

Labs Helping Labs:

The Story of A California Mentor Initiative

2019 National Environmental Monitoring Conference

Jacob Oaxaca

Senior Environmental Scientist

California Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program



Objectives of this Presentation



THE STORY



THE PROGRESS



THE LESSONS

The California Story

- California was the worst program in the nation
 - We withdrew from TNI in 2014
- We have been fixing ourselves, but one big problem remains
 - Insufficient accreditation standard
- We are proposing the 2016 TNI Standard in our draft regulations

Fear of TNI

- Lots of resistance to the proposal
 - Labs fear closure because of the cost of implementing new quality system requirements
- We wanted to find a positive approach to calming fears
 - Speakers from other out-of-state TNI municipal labs
 - Education
 - Implementation assistance
- Our efforts had some effect, but opposition was still strong

A Bright Idea

- We envisioned partnerships between experienced labs and small labs who wanted to adopt a laboratory quality management system
- Mentorship has proven success and positive outcomes
- We just needed willing participants

Off to a Slow Start

- When conceived in 2017, there was little interest
 - Energy was being put into fighting against TNI instead
- We discussed with our technical advisory committee and posted on our website
- No takers

Finally, a bite!

- It wasn't until 2018 that ACIL approached ELAP about mentoring labs interested in implementing a quality management system
- ELAP facilitated the partnerships
 - Worked with mentors to establish goals and a plan
- The result
 - 7 mentees paired with an expert mentor on a journey to implement a quality management system in their laboratory

Goals



Connect labs to the resources they need



Deepen understanding of the help our labs need



Implement quality management system in CA

Participants

Mentors

- Bruce Godfrey, Montrose Environmental
- Diane Anderson, APPL
- Brad Meadows, Babcock Laboratories
- Nilda Cox, Eurofins Eaton Analytical

Mentee Laboratories

- Five small municipal laboratories
- One medium public health lab
- One medium commercial lab

Thank you to TNI and Jerry Parr for providing support



Your Mentor, I am

The Plan

- Each lab had an initial onsite meeting with their mentor
 - Included a gap analysis against existing quality system, if any
- Collaborative development of timeline and plan
- Mentors delivered critical tools to mentees
- As-needed support via phone and email
- Assessment by CA ELAP

The Tools

2016 TNI
Standard

TNI Lab
Manager
Training Course

TNI Small Lab
Handbook

TNI
Community

Progress So Far

- 5 of 7 labs are implementing with the TNI quality management system
 - It took them less than a year
 - None added staff because of TNI
- 2 are still pending our assessment
 - We anticipate being able to assess them within the next few months

**“TNI brought
structure to my lab.”**

“It does improve data quality.”

*“It’s an insurance policy for the lab and the
Water District.”*

“I should have been doing this all along.”

*“After implementation it
got easier.”*

“Doing a little bit at a time is important.”

“My data quality is better.”

“The paperwork was not as bad as we thought.”

“No problem at all”.

*“Three years is
plenty of time.”*

*“You don’t need to be running a
lab if you can’t do this basic stuff.”*

“It’s a pain, but I get why we do it.”

“The Quality Manual template was essential.”

Takeaways

- There is a wide range of abilities and starting points
- Small labs can implement the TNI Standard without hiring new staff
 - Having the right tools and resources is critical for success
- Attitude plays a big role

Labs Helping Labs

- Mentorship is an incredibly powerful tool
- The TNI community possesses the knowledge and experience to make this transition easier for other labs
- Another round of mentors just signed on to help 11 more labs
 - We hope to develop a program with you before TNI comes to CA in 2020

A detailed illustration of Master Yoda, the green-skinned, wrinkled character from Star Wars. He is shown from the chest up, sitting and looking directly at the viewer with a serious expression. He has large, expressive eyes and prominent ears. He is wearing his characteristic brown robes. The background is a dark, textured space with some faint star-like specks. The entire image is framed by a thin white border, and there are dark horizontal bars on the left and right sides, resembling binder tabs.

**ALWAYS PASS ON WHAT
YOU HAVE LEARNED**

- MASTER YODA -