

Managing Editor's Desk

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NEHA and the Economy

I am writing my *Journal* column this month a couple of hours after Congress voted down the administration's bailout legislation. You will be reading this column a couple of months from now. Who knows what will have happened in the meantime!

Regardless of how this particular story unfolds, it can certainly be said that the economy is weighing heavily on many people's minds these days. In view of this, I thought I'd devote my *Journal* column this month to a brief discussion about how your association is doing financially and what it has done to prepare for difficult economic times.

Interestingly enough, associations like NEHA tend to become even more important to their constituencies in times like these because as jobs become more insecure, associations become important resources for help, guidance, contacts, employment leads, and information. As a NEHA member, you deserve to know what we are doing to weather these storms so that we can be there when you need us.

First and foremost, over 20 years ago, NEHA adopted an economic strategy that we have assiduously followed ever since. That strategy lines up well with one of the fundamental laws of ecology: the healthiest ecosystems are those that are the most diversified. (On a similar note, the healthiest economies are those that are the most diversified.)

Taking that concept as our insight, we have followed an economic strategy that has sought to keep our revenue streams as plentiful and diversified as possible. To that end we have been quite successful.

We continue to keep one eye on our opportunities just as we keep the other on where our challenges might be emerging.

The literature shows that most associations depend on their membership dues for upwards of half their income. In NEHA's situation, our membership dues constitute around 12% of our total revenue! That in itself is a huge accomplishment. In times of economic worry, it is a comfort because it means that we don't have to over-rely on membership dues when people are cutting back on their discretionary spending.

Being committed to a diversified revenue base is one thing. To actually make it more and more diversified is quite another. Yet that is exactly what we have been doing, year in and year out. In other words, we've pushed this idea hard: never be satisfied that we're diversified enough. Just in the past year alone, we've added new revenue streams, ranging from some of the work coming out of our new Entrepreneurial Zone (where many of the training products that NEHA offers comes from) to a variety of new grants and even to the development

of brand-new programs such as a private sector-orientated track for our nationally recognized Epi-Ready program.

At the same time that we're expanding the number of programs that we are offering, we are also working to improve the quality of many of our mainstay programs, from our annual conference to our publications to the training that we offer for our credentialing. We do this because you and our competition demand it. Moreover, we realize that if we allow the products and services that NEHA offers to grow stale, EH professionals will lose interest in them. That's a situation that we can't afford—financially and otherwise.

NEHA has also been working hard to extend its reach. We are making efforts beyond anything we have done in the past to diversify our membership base and to introduce NEHA to EH professionals who are working in nontraditional environmental health employment settings.

We've also worked hard to expand the scope of EH work for which we contract to the federal government. A huge economic event for us this year was landing a five-year contract with CDC that is funded up to a million dollars per year for each of the five years. This contract enables NEHA to perform a variety of work important to both the National Center for Environmental Health of the CDC and to the EH profession. It also constitutes another giant step in the direction of preserving our association's financial viability. I might add that this funding is in addition to other government funding that we also enjoy

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