

Accomplishments of the FDA and NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program



Background

Since 2012, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has invested over \$1.4 million* through a Cooperative Agreement in a mentorship program that the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) has used to provide 124 awards to retail food regulatory programs. The mentorship program supports retail food regulatory programs in implementing the Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards (Retail Program Standards). The program provides peer-to-peer assistance and intensive technical support to help implement the standards efficiently and effectively. Experienced retail food regulatory programs advise participating agencies on how to get started and best apply the Retail Program Standards to improve their programs. Mentees also gain insight on developing and implementing policies and procedures, completing self-assessments, and conducting verification audits.

The mentorship program provides funds for the completion of projects and training to enhance conformance with Retail Program Standards. Participants have been able to improve their inspection programs, train more inspection staff, enhance customer service, and implement innovative strategies to reduce risk factors at retail food establishments that may cause or contribute to foodborne illness outbreaks.

The mentorship program period is typically nine to 10 months long. However, participants typically have seven to eight months to work on their work plan after refining and finalizing their plans with their mentors and executing contracts with NACCHO. Achieving conformance with a standard can take several months to years. Therefore, during the mentorship program period, most participants are only able to make partial conformance with the standards. Participants are also mentored to create a foundation and relationships that will help them continue to make progress on the standards in the future.

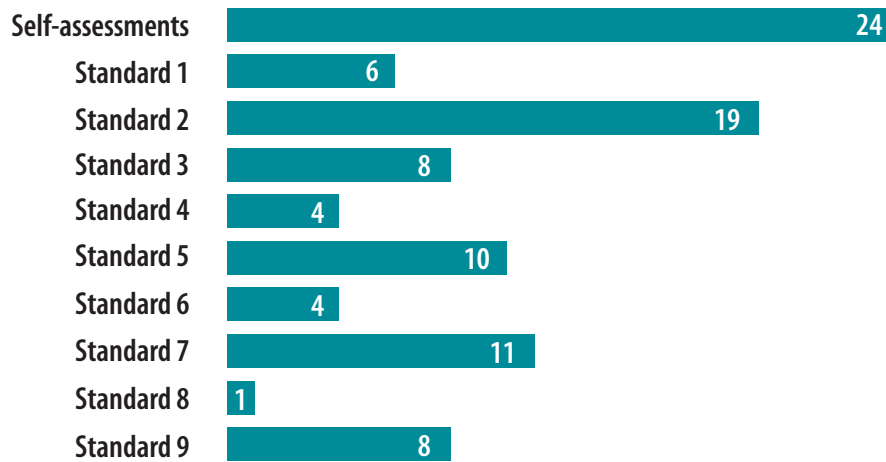
Accomplishments

The mentorship program has been a tremendous success. Based on the 93 final reports submitted by mentees from Cohorts 1 through 5, all mentees made significant progress towards their work plan's goals and objectives. Common work plan items included meeting components of standard(s); meeting a specific standard; or conducting a self-assessment, developing improvement plans, and conducting verification audits. Figure 1 shows the different standards and projects that participants met or achieved significant progress on.

**Note: A total of \$2.625 million has been awarded to NACCHO under the cooperative agreement since 2012. Funding has been used to conduct several research projects and administer the mentorship program.*



FIGURE 1. MENTEES MET OR MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS/PROJECTS



In 2017, NACCHO administered a survey of participants in the first five cohorts of the mentorship program to document their experiences, benefits, and outcomes of the program. The survey consisted of overarching questions on the impact of the FDA’s Retail Program Standards on their health department and questions on their experiences during the mentorship program and working with NACCHO and FDA staff. A total of 43 of 64 individuals (67% response rate) responded to the survey. Figure 2 shows the accomplishments of mentees in the standards since participating in the mentorship program.

In the survey, all participants answered that they either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that the mentorship program has stimulated quality and performance improvement opportunities within their agency and helped their agency better identify strengths and weaknesses in its retail food program. When asked if the mentorship program helped their agency better communicate with their Board of Health or governing entity regarding the

retail food program, 84% responded that they “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” More than half of the participants answered that they “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that the mentorship program helped their agency meet a Public Health Accreditation Board requirement. All participants stated that NACCHO staff provided helpful guidance, resources, and materials during the program.

Other survey results found that 86% of respondents reported that their agency has continued working on the standards since the mentorship program ended and 88% stated that their agency has used resources and contacts from the mentorship program to continue work on the standards.

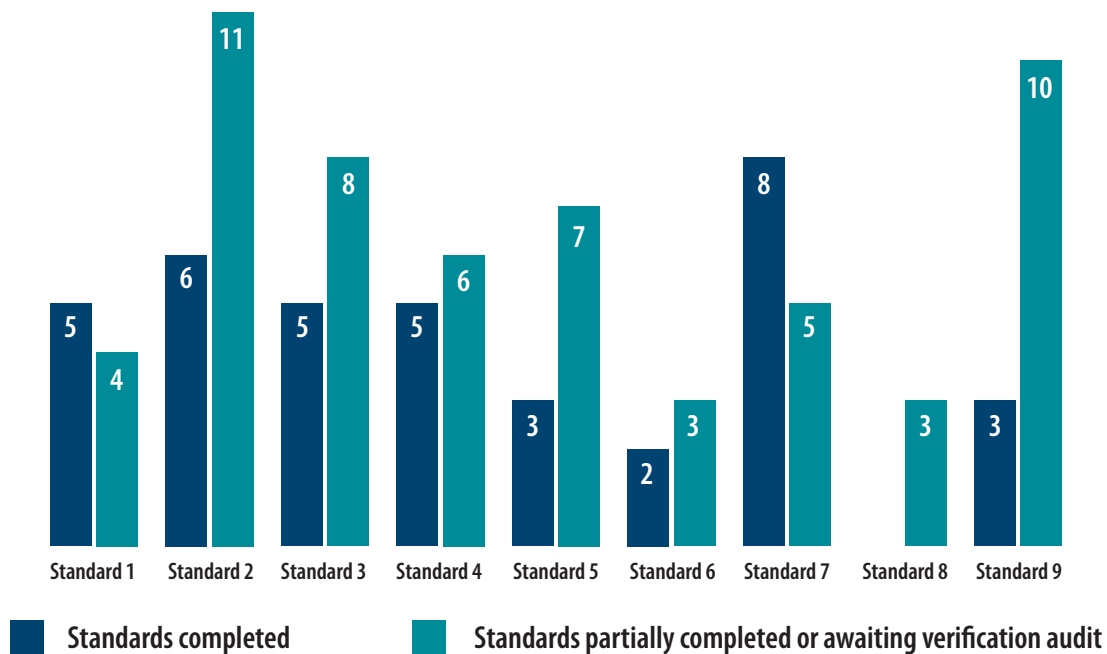
When asked if making progress on or achieving the standards helped them identify retail food program areas in which their agency can have the greatest impact on retail food safety, 95% of the participants answered that they “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” In addition, 88% of participants responded that they



The program provides peer-to-peer assistance and intensive technical support to ensure entities facilitate the standards efficiently and effectively. Experienced retail food regulatory program staff advise newer agency representatives on how to get started, overcome challenges, and best apply the Retail Program Standards to further their food protection programs.



FIGURE 2. STANDARDS COMPLETED VS. STANDARDS PARTIALLY COMPLETED/ AWAITING VERIFICATION AUDIT SINCE MENTORSHIP PARTICIPATION



“Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that their staff were able to promote wider application of effective risk-factor intervention strategies in their agency. All participants stated that the standards assisted their agency in identifying retail food program areas in need of additional attention.

Final progress reports from mentees and survey results show the NACCHO mentorship program has successfully increased local health departments’ participation in and conformance with the Retail Program Standards and has met the FDA’s goal to strengthen the role of local health departments regulatory programs responsible for retail food protection in the United States. For more information on the impact of the mentorship program, watch a NACCHO video with testimonials from participants at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEIMeXmIfNI>.

Acknowledgments

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Key Accomplishments of the Program

-  Increased conformance to Retail Program Standards
-  Stimulated quality and performance improvement
-  Helped identify strengths and weaknesses
-  Promoted effective risk-factor intervention strategies

[FACT SHEET]

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NACCHO

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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 be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice with local health departments.

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