



Alcohol Service Training Programs

Responsibility.org Position:

Responsibility.org is dedicated to preventing underage drinking, eliminating all forms of impaired driving, and promoting alcohol responsibility. To support these goals, we advocate for state regulations that require all staff who serve, sell, or prepare alcohol drinks to complete an accredited alcohol service training to enhance public safety and foster responsible alcohol practices.

This paper includes the most current and relevant data for this position as of Jan. 12, 2026.

Overview:

Alcohol service training programs, sometimes referred to as responsible beverage service (RBS) training, equip hospitality staff with the knowledge and tools to serve alcohol safely and comply with state and/or local laws. These programs help staff take proactive steps to reduce alcohol-related harms, including underage drinking and impaired driving.

Research shows that approximately half of intoxicated drivers had their last drink at a licensed bar or restaurant (Fell et al., 2024). Additionally, studies on risk factors associated with drinking that lead to harmful incidents such as violence or injury are linked to risk factors like the amount of alcohol consumed and whether obviously intoxicated customers continue to be served (Fell et al., 2017). Training programs help staff recognize and respond to these events before they escalate.

Many states and local jurisdictions mandate alcohol service training. The scope of these laws varies but often includes training for bartenders and servers, and in some cases managers or supervisors who oversee alcohol service. For the purposes of this position paper, “alcohol service training” refers specifically to requirements for staff who interact directly with customers.

Responsible alcohol service training should cover topics such as:

- Understanding state and local laws, including who is permitted to serve or prepare beverages containing alcohol;
- Verifying age and preventing underage drinking through proper identification (ID) checks;
- Spotting fake IDs;
- Recognizing signs of intoxication and overconsumption;
- Measuring and serving standard drink sizes accurately;
- Refusing service when necessary; and
- Helping a customer leave an alcohol-serving venue safely.

In addition to these core topics, hospitality-forward establishments can build on training by adopting additional proactive strategies. These may include partnering with local stakeholders such as law enforcement or city councils on joint alcohol responsibility initiatives or creating recognition programs and incentives that reward staff for consistent, responsible service.

Beyond promoting public safety, establishments have an incentive to comply with training requirements. Failure to comply may result in penalties that vary by state or local jurisdiction, including fines for employees and establishments or suspension or revocation of a liquor license.

Prevalence:

Whether alcohol service training is mandatory or voluntary differs across states and local jurisdictions. Participation in states with voluntary programs is often encouraged through incentives such as liability protection or insurance discounts (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], 2023).

According to Training for Intervention ProcedureS (TIPS, 2025), most states and Washington, D.C. have either state or local alcohol service training requirements that vary as follows:

- 17 states require mandatory alcohol service training: Alaska, California, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Washington ([WAC 314-17-025](#)).
- 24 states and Washington, D.C. have voluntary alcohol service training programs: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.
- 11 states with either voluntary alcohol service training or no statewide law have local jurisdictions that mandate training: Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota, and Wyoming.
- Five states don't have state or local alcohol service training requirements: Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, and West Virginia.

Research Highlights:

Factors that Influence Effectiveness of Training:

- Research shows that RBS training reduces harm from risky alcohol consumption, especially when managers actively support and enforce the program. Additionally, the training is more effective at reducing alcohol-related crashes when combined with community mobilization, targeted impaired driving enforcement, sobriety checkpoints, and other harm reducing strategies. While evidence demonstrates the success of RBS programs in some areas, further research is needed to evaluate their impact on preventing underage drinking (Fell et al., 2024).

- A literature review of the impact of RBS training found that barriers to training implementation include limited incentives for servers to participate, frequent staff turnover, and weak enforcement or emphasis by establishments on compliance with alcohol laws (Fell et al., 2024).

Outcomes of Training in Practice:

- An education and enforcement initiative on alcohol service laws in Washtenaw County, Michigan led to an increase in refusals of service to pseudo-intoxicated patrons, from 17.5% to 54.3%, later stabilizing at 41%. The proportion of drivers arrested for driving while intoxicated (DWI) who had come from bars or restaurants decreased from 31.7% to 23.3%. In a comparison study, refusal rates rose more modestly, albeit significantly, from 11.5% to 32.7%, and DWI arrests linked to bars and restaurants showed no significant change (McKnight & Streff, 1994).
- A study conducted in Monroe County, New York and Cleveland, Ohio found that combining RBS training with consistent enforcement of the training protocols and service laws significantly reduced bar patron intoxication and potential impaired driving. Ten intervention bars that received training and enforcement showed greater improvements than ten control bars in lowering the average blood alcohol concentration of exiting patrons, fewer intoxicated customers, and increased staff refusals to pseudo-intoxicated customers. The intervention also decreased self-reported instances of impaired driving. The RBS training included instructions on signs of intoxication such as poor balance and strategies to prevent customer intoxication like offering food or measuring alcohol drinks (Fell et al., 2017).

Established in 1991 as a national not-for-profit organization, Responsibility.org leads the fight to eliminate drunk and impaired driving, prevent underage drinking, and promote alcohol responsibility.

References:

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