

Retail Food Program Standards Mentorship Program: A 10-Year Retrospective Review



Program Description

NACCHO's [Retail Food Program Standards \(RPS\) Mentorship Program](#) encouraged all retail food regulatory programs to use the FDA's [Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards \(VNRFRPS\)](#), which were created to reinforce proper sanitation and reduce factors associated with the occurrence of foodborne diseases. From 2011–2021, this mentorship program provided peer-to-peer assistance and intensive technical support to help enforce the standards efficiently and effectively. Experienced retail food regulatory programs advised participating agencies on how to get started and best apply the Retail Program Standards to improve their food protection programs. Mentees also gained insight on developing and implementing policies and procedures, completing self-assessments, and conducting verification audits.

Training Methodologies and Resources

The program activities varied based on the needs of participating agencies, but generally included:

- a customized “Briefing Book” full of best practices and tips for both mentors and mentees to achieve success in the program, including contact information for all participants;
- access to a secure platform to exchange documents, templates, and checklists between participants;
- curated webinars featuring presentations by subject matter experts in the VNRFRPS;
- interactive sharing sessions to encourage sharing of stories and lessons learned among participants;
- access to a growing community of experts from health departments, national associations, and federal partners; and,
- a free end-of-year conference for participants to showcase their successes, network with their peers, and hear relevant presentations from federal partners and their peers.



114 agencies had at least one staff member participate as a mentee



1 in 3 mentees believed their agency increased capacity to successfully implement VNRFRPS*



1 in 8 mentees returned to the program to serve as a mentor**



100% of mentees reported they benefited from a growing network**



98% of mentees reported they identified strategies to improve implementation of VNRFRPS**

*n=48

**n=50

[FACT SHEET]

April 2023



Program Outcomes

A 10-year retrospective review was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the RPS Mentorship Program in achieving its goals. Overall findings showed that the program created a support system of peers that resulted in improved accountability, confidence, and achievement of the VNRFRPS. Mentors provided guidance, clarification, and accountability to help mentees navigate the conformance process. Mentees often described the requirements of the VNRFRPS as “overwhelming” and intensive but knowing their mentors had been through the process was reassuring. Mentors shared their own tools and strategies for establishing food safety systems and practices that mentees could adopt to avoid “reinvent[ing] the wheel.” In addition, NACCHO leveraged its credentials and networks within the food safety profession to connect mentees with tools, funding, peers beyond their mentor, and subject matter experts relevant to their unique and specific needs. The program helped grow mentees’ confidence with the VNRFRPS framework, while enabling them to build departmental and community capacity. For example, mentees formalized departmental policies and developed new training courses for agency staff, restaurant owners, food inspectors, and other external partners. Mentees leveraged their successes through the program with decisionmakers to generate buy-in for improved food safety practices and with funders to sustain their work for future years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The final year of the RPS Mentorship Program was in 2021, but a version continues to support agencies as the Retail Flexible Funding Model (RFFM) Mentorship Program (neha.org/retail-grants).

What Mentees Said

“It was valuable to us to have someone that could answer our questions and that were familiar with the Food Safety Regulations that we use. The program provided the resources and a plan our health department could follow to put forth time and effort to work towards compliance of the VNRFRPS. The program helps make the standards a priority in our everyday work for our food safety program.”

“The major strength [of the program] as we saw it was being able to witness real world application of the VNRFRPS through the experiences that our mentor (and others) were able to share.”

“By completing our self-assessment, we were able to apply for the FDA Cooperative Agreement funding opportunity that has available in April/May, and we recently were notified that we received this grant opportunity. With that funding, our involvement with the VNRFRPS will be continued and enhanced.”