

Vector Control Collaborative Hurricane-Affected States Cohort *Post-Program Report*

[July 2020]

The National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO) Vector Control Collaborative (VCC) program strengthens the ability of local communities to detect disease threats spread by mosquitoes and ticks through targeted technical assistance in the fundamental capabilities of vector surveillance and control. In February 2020, NACCHO concluded the third VCC Cohort which targeted programs from communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. The "Hurricane-Affected States" Cohort consisted of four programs from North Carolina and Texas.

	MENTOR	MENTEE
NORTH CAROLINA	FORSYTH COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH	DAVIDSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
TEXAS	TARRANT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH	ABILENE-TAYLOR COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

Participants were given nine months to implement action plans that were developed based on priorities that each of the mentees had chosen to focus on over the course of the program. During this period, mentors would also develop strategies to assist their mentees in building their capacity to detect and respond to vector-borne disease threats. To further encourage peer-to-peer information exchange, the full cohort met regularly with subject matter experts from NACCHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to discuss progress, challenges, and best practices in vector surveillance and control. At the end of the program, participants attended an [in-person meeting at the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Vector Week 2020](#) in Fort Collins, Colorado to present to NACCHO and CDC representatives on their programmatic accomplishments, and participated in a focus group to discuss their experience in the VCC.

Key Accomplishments

Cohort mentees indicated that by participating in the VCC, they were looking for opportunities to grow and formalize their program through access to vector control subject matter experts. Abilene-Taylor County Public Health District described that their current program was the result of procedures passed

down from other staff within their health department, and that they were seeking validation of their work. Davidson County, by comparison, noted they were building their program from “a blank slate.” Forsyth County was able to advise Davidson County on the different types of trapping equipment and Geographic Information System (GIS) technology that would be most suitable for their departmental needs. Utilizing the new trapping equipment and GIS technology, they will be able to expand their surveillance, specifically within their parks. Similarly, Tarrant County advised Abilene-Taylor County on which equipment would be most advantageous to purchase with VCC grant funding. Tarrant County also worked with Abilene-Taylor County on properly setting up their new traps and advised them on ideal placement locations throughout their city. Using this new knowledge, the City of Abilene’s Emergency Preparedness Coordinator will set traps, collect mosquitoes, conduct mosquito identification, apply treatments, and help sustain the program in the absence of a VCC intern.* Abilene-Taylor County plans to continue to collaborate with Dyess Air Force Base and the County’s epidemiology department for mosquito surveillance activities, and the parks department to educate the public on mosquito and tick control and prevention.

Program mentors viewed the VCC as an opportunity to contribute to state-wide vector preparedness and the larger field of vector control. Tarrant County noted that although they participate in the Texas Mosquito Control Association and the American Mosquito Control Association, **the VCC was an opportunity to reach professionals who are not involved with those groups and do not have entomological training.** For Tarrant County, the VCC provided a window into the ways in which their training could be applied across the state and the nation. Forsyth County Department of Public Health, which had a preexisting relationship with their mentee, viewed this as an opportunity to help a neighboring county and was able to consequently add surveillance data to their region, benefiting their own program.

Program Improvements

Participants provided suggestions for program improvement, many of which centered on addressing time constraints and easing the administrative burden. Participants expressed that the project period needed to be extended to better support the administrative processes that come with the grant. Many participants indicated that the project period should run for an entire year to allow for time to work through logistical hurdles, and noted that extending the mentorship through the mosquito season would allow mentors to demonstrate more of their operations to their mentees. Additionally, participants agreed that the development of standard operating procedures and guides for the mentorship program would be helpful. Specifically, they requested a budget/reimbursement guide for the types of expenses included in NACCHO categories, and a guidance document to help awardees understand the grant process.

Opportunities and Considerations for Future Cohorts

*Abilene-Taylor County budgeted for an intern through the VCC project to do GIS work and draft standard operating procedures. The County also mentioned that the VCC program helped to launch their intern into a Master’s program.

- **The administrative work behind the program** was brought up by participants throughout the focus group.
 - Mentors expressed their desire to help other programs but admitted that the administrative burden of smaller funding amounts can be a deterrent.
 - Participants noted that it would be helpful if mentors were offered assistance in making the case to their leadership for why participating in the VCC would benefit their program.
 - To address the administrative burden, participants suggested that the VCC program could begin in the off-season/winter to allow for time to work through logistical hurdles. Items such as travel should be addressed at the start of the program to ensure that any potential administrative barriers are brought to light and addressed before moving forward.
 - Participants also asked that the different mosquito seasons among states be taken into consideration when adjusting the program period.
- **Mentor(s) also expressed that it would be advantageous** if they could obtain more information about their mentee's current capabilities at the start of the program (e.g., using a pre-program questionnaire). This additional information would help to inform initial meetings and subsequently, their action plan for the project.
 - VCC mentees in previous cohorts have reported that a benefit of the VCC is having a mentor advise on equipment purchases. This may pose an opportunity for the CDC and NACCHO to work with vector subject matter experts to provide guidance on equipment purchases for jurisdictions who are in the process of developing a vector program.
- **Ultimately, participants have voiced that they find value in the VCC** and would want to continue to stay in touch with their cohort.
 - Moving forward, this poses an opportunity for NACCHO to facilitate a dedicated community of practice for past and future VCC participants as a lasting benefit of the mentorship program.

For more information about the Vector Control Collaborative Program, please visit NACCHO's Vector Control Web Site:

www.naccho.org/programs/environmental-health/hazards/vector-control

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NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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