

PA Mentorship Participants

Bethlehem Bureau of Health (PA)

Background

State: Pennsylvania

LHD Population Size Served: 75,103

Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected: ~500

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

Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards: 2008

NACCHO Mentorship Program Cohort(s): 3

The mission of the Bethlehem Bureau of Health (BHB) is to provide high quality public health services that protect and promote optimal health and well-being to assure Bethlehem is a safe and healthy community. The City of Bethlehem, the sixth largest city in Pennsylvania, has a population of approximately 75,103 individuals and is a bi-county city with portions of the city in both Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

The City of Bethlehem has been delegated by the Local Health Administration Law (Act 315, August 24, 1951 P.L. 1304) to inspect all retail food establishments and to investigate all suspect or actual food related illnesses within the City. All inspections are conducted using a risk based approach with facilities inspected 1 – 4 times per year. The Health Bureau services 535 permanent facilities consisting of restaurants, retail stores, schools and child care facilities, as well as institutional facilities. Bethlehem is also home to the Sands Casino and Resort which includes a casino, luxurious hotel, the Sands Event Center, outlet shopping, nightclubs, and ten restaurants.

In addition to permanent facilities, the City of Bethlehem prides itself in being known as the “City of Festivals”. The City of Bethlehem is a tourist destination and offers an abundance of arts and cultural events, festivals, and dining opportunities throughout the year. More than 10 million people visit the “Christmas City” every year to attend 10 major festivals and over 150 mini-festivals throughout the year. The City is famous for its annual Musikfest, a free, ten-day festival that draws over a million people to Bethlehem every August. Associated with the festivals are approximately 175 temporary food stands that must be inspected by Health Bureau staff.

The Bureau consists of 18.5 FTE’s, of which 4.0 are concentrated within the Environmental Health Division.

Role in Mentorship Program

BHB participated in the NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program as a mentee in third cohort and was mentored by Vineland Health Department (NJ).

Lessons Learned/Tips

We learned very early on to look at the project holistically to the point of developing an outline for completion however, since it is very easy to get overwhelmed, it is also important to take one step at a time. Prior to entering the mentor program we attempted multiple times to conduct the self-assessment, however whenever a standard was not met, we attempted to jump to that standard to try and complete the requirements. Although we initially thought this would speed up the process of meeting the standards we realized that we were getting quickly overwhelmed and not accomplishing anything.

We also learned that it is acceptable to say “we do not meet that standard”, no matter how embarrassing it may feel. We learned through the various meetings with this project that we are not the only health department that has many verbal policies, which are presumably understood by the staff, however not available in writing. It is extremely hard for an individual/organization to admit that they do not meet a requirement; however it is not until an organization accepts this that they will be able to move forward. Take credit for what is available, however understand your deficiencies, work toward correcting them, and understand you are not alone in this deficiency.

Contact

Jessica L. Lucas, Director Environmental Health Programs
jlucas@bethlehem-pa.gov
610-865-7083

Link: <http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/health/environmental/food.htm>