified, the date of purchase, description of the items purchased, unit price and total purchase price. Affidavits or oral statements are not acceptable as proof of inventory.

Failure to submit the requested documentation within the time specified will result in denial of the vendor application or termination of the vendor agreement.

Peer Groups

The Georgia Woman, Infants and Children Program maintains a vendor peer group system. A vendor peer group system is a means of classifying authorized vendors into groups based on common characteristics that affect food prices. The purpose of peer groups is to facilitate the application of competitive price criteria at vendor authorization and during the food instrument redemption process. The Georgia vendor peer grouping criteria is approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Each vendor is assigned to one of ten (10) peer groups. Vendors are assigned to peer groups during the selection and authorization process utilizing five (5) criteria:

- (1) Business Economic Markets (BEAs) – Geographic Measure
- (2) Sub-Markets (e.g., Metro or Non-Metro) – Geographic Measure
- (3) Type of Store (e.g., Supermarket or Non-Supermarket) – Size Measure
- (4) Actual Gross Sales or Estimated Sales Revenue – Size Measure
- (5) Type of Ownership (e.g., Chain Store or Non-Chain Store) – Size Measure.

Vendor peer group assignments are conducted at least quarterly. Authorized vendors are notified of a peer group designation. New vendor applicants are reviewed for peer group placement at the time of authorization and at the beginning of the next federal fiscal year quarter preceding the date of authorization.

Reporting Sales Information

Annual sales volume is a criterion used when assigning peer groups. Sales data includes non-food sales, non-WIC food sales, taxable sales and non-taxable sales. Sales data for vendors will be verified by the Georgia Department of Revenue (GDOR). The vendor must supply proof (tax return information) of reported sales figures, when requested by Georgia WIC.

For new vendor applicants, with less than one year of operation, estimated sales revenue supplied on the SNAP application will be used when assigning the peer group.

The sales information is to be provided quarterly or upon the request of the State Agency. If the information is not completed and returned to the State Agency within the proper time frames, the Vendor agreement may be terminated.

Not To Exceed

The initial Not to Exceed (NTE) amounts will be calculated on a Category/Subcategory level, using submitted shelf price list/market basket data obtained for all WIC food items, for each peer group. The payment for a supplemental food item cannot exceed the established NTE amount. Ongoing NTEs are established using actual WIC redemptions for supplemental food items within a vendor peer group.

Vendor Peer Groups

Cluster	BEA	Peer Group
1	11	J
	Non-11	K
2	11	M
	Non-11	N
3	11	H
	Non-11	I
Pharmacies	11	O
	Non-11	L
Military Commissaries	N/A	E
Above 50%	N/A	G
Vendors and applicants found to be an actual above fifty (50) % vendor where denial of authorization for that applicant or vendor would result in inadequate participant access.		
Note:	Above 50%	Applicants identified as actual or potential above fifty percent (A-50) vendors at application will not be authorized. Vendors assessed as A-50 during the annual assessment or at re-authorization will be terminated from the program. Pharmacies and military commissaries are exempt from this assessment.