

The Massachusetts Alcohol Responsibility Program: A new paradigm for safe and responsible alcohol sales and service

The *Massachusetts Alcohol Responsibility Program (MA ARP)* is a public-private partnership of Massachusetts cities and towns, public health and prevention agencies, and alcohol beverage licensees and their industry partners who share a commitment to the responsible sales, service and consumption of beverage alcohol.

Rationale:

Massachusetts communities cannot and should not be expected to "go it alone" in efforts to achieve lawful, responsible alcohol sales and service. As noted in *Public Policy and Responsible Retailing*, a report of innovative approaches to compliance by cities and states:

Even the most aggressive law enforcement program can monitor only a small fraction of [alcohol licensee] transactions. Government's operational resources alone will never be able to achieve and sustain responsible retailing without a meaningful partnership with those involved at every level. Public agencies, prevention organizations and alcohol industry stakeholders can work together with licensees to achieve consistently high compliance with alcohol sales laws and promote responsible sales and consumption.

Alcohol responsibility is not simply a *policy* to comply with the alcohol sales laws. Through research partnerships with national retail chains, communities and state alcohol regulators, RRForum has shown that alcohol responsibility is built upon an *ongoing system* that continually reinforces staff responsibilities to check IDs -- and, in on-premises serving establishments, to monitor consumption and prevent overservice; and provides resources and topical information to owner-operators and managers.

How the MA ARP Works

The *MA ARP* is an alcohol responsibility system based upon three pillars: (1) periodic measurement of ID-checking as observed by young, legal-age mystery shoppers in on- and off-premises licensees, with confidential feedback to managers on actual staff conduct; (2) promotion and adoption of responsible retailing Best Practices for off-premises retailers, on-premises serving establishment, and communities; and (3) cooperation and frequent communication among law enforcement, licensing commissions, public health and prevention agencies, licensees and their industry partners, and customers.

- **Participating alcohol retailers and serving establishments** receive quarterly visits by young, *legal-age* mystery shoppers, with written reports and assistance in implementing RR Best Practices. *MA ARP* participation conveys the licensee's commitment to alcohol responsibility and to the safety and well-being of customers, staff and the general community. Enrollment for a licensee is \$250/year.

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- **Individual cities and towns** that participate in the *MA ARP* receive reports on aggregate ID-checking rates of randomly selected licensees in that community. RRForum distributes these reports to all licensees, (whether or not they have joined the *MA ARP*), providing an opportunity for licensing and law enforcement agencies to communicate on topical issues and any areas of concern. As in Waltham, the first city to join the *MA ARP*, a community-specific page on the RRForum website provides guidance documents and resources for licensees. As in Waltham, Instagram and Facebook pages will allow real time communication with licensees on safety issues. Additionally, participating police departments and licensing boards receive technical support on policies to leverage the effectiveness of their own compliance resources and promote licensee adoption of effective responsible retailing practices.
- In **college communities and hospitality zones with young drinkers**, RRForum will also employ “pseudo-intoxicated” actors to measure the prevalence of overservice / over-consumption and provide licensees with video to reinforce serving training principles.

The Public-Private Partnership

All organizations committed to the goals of alcohol responsibility are invited to join the *MA ARP*, including Massachusetts cities and towns, public health/prevention agencies, alcohol distributors, producers and trade associations. Partners are asked to publicize the *MA ARP* to its membership and, for cities and towns, to assist RRForum in developing a contact list of licensees that includes the on-site managers who oversee staff on a daily basis. There is no financial obligation for partners (though some partners may also provide financial support for the *MA ARP* administration as sponsors).

An **Advisory Board** of these stakeholders will provide the *MA ARP* with guidance.

About RRForum

Launched in 2003 as a project of Brandeis University, RRForum is a national non-profit whose objectives are to identify and promulgate ways of achieving compliance with the alcohol (and tobacco) sales laws and to promote evidence-based approaches for licensees, communities and states to reduce underage access and alcohol abuse. The development of the RRForum program has been supported by research grants and program development/ implementation awards from the following organizations:

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism ~ U.S. Department of Justice ~ Break-thru Beverage Group ~ Brown-Forman ~ Diageo ~ Heineken ~ MillerCoors ~ Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S. ~ National Beer Wholesalers Association ~ Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division ~ Montgomery County Alcohol Beverage Services ~ Oregon Liquor Control Commission ~ National Alcohol Beverage Control Association

Interested parties can learn more about the *MA ARP*, and the RRForum, at www.rrforum.org. Specific inquiries about the public-private partnership can be directed to Brad Krevor, Ph.D at krevor@rrforum.org or please call: (617) 454-4676.