

FAQ for Grocers

1 THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR AUTHORIZATION

How do I get an application to become an authorized VT WIC retail vendor?

What is my role as a retail vendor?

What types of fruits and vegetables are allowed for WIC?

What selection criteria must be met to be a retail vendor?

What if I have multiple retail locations?

What is a completed application and how long do I have to return it?

How long does the application review take?

What is an on-site visit?

What is a WIC Retail Vendor Agreement?

What is the length of the WIC Vendor Agreement?

What is the purpose of the question on the Corporate Application Form about whether owners or managers are relatives of Vermont Department of Health staff? We have hundreds of sales associates; how do I find out about this?

2 PARTICIPATING AS A VT WIC VENDOR

What is Vendor Training?

If we are off-line, do we use the Manual Voucher process used for food stamp EBT?

The Vendor Agreement lists as a sanctionable act the "Failure to provide security during the redemption process preventing the unauthorized disclosure of participant PIN numbers." What security does the state expect vendors to provide?

If a customer returns their fruit and vegetables and needs a refund, do we just refund to the EBT card?

What if a WIC participant uses a WIC card at an unauthorized store?

What if I sell my business?

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1 THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR AUTHORIZATION THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR AUTHORIZATION

How do I get an application to become an authorized VT WIC retail vendor?

Application forms and information are available by emailing phenry@vdh.state.vt.us.

Please review the Selection Criteria (below) before completing the Application Form online. Also, please be aware that only as many Retail Vendors will be authorized as are needed to provide WIC participants with adequate access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

You may also contact the State WIC Office to request an application packet.

VT Department of Health, WIC Program
PO Box 70
Burlington, VT 05402-0070

What is my role as a retail vendor?

Approved WIC retail vendors enable WIC participants to redeem their Cash Value Voucher EBT benefits (CVV) for nutritious fruits and vegetables. The WIC Retail Vendor Agreement, available on the WIC website, details all responsibilities, sanctions and penalties. By completing the Application, you are agreeing to follow state and federal WIC regulations as outlined in the WIC Retail Vendor Agreement.

The CVV benefits can be used by WIC participants only for fruits and vegetables authorized by the VT WIC Program. The remainder of the WIC food package will continue to be distributed by a home delivery program.

What types of fruits and vegetables are authorized on WIC?

Generally speaking, authorized foods include any organic OR non-organic fresh, canned or frozen fruit or vegetable, EXCEPT potatoes, AND EXCEPT fruits or vegetables prepared with added sugars, fats, oils, or salt. More specifically, the authorized foods include:

- Any variety of fresh whole or cut fruit without added sugars.
- Any variety of fresh whole or cut vegetable, except potatoes, without added sugars, fats, or oils (orange yams and sweet potatoes are allowed).
- Any variety of canned fruits (must conform to FDA standard of identity (21 CFR part 145); including applesauce, juice pack or water pack without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt (i.e. sodium).
- Any variety of frozen fruits without added sugars.
- Any variety of canned or frozen vegetables (must conform to FDA standard of identity (21 CFR part 155)) except potatoes (orange yams and sweet potatoes are allowed); without added sugars, fats, or oils. May be regular or lower in sodium.

What selection criteria must be met to be a retail vendor?

Retail vendors must meet the following WIC selection criteria:

1. Store is physically located within Vermont.
2. There is need for a WIC authorized retailer in the area to assure participant access to WIC authorized fruits and vegetables.

3. Retailer currently participates in, and is not disqualified from, Vermont food stamp (FS) program, and has no FS program violations.
4. Retailer has no serious WIC vendor violations in other states.
5. Retailer may not be authorized if the current owners, officers, or managers have been convicted of or have had a civil judgment during the last 6 years for the following:
 - 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.
6. Retailer must have the ability to maintain adequate stock of fresh WIC authorized food items. Retailers must stock at a minimum:
 - At least two fresh fruits AND
 - At least two fresh vegetables AND
 - At least two frozen or canned fruits, AND
 - At least two frozen or canned vegetables.
7. Retailer must provide a full line of grocery items, including meat, dairy, produce, (fresh, frozen and/or canned) and dry goods. (Smaller "convenience type" stores, with limited variety and inventory, may be authorized only if they meet all other criteria and State determines authorization is necessary to ensure participant access.)
8. Retailer must be open at least 8 hours per day, 6 days per week.
9. Retailer successfully completes on-site visit requirements.

What if I have multiple retail locations?

Grocery retailers must submit a "master application" with an addendum listing each store location for which authorization is sought. A "master agreement" applying to all authorized locations will be signed by the state and by a store representative who has legal authority to obligate the retailer to the WIC Vendor Agreement for all locations.

What is a completed application and how long do I have to return it?

An application is considered "complete" when all forms are fully and accurately completed, forms are signed by a legal authority of the retail vendor, and all other required documentation has been submitted. The application must be received within 60 days of the initial request for an application.

How long does the application review take?

The WIC State Office will review each application within 14 working days of receipt and determine whether the retail vendor meets the selection criteria in the Vendor Handbook. The WIC State Office may, at its discretion, request a retail vendor to resubmit or complete an application if the application is incomplete and determination of eligibility cannot be made.

If the application shows that the retail vendor does not meet one or more of the selection criteria, the WIC State Office shall deny the application. If the application indicates that the retail vendor would qualify, the WIC State Office shall make an on-site visit to verify the information in the application is accurate.

What is an on-site visit?

WIC Local Office staff will contact the retail vendor to make an appointment for an on-site review. During this visit they will:

- Verify the information contained in the application.
- Explain the VT WIC Program regulations that retail vendors must follow, and
- Provide training on how to complete a valid WIC transaction.

The manager and person responsible for store associate training must allow time at this appointment for training to be completed (approximately 60 minutes.)

In the case of a chain store application, each store location will be visited to verify information in the application, but the chain store may be responsible for training managers and cashiers at each authorized location.

What is a WIC Retail Vendor Agreement?

The Retail Vendor Agreement is an agreement between the State WIC program and the retail vendor that details the responsibilities of the retail vendor and the state, and the sanctions and penalties for non-compliance. Upon the submission of a complete application and a successful on-site visit, the WIC State Office and the retail vendor will sign the WIC Retail Vendor Agreement. Once the agreement is executed, the retail vendor will be provided with a WIC identification number, and will be authorized to accept WIC EBT cards for purchases and settle WIC claims using the state's EBT system.

What is the length of the WIC Vendor Agreement?

Vendors must complete a new application and sign a new WIC Vendor agreement every three years to continue accepting WIC CVVs. The WIC Vendor Agreement will expire at the earliest of the following events:

- The date specified in the WIC Vendor Agreement is reached,
- Ownership of the business named in the WIC Vendor Agreement changes,
- The Vendor ceases operation, or
- The WIC Vendor Agreement is terminated for program violations.

What is the purpose of the question on the Corporate Application Form about whether owners or managers are relatives of Vermont Department of Health staff? We have hundreds of sales associates; how do I find out about this?

An answer to this question is required by all states in the application process because of federal requirements regarding state monitoring for potential conflicts of interest.

The question does not apply to your individual associates, cashiers, clerks, and other staff. It is directed towards your owners, corporate officers and managers and general store managers only. (i.e. not managers of produce or other store departments; the single store manager only)

If anyone of these people is related to anyone who works for the Vermont Department of Health, it needs to be declared on the application form. And just because they are related doesn't necessarily mean that your store(s) will be ruled out. The declaration just needs to be noted so the potential for conflict of interest can be examined.

2 PARTICIPATING AS A VT WIC VENDOR

What is Vendor Training?

Prior to final authorization of retail vendors, a representative of the WIC State Office must train store associates who will be handling WIC EBT transactions, or who have been designated as store trainers. Vendors shall be responsible for ensuring that all store associates who will be handling WIC food instruments are trained.

Thereafter, the State WIC Office will provide annual training to retail vendors at all locations via newsletters, electronic bulletins and other means. Every three years all retail vendors are required to participate in at least one "interactive training," which will be conducted in person, at a regional meeting or by teleconference. Interactive training allows active discussion, question/answer and other forms of direct interaction between vendors and the state WIC Office. (This requirement can be satisfied through attendance by a chain grocer's training staff, as long as the corporation attests that all local staff will receive corporate-sponsored interactive training as well.)

If we are off-line, do we use the Manual Voucher process used for food stamp EBT?

No. VT WIC will not use a Manual Voucher process. In this regard, the WIC EBT CVV benefit is like any other bank debit or check card. The participant may choose to use cash or if eligible, the manual food stamp system, or may return at another time to use the WIC EBT card.

Also, NO RAIN CHECKS may be issued to a WIC Participant if the EBT system is off-line. This will be explained to WIC participants and Retail Vendors in the required training, and included in the shopping instructions provided to participants.

The Vendor Agreement lists as a sanctionable act the "Failure to provide security during the redemption process preventing the unauthorized disclosure of participant PIN numbers." What security does the state expect vendors to provide?

VT WIC will consider a vendor to be in compliance if the vendor has taken the steps necessary to comply with Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards.

If a customer returns their fruit and vegetables and needs a refund, do we just refund to the EBT card?

No refunds are allowed under the WIC program. The participant may exchange spoiled or damaged foods for an identical item, with receipt for original WIC EBT purchase. This will be explained to WIC participants and Retail Vendors in the required training and included in the shopping instructions provided to participants.

What if a WIC participant uses a WIC card at an unauthorized store?

WIC participants will be given a list of authorized stores and instructed to use authorized stores. Participants will be trained to show the WIC card to the cashier to identify the transaction as a WIC transaction before swiping the card in the POS terminal. Cashiers at unauthorized stores should inform the WIC participant at that time that the store is not authorized. VT WIC will work with retail grocer industry groups and others to inform unauthorized grocers of the penalties for transacting WIC EBT purchases.

VT WIC will receive daily transaction reports identifying both the retail vendor and WIC

participant for each CVV transaction, to audit for unauthorized transactions. VT WIC will take action as necessary to recover unauthorized use of CVV benefits.

What if I sell my business?

If ownership of an authorized vendor changes during the agreement period, the WIC Vendor Agreement becomes void. The new owner must file an application and be approved prior to accepting WIC food instruments.