

October-November 2014 Update

State IT team members from DII, AHS and the Health Department worked with our contractors Ciber and Xerox through October and November to prepare for and conduct Contractor-to-Contractor (C2C) testing. This phase assured that messaging and batch files between Ceres (now hosted on VT servers) and Xerox was configured and functioning correctly. A huge thank you to all involved; during November this important pre-User Acceptance Testing phase often involved daily telephone conferences and prodigious trouble shooting. It appears at this writing (Dec 10th) that due to the diligent work, this phase will be completed on schedule by mid-December. Again, Vermont WIC expresses deep gratitude for the persistence and dedication of our IT staff.

Meanwhile, Vermont WIC state staff completed all required configurations of Ceres in preparation for User Acceptance Testing. Food rules and food packages, the Approved Products List with UPCs and Not-to-Exceed pricing limits, VT WIC staff and their security roles in Ceres, all nutrition education configurations and other configurable elements are ready for testing starting in January. This huge milestone was celebrated with cake and frozen yoghurt, and a reminder that work will start up again in January on configuration updates due in May 2015 for the Production phase.

Xerox began contacting Vermont's authorized retailers to discuss the technical requirements for integrated eWIC, and also to offer stand-beside technology to those retailers who won't be ready for integrated eWIC by pilot in Rutland May 2015, or by rollout to the rest of the state starting in October 2015. State WIC staff is monitoring the integration activity, as FNS procedures now require state WIC agencies to "certify" that retailer systems are eWIC operational prior to Production phase. We anticipate these certification activities will begin in March 2015 to prepare for Rutland pilot. The three major grocery chains in our network (Price Chopper, Hannaford, and Shaws) will all be ready for certification shortly. Xerox will work with Dumac, the IT contractor for Mac's Markets and for the many small grocers affiliated with Associated Grocers of New England, in order to facilitate integrated eWIC for all of those retailers. Our shared goal with Xerox is to launch eWIC with as many integrated retailers as we can, and minimize the number of grocers using stand-beside technology.

State WIC staff began planning and preparation for the 2015 reauthorization of our grocer network. New selection criteria and minimum inventory requirements were adopted. Application packages will be sent to statewide chains and Rutland area grocers in January 2015, and authorization must be completed in time for pilot starting June 2015. The rest of the network will receive their application packages in March 2015 for completion of the process by September 30, when current agreements expire.

State WIC staff started development of a toolkit for District Offices called the Vermont Ceres/eWIC Readiness Toolkit (V-CeRT), to aid the districts in their preparation to convert to Ceres and eWIC. Modelled after the toolkit used in Oregon for conversion from WIC vouchers to eWIC, the Vermont toolkit serves the double duty for our change from a paper record WIC to the electronic Ceres MIS, and from home delivery to eWIC. V-CeRT will include timelines, checklists, and guides for the districts to prepare staff, as well as participants, local partners, and other regional and local state agency staff for the coming changes. The WIC director also established a task force of district office WIC directors and supervisors to help identify clinic flow changes and district needs for conversion and rollout.

WIC also has contracted with a communications firm to design participant education materials. We are very excited about some of their ideas, which include developing videos explaining eWIC and the WIC card, using the "whiteboard" animation techniques used in some national ad campaigns.