



FOODSHIELD[®]

The secure collaboration platform for food safety and public health organizations

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is FoodSHIELD?**

FoodSHIELD is a web-based platform that fosters collaboration with food safety and public health partners both within and between organizations.

The system facilitates effective communication, collaboration, education, and training through custom and secure workgroups, portals, and tools available to all members. The platform provides an environment that bridges organizations that might not otherwise be able to easily collaborate in an IT environment.

A one-minute FoodSHIELD Introduction Video can be found here:

<https://youtu.be/tG-10QP9zSQ>.

- **Why was FoodSHIELD developed?**

FoodSHIELD got its start in the laboratory world as a result of the National Food Safety System (NFSS) Laboratory Operations & Coordination Workgroup's vision of transforming a paper-based lab directory into a web-based directory designed for easy access.

In the early 2000s, discussions with the FDA, USDA, Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and AAVLD (American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnostics) identified the need for a searchable web-based directory across the full spectrum of farm-to-table laboratories as well as clinical laboratories that respond to outbreaks and food safety concerns.

It was later decided to develop an expanded prototype of this comprehensive laboratory directory to model concepts and features being requested by diverse groups responsible for emergency response, encompassing the entire food and agricultural farm-to-fork continuum.

As a result, FoodSHIELD came to exist as a comprehensive infrastructure supporting the protection and defense of our food and agricultural resources,

including the scientific and technological diversities of the laboratory community. Today, the majority of platform membership is comprised of state and local regulatory and public health organizations, followed closely by federal regulatory agencies and Tribal, territorial, academic, and industry entities.

The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) assumed the lead role in continued enhancement of the platform in 2021 through an FDA cooperative agreement. AFDO has been working with the IT developers and directly with stakeholders to ensure that FoodSHIELD remains relevant, reliable, and current for the current collaborative needs of the food safety, food defense, and public health communities.

- **What can FoodSHIELD help me with?**

First and foremost, FoodSHIELD is a secure collaboration environment. FoodSHIELD and its parent environment CoreSHIELD operate on GovCloud, which maintains the stringent FedRAMP “high” classification. This means that GovCloud provides the most secure method for storing and processing data in the cloud while adhering to a federally standardized approach to security assessment, authorization, and continuous monitoring.

For more information on FoodSHIELD’s security, a **technical/security sheet** is available here: <https://www.afdo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Foodshield-8.5x11-Technical-Tool-Handout-V2-Letter.pdf>.

Within that secure environment, there is a host of useful tools and capabilities that are offered to FoodSHIELD members at no cost. Some of the more popular capabilities include (but are not limited to):

- Customizable workgroups where groups can set up secure meetings, collaborate on documents in real-time, easily send group emails/texts, maintain discussion boards, customize with organization logos and available tools, and many other tools at a click of a button.
- Creating and hosting virtual meetings using ZoomGov within FoodSHIELD. This allows for up to 500 concurrent participants, includes all the typical functions/tools related to ZoomGov, and meeting recording, transcription, and language interpretation tools are available all in one spot. Having separate ZoomGov

capability in FoodSHIELD allows for secure communication and collaboration without the additional cost for ZoomGov licenses.

- Creating custom surveys with popular question formats, without survey builder license fees or limits on the number of questions.
- Solving issues related to email file attachment size limitations by using the SecureSend tool. This tool allows files of unlimited size to be sent to one or several recipients while offering additional security features such as limiting number of views, access expiration dates, read-only option, password protection, and file retention dates.
- Developing, delivering, and tracking online training and course materials for your staff and partners using the Training tool. This includes creating live or pre-recorded courses, requiring pre-requisite courses, attendee management including developing a registration form and mass-upload of attendees, administering quizzes and setting passing scores, and issuing custom certificates with custom logos and signatures.
- Manage meetings, conferences, and events through the Conferences and Events tool. This includes coordinating many aspects of virtual or in-person events from registration to collecting post-event evaluations for up to 1,000 attendees simultaneously. Additional capabilities include public registration forms, auto-creation of attendee lists, and support of simultaneous conference tracks with separate ZoomGov meetings and breakout rooms.
- For more information some of the most popular tools available on FoodSHIELD, please see the **Featured Tools Booklet** here: <http://afdo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Foodshield-Featured-Tools-Brochure.pdf>.

- **What is the relationship between FoodSHIELD and CoreSHIELD?**

FoodSHIELD is one of the portals that “live” in the CoreSHIELD cloud environment. Other portals that live in CoreSHIELD include the Retail Food Risk Factor Study portal and the Food Protection Task Forces portal. Users can switch between these portals using the same username and password.

Many of the security features that are present in FoodSHIELD are set up and implemented in CoreSHIELD and “trickle” down to the various portal housed within it.

- **What is the relationship between FoodSHIELD and FERN?**

Many of the important tasks and activities associated with the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) are carried out in the CoreSHIELD environment.

These tasks include tracking proficiency testing for FERN lab technicians as well as coordinating information sharing and document organization during FERN activation responses.

- **Who can be a FoodSHIELD member?**

Typically, FoodSHIELD membership applies to food/feed safety and public health regulatory professionals who routinely interact with other federal agencies and state, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners for:

- Sharing ongoing outbreak response or incident information
- Coordinating and managing recall events
- Hosting or participating in various multi-agency workgroups
- Scheduling multi-agency trainings or meetings
- Developing on-demand or live training sessions
- Sending large files to partners with additional security precautions
- Developing and sending out surveys
- Hosting or participating in trainings or meetings
- Work planning with partners
- Other collaborative work that requires multiple groups coming together in a secure environment

FoodSHIELD was originally designed for participants from local, state, and federal governments, the military, and laboratories. Increased opportunities for collaboration across sectors and organizations have emphasized the need to bring in additional stakeholders such as industry/private sector and academia.

These non-government partners can also participate in FoodSHIELD if they are part of a workgroup initiated by a government member. These individuals' access is limited to the workgroup materials, meetings, and documents.

- **What are the different levels of FoodSHIELD membership?**

There are three common levels of FoodSHIELD membership, listed here:

- Contact: An individual who has their contact information displayed in FoodSHIELD but has no login rights to use any of the tools.
- Guest: An individual who has guest membership to a specific workgroup but does not qualify as a full portal member. As such, they do not have the ability to create meetings or workgroups on the platform.
- Portal Member: An individual who has full access to all of the tools within FoodSHIELD, can create meetings, and establish their own workgroups.

When creating their own workgroups, Portal Members can also be listed as workgroup Owners, which gives them full access to administrative options to manage the workgroup (including membership).

Additionally, any Portal Member can also be elevated to a Workgroup Administrator by the Workgroup Owner, giving them full administrative control over the workgroup as well.

- **How are FoodSHIELD members vetted and approved?**

Security is an extremely important component to maintain FoodSHIELD's integrity as a trusted, multi-organizational collaboration platform. As such, applicants for membership must be vetted prior to admission.

Full details on the vetting and admission process can be found on the **Membership Vetting Document** here: [https://web-fs.s3-fips-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/default/assets/File/FoodSHIELD_Vetting_Process\(2\).pdf](https://web-fs.s3-fips-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/default/assets/File/FoodSHIELD_Vetting_Process(2).pdf)

The following is the membership approval criteria for the two membership types who will receive FoodSHIELD login access:

- Portal Member
 - Has provided accurate and verifiable personal information.

- Has agreed to comply with all terms and conditions in the FoodSHIELD vetting document.
- Has provided the required information requested in the online **FoodSHIELD Membership Form** located here: <https://www.foodshield.org/my/register/>
- Is employed by a government agency (Federal, State, County, Territorial, or Tribal) or an agency that represents the food and agricultural sector if the Applicant is a government representative.

- **Guest**

- Has provided accurate and verifiable personal information.
- Has agreed to comply with all terms and conditions in the FoodSHIELD vetting document.
- Has provided the required information requested in the FoodSHIELD Membership Form.
- If the Applicant is a private sector representative, he/she will receive a guest membership or contact status ONLY. The Applicant must be employed by a food and/or agriculture related organization to be considered for guest membership.
- The Applicant must have a referral from a government FoodSHIELD member (included in the online membership form).

- **How is FoodSHIELD membership kept secure and updated?**

FoodSHIELD members who no longer meet the membership approval criteria are subject to having their access to FoodSHIELD suspended.

In addition, if an applicant does not respond to the initial “welcome email” or violates the Terms of Service Agreement, membership will be suspended.

All members are subject to an annual review process for activity and updates to their current positions to ensure that access to FoodSHIELD remains warranted.

Members are responsible for updating their FoodSHIELD profile. If a member’s eligibility changes due to a position or role change, they may still qualify for a guest account. Please contact the FoodSHIELD Help Desk for assistance in these cases. The Help Desk can be accessed by clicking on the round dialog bubble in the bottom right of the FoodSHIELD homepage screen.

- **How do I access FoodSHIELD?**

Applicants can start the membership process by completing the **online registration form** here: <https://www.foodshield.org/member/register/>.

Once an individual is a member, they can **log in to FoodSHIELD** here: <https://www.foodshield.org/my/login/>.

- **What are the steps to join FoodSHIELD?**

1. Applicants can start the membership process by completing the **online registration form** here: <https://www.foodshield.org/member/register/>. This includes a field where the applicant must specify a reference who can vet their current position and role to determine the appropriate level of membership.
2. Upon receipt of the online registration form, membership level will be determined. The listed reference may be contacted with any questions or to confirm the correct level of membership.
3. Applicant contact information will be confirmed and membership will either be approved or denied.
4. If approved, the applicant will receive a welcome email with temporary login information. The new member will be required to log in and update their profile to create a permanent password for continued access.

- **How do I receive training on using FoodSHIELD and its various tools?**

AFDO has been working closely with FoodSHIELD's IT developers to enhance the user experience of the platform, including navigation.

One option is to take advantage of the new self-guided tour option available on the FoodSHIELD homepage. After logging in, look for the yellow question marks in a circle. Clicking on these icons will reveal a new interactive window that provides high-level information on where to find certain tools, updating user profiles, and opening a chat with a live Help Desk representative.

Based on user interest and request, short how-to videos and other FoodSHIELD-related information are being posted on a **LinkedIn FoodSHIELD User Community** that can be accessed here: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3603307/>.

The AFDO FoodSHIELD website provides a considerable amount of information related to the collaborative platform, including e-versions of various outreach and educational materials related to FoodSHIELD tools, security, and a comparison chart comparing other online collaboration programs. The **AFDO FoodSHIELD site** can be found here: <https://www.afdo.org/foodshield/>.

FoodSHIELD also maintains a help desk where you can chat with real people in real time. The help desk can be accessed by clicking on the round dialog button in the lower right corner of the FoodSHIELD home page. The help desk can help with issues such as access, passwords, finding specific workgroups, etc.