

## Towns of Ashland / Hopkinton / Medway



Community Innovation Challenge Grant for Electronic  
Food Inspections

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## **INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

April 1, 2013

.To Whom It May Concern:

We would like to thank the Executive Office of Administration and Finance for allowing the Towns of Ashland, Hopkinton and Medway the opportunity to utilize electronic food inspections due to a grant that allowed the purchase of the software and hardware. Our CIC Grant objective was to utilize emerging hardware and software, allowing the participating communities to perform required food establishment inspections more efficiently and save time preparing reports for food establishments, as well as State and Local officials also, by performing these inspections electronically, data base management would be easier, faster, and easily accessible by all parties. The Health Agent/Directors moved forward in a collaborative process and applied for the Community Innovation Challenge Grant in order to provide a more efficient manner of inspections including data base management that was not possible with electronic program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Oram", with a stylized, flowing script.

Mark Oram, Health Agent/Director for Town of Ashland

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Towns of Ashland, Hopkinton and Medway began to examine ways of conducting food inspections in an efficient way within the Metrowest region. These communities had been examining collaborative ideas such as delivery public health services including the opportunity to consider a public health community nurse.

The economic downturn that began in 2006 has had a major impact and ripple effect on Federal, State and local entities. The communities involved have to do more with less. Local municipal budgets have been cut and in worse of cases, layoffs or contracts were not renewed. It is important to remember that the responsibility of Boards of Health was not lessened in any way in local inspections and services needed to be delivered

## **PARTNER COMMUNITIES**

Ashland, Hopkinton and Medway participated in this project. Ashland and Hopkinton have the Town Manager form of government while Medway operates with a Town Administrator form of government. All three Towns have an elected Board of Health with a Health Agent / Director operating in each community. Our communities have been involved in previous collaborative efforts with ways to examine regional services for food inspections and public health nursing for the past 4 years. These communities have also participated on a regional basis for public health emergency planning and forming a regional tobacco control initiatives.

Ashland was the lead community for this project, providing accounting services and bookkeeping for the grant funds. The Metrowest Regional Collaborative (MWRC), a part of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) staff provided research, procurement and purchasing services, project coordination with vendors and community's and along with MAPC staff provided general oversight as well as project coordination during the project, a number of meetings were held, and were attended by each community's Board of Health Agent/Director and staff from the MWRC and MAPC.

## **GOALS**

The goal of this grant project was to provide Health Agent/Directors a more efficient and time saving process relating to local food inspection and provide communities with an easier, more efficient and uniform data base. One or two individual communities had been utilizing electronic food inspections, however none have regionalized and no community has approached this on a regional basis.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

After receiving notification of the grant award, MWRC staff and the Ashland Health Agent/Director began informal research of electronic food inspection software and coordination with computer staff and other Federal, State and local governments. MWRC staff researched various hardware options, with the ultimate goal being ease of use and durability because of legal requirements that require the local inspector to sign and issue the inspection report “onsite” adaptation USB signature parts and portable printers were researched and purchased as well. By utilizing the Comm-PASS system, the chosen software was delivered quickly. Nover Engelstein and Associates Inc. from New Jersey, provided the named software known as After being notified of their selection, a representative from Win Wam began working with the staff from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Food Division in order to update the software and to ensure consistency and compatibility with State and Federal food codes.

After reviewing the final software approval from the Commonwealth, training was held for the Health Agent/Directors on March 27 and 28, 2013 at the Ashland Town Hall. Following training, each Health Agent/Directors went back to their individual communities with laptops and printers, ready to begin utilizing the new technology and communicating any updates and information needs with the WinWam group. The use of the hardware and software decreased reporting time, but the data input and use of this new format was time consuming, but the extra time needed will be far outweighed by the time saved in duplication and the tremendous data output that will be allowed by utilizing this electronic format.

## **BUDGET**

The budget for the project was the following:

Laptop Tablets -  $\$800 \times 3 = 2400$

Wireless Printer -  $\$120 \times 3 = \$360$

Supplies (ink, paper) -  $\$200/\text{month} \times 8 = \$1600$

Software System - \$6500

Training - \$4,140

Total Budget = \$15,000

The project stayed within the original budget parameters. This was due to the research that was done before the grant proposal was submitted, and the use of the Comm-PASS System. The software and hardware were purchased jointly as was the licensing fees for the second year of

operation. The Health Agent/Directors had several meetings with the Metrowest Regional Collaborative and MAPC in order to move the project forward and to reach all goals. Training was conducted on a regional basis as well in order to save money and time. The Metrowest Regional Collaborative staff evaluated hardware needs based upon the inspectional software parameters. This research led to the configuration now utilized by the Health Agent/Directors.

## **CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

Ashland, Hopkinton and Medway have worked on regional projects relating to public health over the past three years. The relationships that have developed by the Health Agents/Directors of the MWRC and MAPC made this project eliminate the challenges in working on a regional basis. Any minor difficulties in opinion were few and worked out quickly. The Health Agents/Directors realized the benefits to their Towns and individual departments. During this project, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Food Division took this opportunity to review changes to the Food Code and modify the software for these changes. Although this process was unexpected and took several months, the results of this provided a more efficient software product.

## **OUTCOMES**

A more efficient food inspection process that is capable of collecting data during the inspection process and streamlining reporting to the State is one of the many beneficial outcomes. As time passes, the inspectors will become more familiar with the new software and hardware and therefore the inspection process itself will be completed efficiently and quickly. Database management and reporting will be easier and consume less time than current practices. Moving forward, Ashland and Medway continue to use new technologies as they were among other Towns in applying for, and receiving a CIC grant to use laptops to conduct weights and measures inspections in FY 14. Hopefully additional communities will switch to this form of inspections to help the Food Division's reporting.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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Paul Boushell, Municipal Service Coordinator, Metrowest Regional Collaborative, 101 Main Street Ashland MA [pboushell@mapc.org](mailto:pboushell@mapc.org)

Stephanie Bacon, Medway Board of Health Agent, Medway MA, sbacon@townofmedway.org

Ed Wirtanen, Hopkinton Board of Health Agent , Hopkinton MA, ewirtanen@hopkintonma.gov

Mark Oram, Ashland Board of Health Agent/Director, Ashland MA, moram@ashlandmass.com

## **REFERENCES**

Nover Engelstein and Associates Inc. from New Jersey , aka Win Wam software

CDW Government Computers / - signature pad and printers

## **RESOURCES**

Scott Moytika, Ashland MIS Director, Ashland MA

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Food Division