

Massachusetts Mentorship Participants

Arlington Health Department (MA)

Background

State: Massachusetts

LHD Population Size Served: 42,000

Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected: 200

Retail Program Standards Met/Working On: Self-Assessment

Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards: 2014

NACCHO Mentorship Program Cohort(s): 4

The mission of the Arlington Health Department (Office of the Board of Health) is to protect and promote the health and safety of the community. The number of staff involved in our food programs consists of the following: 2 full-time Health Inspectors, 3 part-time Food Inspectors (contracted), and 1 Public Health Associate from the Centers for Disease Control (through 2016). The Town of Arlington, Massachusetts occupies 5.5 square miles and is home to approximately 42,000 people. Arlington is situated 6 miles northwest of Boston, MA, bordering Cambridge and Somerville, MA to the east.

The retail food regulatory program in Arlington, MA, referred to as the 'food protection program', consists primarily of a risk-based inspection program where retail food establishments are grouped into 1 of 4 categories based on inherent food safety risk(s) of the operation, and the principal population served. This categorization determines the inspection frequency for each establishment, with those in 'Category 1' being inspected at least once per year, and those in 'Category 4' being inspected at least four times per year. For example, a gas station mini-mart selling candy and soda would be grouped in 'Category 1,' while a convenience store selling potentially hazardous or perishable foodstuffs, such as dairy products, in addition to pre-packaged snack-foods would be grouped in 'Category 2.' Most of the retail food service establishments, including, for example, bakeries, diners, pizza and sandwich restaurants, as well as coffee and donut shops are grouped in 'Category 3'. 'Category 4' is reserved for higher-risk establishments and includes those serving primarily highly susceptible populations, establishments with a history of chronic critical violations, and establishments engaging in specialized food processes, including those processes requiring a variance and HACCP plan.

The retail food regulatory program also consists of a robust food establishment plan review component where new food permit applicants are required to submit plans, specifications, menu(s) and a comprehensive application for review and approval prior to construction and subsequent operation. The plan review process entails in-office meetings, site walks and pre-operational inspections, as well as coordination with other inspectional services. Establishments that change ownership, which happens frequently in Arlington, are also required to complete the plan review process to ensure the establishment will comply with current Department guidelines and code requirements.

The retail food regulatory program is founded on the Massachusetts Merged Food Code (1999 FDA Model Food Code with State amendments) as well as additional local requirements passed by the 3-member local Board of Health. The Health Department derives its regulatory authority from the Massachusetts General Laws, the Code of Massachusetts Regulations, as well as local bylaws and regulations. The 'food protection

program' regulates approximately 200 retail establishments from convenience stores and restaurants to schools and nursing homes. Also under the jurisdiction of the program are frozen dessert manufacturers, residential kitchens, farmer's market vendors, and many temporary food events and festivals.

Role in Mentorship Program

Arlington participated in the NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program as a mentee in fourth cohort. The Lake County (OH) General Health District served as the mentor on conducting a self-assessment.

Lessons Learned/Tips

Undertaking the self-assessment was a daunting task, especially without a clear strategy. Having an experienced mentor helped in the very beginning to establish a starting point and clear course of action. Upon completion of our self-assessment, we were both surprised and discouraged that we did not satisfy any of the Retail Standards. Lake County was able to relate to us, and really helped refocus our vision so that we could develop a plan of action for the future. We learned the importance of documenting and memorializing some of the work we are already doing but not capturing on paper; however, the most important lessons we learned from Lake County and the Mentorship Program was not to focus on meeting all of the Standards at one time; but, instead, to acknowledge and appreciate the Retail Standards Program as a continuous improvement process. We now realize that as long as we are working towards standardization, we are working on providing our community with a better food protection program. We also learned there are small things we can do, which are not a burden to the budget or our staff, to implement new policies and procedures, or capture existing policies. We also understand, from our Mentor and the in-person meeting, the standardization process will create a foundation and legacy for our Department.

Contact

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Link: <http://arlingtonma.gov/departments/health-human-services/health-department/food>

Fairhaven Board of Health, MA

Background

State: Massachusetts

HD Population Size Served: 15,733

HD Staff: Director, Part time inspector, Administrative assistant, Part time associate provided thru NACCHO grant

Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected: 110 total.

Retail Program Standards Met by Verification Audit/Working On: Met Standards 3 & 7. Working on Standard 4 & 9.

Year Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards:

2017

NACCHO Mentorship Program Cohort(s): 8 and 9

Version of Food Code: 2015

Pursuing Accreditation: We are seeking accreditation.

Mission and Brief One Paragraph Background:

Fairhaven's mission is to set a standard for our Food establishments where we partner with the owners and managers to create a work space where all partners first goal is to protect the public's food supply, through employee illness policies, hand washing, safe food sources, hot and cold holding and proper cooking and cooling of foods and clean and sanitary facility. We meet with staff along with the owners and Managers to answer any questions an employee may have as to why we require the standards we do. This is a partnership.

Role in Mentorship Program

- Mentee or Mentor? Mentee
- Who were you paired with? Fairfax, Virginia

Accomplishments in the Mentorship Program

- In cohort 8, Fairhaven worked on Standards 3 and 7 and met both Standards with the help of the Grants. We were operating according to the standards, but we did not have the staff or resources to produce the supporting documentation. Through the grant and a lot of guidance from Fairfax, we passed the audits for 3 and 7.
- In cohort 9, Fairhaven participated as a mentee and was mentored by Fairfax, VA on Standards 4 and 9.

Lessons Learned/Tips

- Don't get overwhelmed.
- Apply for Grants.
- Work on one thing at a time. Start to finish you would be amazed how fast you get things done. Prioritize and schedule a specific time or day and work during that time on Standards. There is always another emergency or complaint. Make time to work on this even if it is a little time.
- Ask for help, use the resources available. You don't have to reinvent the documents, perhaps just amend them.
- You need to be flexible and able to adjust on the fly. BOH never knows what tomorrow brings.

- Progress is not always swift. sometimes slow and steady works best.

Contact

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Link to food safety program website:

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Marlborough Health Department, MA

Background

State: Massachusetts

HD Population Size Served: 40,000

Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected: 201

Retail Program Standards Met/Working On: Standards 3 and 4

Year Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards: 2015

NACCHO Mentorship Program Cohort(s): Cohorts 7 and 8

Version of Food Code: 2013

Mission and Background:

The Mission of the Local Health Department is to protect the health of the community by enforcing the State Sanitary and Environmental Codes. These services include: policy development, issuance of permits and licenses, ongoing inspections and surveillance, and reporting of infectious and communicable diseases. We are also committed to serving the community's needs in the event of a public health emergency.

Role in Mentorship Program

- 1) In the 7th cohort, Marlborough, MA participated as a mentee. Rockingham County, NC served as their mentor on Standard 4.
- 2) In the 8th cohort, Marlborough, MA participated as a mentee. Fairfax, VA served as their mentor on Standard 3.

Lessons Learned/Tips

- We were able to conduct a shortened inspection at the local hospital to get an idea of how the quality assurance program looks and actually works. Our mentor explained to us during the inspection and with handouts and example reports how the inspectors are evaluated. Experiencing the program firsthand makes it easier to visualize and understand how it should be used and can be implemented.
- During the inspection at the local hospital, our mentor discussed using a cooling rate to monitor foods that are cooling during the inspection.
- The discussion differentiating quality controls vs quality assurance was helpful. I plan to review Standard 4 policies and procedures checking the approach which is preventative and defines standards/methodology.
- Customize the data collection form and creating surveys.

Contact

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Link to food safety program website: <https://www.mass.gov/food-safety>