

## ► BUILDING CAPACITY



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## An Introduction to Building Agency Capacity

**Editor's Note:** A need exists within environmental health agencies to increase their capacity to perform in an environment of diminishing resources. With limited resources and increasing demands, we need to seek new approaches to the business of environmental health.

Acutely aware of these challenges, NEHA has initiated a partnership with Decade Software Company called *Building Capacity*. *Building Capacity* is a joint effort to educate, reinforce, and build upon successes within the profession, using technology to improve efficiency and extend the impact of environmental health agencies.

The *Journal* is pleased to publish this bimonthly column from Decade Software Company that will provide readers with insight into the *Building Capacity* initiative, as well as be a conduit for fostering the capacity building of environmental health agencies across the country.

The conclusions of this column are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NEHA.

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Consider for a moment your agency's mission. Say it out loud. Look it up or define it now if you're not certain. For many *Journal* readers, the mission is something such as, "...to protect, promote, and enhance the health and well-being of the public and the environment (Boulder County Environmental Health Division, Boulder, Colorado; <http://tinyurl.com/bouldermission>)."

Are you ever frustrated with the sense that doing your job—and doing it well—doesn't change the equation? Do worthy initiatives

fall prey to the feeling that you can't make time to work on it, no matter its merit? How do you approach such challenges?

When I face a challenge at the office such as how to best hire and recruit, implement policy, or design a new service, I often look to successful organizations that have already innovated in those areas. Who hasn't been inspired by innovation and excellence in the wild? Where possible, I strive to apply those lessons; I rarely build from scratch what is already standing.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) *Food Code* comes to mind when I think of an imitable project. The *Food Code* package includes ordinance language, references, guidelines, forms, guides, and other aids. It's vetted by experts from the Conference for Food Protection; FDA; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and state, tribal, and local food safety experts.

Every state in the country has adopted the code in some form. I love this story; without this model, each jurisdiction risked consuming valuable resources to develop, defend, and maintain a regional food code. By embracing the FDA *Food Code*, these organizations have given themselves added capacity. New on the horizon, the Model Aquatic Health Code promises a similar benefit.

Leverage, strategy, and leadership are foundational components of *Building Capacity*, a NEHA initiative that promotes tactics for improved performance by highlighting fully developed ideas and materials that will allow you to build upon successes demonstrated by your peers. *Building Capacity* touches many parts of an organization and asks us to examine many facets of what we do daily. A fundamental aspect is how technology can help us accomplish our goals better and faster.

This regular *Journal* column is chartered to find and promote right-minded environmental health projects, largely with technical underpinnings, that your agency can consider and adopt. Often the column will include links to useful resources (e.g., templates, policies, instructions) to ease implementation. In other profiled projects, the column aims to alert readers to award-worthy projects.

Lest the reader assume I advocate for simply cloning existing projects, I want to underscore the obvious value of iterative innovation. That is, for every well-run project, I share an expectation of progress through innovation.

Future profiles include projects such as interagency data sharing, standardization

among disparate computer systems, useful digital dashboards, GIS, data remediation, operational policy, social media, open data, mobile computing, customer service, and marketing/communications.

I welcome your feedback and suggestions.



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## Did You Know?

The National Association of County and City Health Officials surveyed a nationally representative sample of local health departments (LHDs) in March and April 2012. The survey data indicates that environmental health revenue has decreased for a substantial amount of LHDs and significant cuts to the environmental health workforce and its services were made for budgetary reasons. Almost 30% of LHDs had a reduction in environmental health staff and over one-third reduced or eliminated at least one environmental health service. The full report can be found at [www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/lhdbudget/upload/Research-Brief-Final.pdf](http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/lhdbudget/upload/Research-Brief-Final.pdf).

*Source:* Li, J., & Eligers, A. (2014). Impact of budget cuts to environmental health services at local health departments: Key findings. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 76(10), 38–40.



## 2015 Nelson E. Fabian Environmental Health Innovation Award

This award recognizes a NEHA member or organization for creating a new idea, practice, or product that has had a positive impact on environmental health and the quality of life. Innovative change that promotes or improves environmental health protection is the foundation of this award.

Named in honor of former NEHA Executive Director Nelson Fabian, this annual award recognizes those who have made an innovative contribution to the field, as well as encourages others to search for creative solutions. Take this opportunity to submit a nomination to highlight the innovations being put into practice in the field of environmental health!

**Nominations are due in the NEHA office by March 16, 2015.**

For more information, please visit [www.neha.org/about/awardinfo.html](http://www.neha.org/about/awardinfo.html).  
Nomination materials can be obtained by e-mailing Terry Osner at [tosner@neha.org](mailto:tosner@neha.org).

