



Cooking Fresh During COVID-19: The 2020 Montana Cook Fresh Leadership Institute

A Montana Team Nutrition Success Story

[Montana Team Nutrition](#) modified the July 2020 Montana Cook Fresh Leadership Institute into an entirely virtual format due to COVID-19. This Institute is traditionally an intensive, 5-day workshop that provides K-12 school food service directors with 30 hours of management and culinary training. Transitioning a hands-on culinary workshop into a virtual format presented a challenge, but Montana Team Nutrition, with support from Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) School Nutrition Programs and Montana No Kid Hungry, turned difficult circumstances into an opportunity to use technology to increase training capacity for school nutrition professionals.

CLASS STRUCTURE

The 10-day virtual Institute offered 3 hours of blended learning activities per day through live classes on video conferencing and independent assignments completed through an online learning management platform called D2L/Brightspace. This platform allowed participants a flexible and easy way to access curriculum, complete assignments, and upload photos of completed culinary projects from the convenience of their school kitchens.

PARTICIPANT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Master USDA rules and regulations for managing a school nutrition program, including food safety, meal patterns, procurement, offer vs. serve, and record keeping
- Develop emergency preparedness plans for meal service during a pandemic, natural disasters, staff shortages, and other emergencies
- Build confidence in culinary skills to prepare fresh recipes and scratch cooked meals during a pandemic and beyond
- Identify best practices for school nutrition programs to nudge students to make healthy choices
- Connect with school nutrition peers and mentors throughout the state
- Learn new technology for communication and distance learning

Learn More

WEB

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PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"[The Institute] was more accessible for me and my family, [I] could step away if needed for a few seconds."

"It was a great learning experience and helped me to better plan for the next year."

PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

This virtual Institute reached 22 school food service professionals from 9 school districts across the state of Montana, which is the highest amount of participation for this training to date. Eight out of 9 school districts represented rural districts, and 1 school district was located on or near a Native American reservation.

EVALUATION OUTCOMES

Participants were asked to complete a pre and post Institute survey. From pre to post, participants reported promising increases in their comfort level and confidence on the following topics:

- *Developing an emergency preparedness plan: +26.50%*
- *Farm to school and Harvest of the Month: +16.98%*
- *Accurately completing a daily production record: +23.31%*
- *Using herbs and spices in a recipe: +20.48%*

After completing the Institute, participants also reported an increased likelihood of performing the following behaviors during the next school year:

- *Participate in remote professional development activities: +16.40%*
- *Use a new recipe that includes fresh and dried legumes: +13.71%*

100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following post Institute evaluation statements:

"I feel more confident in my ability to participate in remote or distance professional development in the future."

"I increased my knowledge and skills on school nutrition rules and regulations."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified a pre-existing need for distance learning for school nutrition professionals in a large, rural state. The 2020 Montana Cook Fresh Leadership Institute was an opportunity to meet that need and expand state capacity for remote trainings. Montana Team Nutrition looks forward to continuing to explore remote professional development training in the future.

Thank you to the participating school districts and partners that made this Institute possible: *Dr. Carmen Byker Shanks, Aubree Roth, Ginger Buchanan, Caroline Olson, Deb Jones, Pam Fruh, Cindy Giese, Marcy Gaston, Sally Donch, Danielle Anderson, Montana State University Academic Technology and Outreach Office, Montana State University College of Education, Health, and Human Development, Montana OPI School Nutrition Programs, and Montana No Kid Hungry.*

2020 Montana Cook Fresh Leadership Institute
Participant Breakdown

