

# OK Mentorship Participants

## Tulsa Health Department (OK)

### **Background**

**State:** Oklahoma

**LHD Population Size Served:** 610,599

**Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected:** 3,400

**Retail Program Standards Met/Currently Working On:** 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, Self-Assessment, Improvement Plan

**Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards:** 2002

The Tulsa City-County Health Department (THD) has the overall goal to sustain an equitable system that prevents disease, promotes healthy living, and ensures preparedness for everyone. This mission is carried out by upholding the core values of health equity for all, collaboration with community partners to obtain goals, and to provide community empowerment and respect to maintain and improve the health of its people and the environment while maintaining service excellence. This is no small feat in a jurisdiction with 610,599 residents (as of July 2011, US Census bureau estimate) that provides services to individuals from many different socio economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Tulsa County is home to 16.1% of the total population within Oklahoma, second in size only to Oklahoma County which houses 19.3% of the states citizens.

Tulsa County is located in the Northeastern part of Oklahoma which is comprised of eighteen counties (which is larger than the state of Maryland). Tulsa County border touches seven of these counties and provides overlapping services for the citizens of these counties. In order for our County to provide the best possible service to its residents, the Tulsa Health Department Board of Health was created to act in an advisory capacity to the department's Director. The Board sets public health policies and helps establish the annual budget. The nine members are appointed to six year terms and strive to safeguard and promote the health of the people they serve as they strive to uphold the Department's vision of a community of empowered citizens making healthy choices that carry forward for future generations. Four of the members are appointed by the Mayor of the City of Tulsa, the largest jurisdiction within the county, and the remaining five are appointed by the Tulsa County Commissioners.

The Food Protection Services (FPS) Division within the THD has the mission to protect public health, to prevent the transmission of disease, and to meet the public's expectations for a clean, safe environment through the use of effective education and all available community resources. FPS provides inspections of all food establishments in Tulsa County and city jurisdictions extending into the surrounding counties. These inspections include restaurants, bars, grocery stores, convenience stores, school cafeterias, mobile food units, temporary vendors, processors and warehouses. Authority is authorized under Title 63 Oklahoma State Statutes, Contract Agreements with the Oklahoma State Department of Health and local city ordinances.

FPS's goal to accomplish their mission of inspecting the 3,400 food service establishments is done in cooperation and partnership with the food service industry and state restaurant associations. The FPS conducts approximately 10,000 inspections each year with a staff of a Division Manager, 4 supervisors, 20 Environmental Health Specialists (Sanitarians), 1 Office/Data Coordinator and 4 Clerical Support Staff.

### **Overview of Mentorship Program Participation**

THD participated in the NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program as a mentor in the second cohort (2012-2013). THD mentored San Juan Basin Health Department (CO) and St. Francois County Health Center (MO).

## **Mentorship Program Lessons Learned/Tips**

A big lesson learned is to not let several years go by without reviewing at least one or two of the previously audited Standards because attempting to tackle all of them at once can be very overwhelming. We recommend reading through all the standards and keeping a checklist ("self-assessment") of the policies, procedures, and other documentation that a jurisdiction might need in order to meet each Standard. Based on the developed checklist, determine which standard you have identified the most possibilities with and tackle that one first so the feeling of accomplishment will come in a relatively short amount of time. A "win" can help continue the momentum to tackle another Standard using the same process of choosing the next self-assessment based on the Standard with the most possibilities.

Another recommendation would be to reach out to those who have met a standard as identified by your FDA Regional Food Specialist or on the FDA website. Finding a "coach" or a "partner" is also beneficial so that they can assist with questions over the Standard being worked on, break down difficult sections, and provide sample documents that can be used to assist in continuing the process of meeting the targeted Standard. It is important to identify things that are unknown in order to be able to find partners to collaborate with and help your jurisdiction to improve.

Due to the complexity of several of the Standards, if possible, have an internal committee to work on the review of the existing documents related to each standard. This will foster buy-in from multiple staff and in turn they will have a larger investment in the program. Their involvement in the meeting the Standards will help carry your work forward and will also benefit to the succession plan of the program as it develops and evolves towards the future. A knowledgeable and well-trained staff is the legacy the Standards promote to carry on public health promotion and the prevention of disease.

## **Project Contact**

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## **Link:**

<http://www.tulsa-health.org/food-safety>