

Responsible Retailing Practices

Although most people under the age of 21 obtain the alcohol they consume from social sources (e.g., peers, relatives, etc.), a comprehensive approach to preventing underage drinking must also include commercial and retail establishments. While state and local policies vary considerably, effective retailing practices should include employee training to ensure consistent practices when it comes to verifying whether an individual is legally able to purchase alcohol. Such trainings should equip employees with the knowledge and skills required to verify age (i.e., how to properly verify that different forms of identification are valid and belong to the individual presenting the documentation), refuse sales to underage individuals (including any processes that must be followed), and how to adhere to all state laws, local ordinances, and establishment/retailer policies as it pertains to alcohol sales. Employers should offer remedial training to employees who do not comply with policies or fail compliance checks. Businesses risk the loss of liquor licenses if alcohol sales to underage individuals occur which is why it is important for owners and managers to be diligent when training employees and enforcing policies.



The following policies and programs offer beverage alcohol retailers numerous options to meet their compliance goals through self-regulation and the creation of a culture of responsibility within their stores or establishments:

- **Regular and ongoing server training (in person and/or online) for all retail employees, especially non-compliant employees.** Alcohol server training should be completed by servers, bartenders, managers, and any other employees who regularly handle alcoholic beverages during the course of their employment. This type of training is designed to educate employees about local alcohol laws and policies as well as safe serving techniques. In addition to being able to identify underage individuals and fake IDs, servers and bartenders are also trained on how to sell and serve alcohol in a responsible fashion to safeguard establishments against liability. Some states require certification for employees, and it is often a condition of employment by individual businesses. Common examples of this type of program include [TiPS Alcohol Training](#) and [ServSafe](#).

- **Cops in Shops® programs.** This program involves partnerships among local beverage alcohol retailers, law enforcement agencies, and community stakeholders and is designed to deter attempts to illegally purchase alcohol. The program places undercover law enforcement officers in retail alcohol outlets to pose as clerks or store employees. The goal is to catch underage individuals who attempt to purchase alcohol or adults who purchase alcohol on behalf of minors. Participation in the program is voluntary on the part of retailers but demonstrates a commitment to responsibility. This approach should be integrated into agencies overall enforcement strategy to prevent underage access to alcohol and underage drinking. The first Cops in Shops program was implemented in 1992 in Oregon and since that time, it has been effectively utilized in more than 40 states. Experience has demonstrated that collaborations among all community stakeholders yield maximum results for underage drinking prevention and that this program is most effective when highly publicized to maximize the deterrent effect. Learn more [here](#).
- **Mystery Shopper programs.** These programs utilize young, but legal-age customers as “mystery shoppers” who provide immediate feedback to licensees on staff performance during attempts to purchase or be served beverage alcohol. Mystery Shopper programs have been used to determine the effectiveness of employee training related to age verification, use of electronic ID scanners, and compliance with other retailer policies and local alcohol ordinances. These programs have been shown to be an effective tool for large retail chains as they offer a point of intervention for employers to counsel employees on protocol. Unlike with compliance checks, mystery shopper programs allow employers the opportunity to address problems before risking violations that may jeopardize their business.
- **Compliance check programs.** These checks are conducted in strict compliance with enforcement procedures by local law enforcement. Participation is not voluntary, and the checks are often done at random. Any identified violations of laws, regulations, or ordinances can lead to citations, fines, and eventual loss of beverage alcohol licenses.
- **Point of sale public awareness campaigns.** The point of sale provides an opportunity to deliver a strong message from the retailer to the community about its commitment to responsible alcohol sales and increases awareness of the legal purchase age and consequences of underage drinking.
- **Laws that allow retailers to bring civil action** against an underage person (or the underage person’s parents) who illegally enters an establishment, illegally attempts to purchase alcohol, and/or successfully purchases alcohol after falsifying his/her age. Only a handful of states have enacted this type of legislation: Alaska, New Hampshire, Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin. *This law does not apply to persons conducting compliance checks.*

An example of a robust and evidence-based responsible retailing program is the [Arlington Restaurant Initiative](#) (ARI). The initiative is led by the Arlington Police Department (APD) in partnership with multiple establishments in the community of Clarendon. Following increases in weekend calls for service in Clarendon, a neighborhood with multiple nightlife establishments, the APD recognized that a community approach was needed to address the issues of alcohol-related harm that were prevalent in the area. A full-time Restaurant Liaison Officer position was created to improve the standards of establishments that serve alcohol, develop new standards and training for policing in a nightlife environment, and foster positive relationships between businesses, law enforcement, and the community at large.

The Restaurant Liaison Officer oversees the Arlington Restaurant Initiative which is a voluntary accreditation program designed to provide restaurant/bar owners and their staff with resources to maximize public safety and

protect business interests. Accredited establishments demonstrate their commitment to safety and get to take advantage of training offered by APD. Other aspects of the program include the Bar Safe program which focuses on deterring alcohol-related crime through patron accountability, cultivating partnerships and collaboration between government agencies and businesses to promote safe practices, and community outreach and engagement events to strengthen community ties and promote awareness about impaired driving and responsible consumption. Since its establishment, the ARI has undergone several evaluations and is considered an award-winning model that other jurisdictions should replicate. To learn more about the ARI and how similar strategies can be implemented in other communities, access the [toolkit](#).

Responsibility.org Position:

Responsibility.org supports comprehensive responsible retailing practices that ensure legal sales. These efforts should include regular retailer training, mandatory remedial training for non-compliant employees, highly publicized point of sale campaigns, and enforcement efforts.