



Strategic Directions

History of NEHA Strategic Directions

Several years ago, NEHA's board decided to adopt a rather unique approach to envisioning the association's future and determining the association's priorities. It made the bold move of stepping out of classical process of strategic planning. Once out of that process, NEHA's leadership turned to a planning model that was much less constraining. It is a model that supports the idea of an organization always being on the balls of its feet, ready to respond to whatever issue might arise.

This more flexible model prompts us to think more in terms of directions, leanings and above all, relevance. This planning model- which was also suggested by our board's strategic thinking committee- offers NEHA a way to consider and articulate its future aspirations while at the same time, preserving the association's ability to turn on a dime when unexpected issues and even business opportunities arise. The device that makes this possible is the concept of strategic directions. Strategic directions, as opposed to strategic goals or objectives, give NEHA a flexibility that goals and objectives don't. More to the point, strategic directions allow us to react to new and relevant developments and to even quickly change course if the basis for our directions change.

It is our belief that little good is served if we reach our strategic goals only to discover - once there - that this goal is no longer relevant to the profession NEHA serves.

The essence of our formal planning function now rests with the annual exercise of reviewing our association's strategic directions. To help us in this annual review, we look at two factors. First, we review the progress we've made throughout the previous year in support of our directions. Second, we consider what is going on in the world in general and in the world of environmental health in particular. We then determine if our strategic directions remain relevant to the needs of our profession and the ability of NEHA to make a positive impact on the profession's ongoing advancement. Advancing the profession through our strategic directions is the fundamental concept that our mission statement enshrines.

Informally, we have permission to conduct this exercise every time a new development emerges that suggests a direction revision.

Our strategic directions provide a general sense for the types of issues and concerns that we believe are *currently* of the greatest significance to NEHA. Together, the entire set of direction statements help to define and give expression to, the general direction in which this organization is headed. In combination, they also represent where we have determined that we need to spend a significant amount of our time and our resources.

They are intentionally general. They are also adopted with the understanding that they are much more markers of direction than statements of destination. As such, they reflect our best judgment as to what we think is an appropriate and relevant course of direction today- all the while understanding that relevance can change overnight... as can the directions.

By focusing on directions and not destinations, we keep our association on the balls of its feet – ready to change course at a moment's notice should circumstances in our business environment indicate that such a change is appropriate. This mindset and way of operating represents the extra commitment that NEHA makes to insure that the association remains relevant to the profession and to the NEHA membership.

This way of thinking about the future frees us up from commitments to “stay the course” only to find that once we arrive at a destination, it is no longer relevant or meaningful to our cause. The flexibility that we now enjoy in our approach to our future may mean that we change course often but at least we honor our fundamental commitment to the membership to be relevant as opposed to any commitment to be at a certain place at a certain time whether or not that place any longer remains relevant to the people and cause that we stand for. Arriving at destinations that have long since lost their relevance serves no purpose, wastes precious resources, undermines competitiveness and even undermines the essential credibility of the organization.

Our strategic directions represent our way of telling the world who we are and what we stand for on any given day. They also give us a measure by which we can prioritize among the many pressures and opportunities that weigh in on us each and every day.

Current Strategic Directions

As previously noted, each spring, the NEHA board goes through the exercise of re-examining these directions in view of how the world *presently* looks. We also reflect on all that we have done over the past year in support of these directions. We then make the decision as to whether or not any or all of these directions continue to be relevant. If we believe that circumstances have changed such that we need to modify some of our directions to maintain our relevance, we then do so.

Thanks to a considered effort two years ago (finalized at our December 2006 Board Meeting); we consolidated our Strategic Directions into four broad categories. They are as follows:

1. Training and Education

- We need to be offering product for the broad topic of terrorism response and emergency preparedness.
- More needs to be done to expand the educational offerings provided by NEHA. This extends to include even consideration of satellite conferences.

2. Credentialing

NEHA needs to strengthen the stature of the REHS/RS credential. This includes moving in the direction of making the REHS/RS credential NEHA's premier credential and getting more states to use the NEHA national test. This direction also includes movement on NEHA's part to establish a more national, uniform standard for competence in environmental health, which would be the essence of the REHS/RS.

3. Advocacy

- More needs to be done to increase the awareness and appreciation of environmental health and the environmental health profession. This direction would get NEHA more heavily into enhancing the image of the profession and even into branding.
- The association needs to create a capability for staying on top of emerging issues, such as SARS, West Nile, pandemic flu and other emerging

pathogens. NEHA also needs to use all available resources to provide information on these issues to its members. These resources range from the journal to the AEC to NEHA's Website, etc.

- A stronger program for leadership development needs to be worked on and implemented within the profession. Leadership development extends from drawing talented graduating students into the profession to providing for a leadership ascension process to groom future leaders for the profession.
- NEHA needs to better define its niche in the international community and what its desires for international environmental health are.
- NEHA should be instrumental in defining the practice of Environmental Health.
- NEHA should become *the* accrediting organization for local Environmental Health programs.

4. NEHA's Organizational Capacity

- NEHA needs to do whatever it takes to strengthen it financially and to take advantage of financial opportunities. This was described as an all-encompassing thrust that would ground most all of what NEHA did in financial sensibility.
- The importance of NEHA's Website as a fundamental aspect of the business of NEHA needs to be enhanced. Measures need to be taken that make the Website easier for NEHA's members and customers. Also, new developments should be considered, including upgrading the site, creating a member's only section, and giving members access to the NEHA database.
- Development of relationships with governmental agencies and other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) needs to be an ongoing emphasis for the association.
- NEHA must maintain its computer systems (hardware and software) at the optimum level to provide necessary services to members and staff

Current Progress Report—Spring 2008

1. Training and Education

- We are expanding our CERT offerings and driving more and more education into web based presentations. This gives us an alternative to the AEC and positions us as a resource for contemporary education. Through this program, we can also capture the education that we offer at the AEC. This gives us a way to extend its shelf life and make it available to those who couldn't attend an AEC.
- We are also moving in the direction of podcasts, blogs and even other more modern ways of education such as online credentialing classes and something like a radio NEHA to further connect with customers in ways that they prefer.
- We have vastly transformed the AEC to make it more of a multi-generational and green event.
- We are looking at making major changes to the journal as well in order to have a special product that people will highly value.
- We are taking more and more of our education on the road and delivering it in venues that go well beyond just our AEC.

Since training and education speak to the central purpose of NEHA and since our members are in need of this kind of help, this strategic direction topic is as relevant today as it was when it was first approved.

2. Credentialing

The major thrust of this strategic direction has to do with strengthening and improving NEHA's premier REHS/RS credential. Major themes in this direction include:

- Development of an online learning course for the REHS/RS
- Working to establish reciprocity with California for this credential and in getting those states that don't yet use the NEHA exam to use it

- Advocating for using this credential in conjunction with whatever kind of performance or accreditation standards may be evolving.
- Setting up programs with academia to use the REHS/RS for graduating students thereby getting these new professionals off on the right footing for their professionalism

The REHS/RS is one of our four core products. As such, it will always be a focus of our work. To also have it recognized as one of our strategic directions just makes the case as to how important this program is to NEHA.

3. Advocacy

NEHA is incredibly involved in policy issues and advocacy. The time and attention that we are devoting to advocacy seems as though it has been increasing exponentially over the past couple of years. And that trajectory is, if anything, continuing into the foreseeable future.

Major themes to our advocacy work include:

- Building and maintaining relationships with a host of other relevant NGO's and governmental agencies
- Offering our opinions and views on increasing numbers of EH positions
- Building our Governmental Affairs program
- Establishing our good name to the point where other interests are now more and more coming to us to ask us for our input and opinion.
- We've demonstrated with many of our activities leadership for environmental health
- We've opened up discussions with Garrison to look into doing some heavy marketing for EH. This includes even the possibility of working on some type of a tv show that could highlight our profession.
- We now feature both CDC and EPA in our journal

In short, this direction has spurred a significant amount of activity for NEHA. We see nothing in the future that would diminish this area of focus for us. In fact, if anything we see this growing which is affirmation that this strategic direction remains very vital to our interests and aims.

4. NEHA's Organizational Capacity

As important as our other directions are, we maintain that there is no direction that is more important to us than this one. And there has not been anything that we have done this past year that has been more important than this. Our only modification is that we want to extend this direction to also include keeping up with the times.

We say that this direction is urgent because if we don't have the resources, organization and capacity to carry out our dreams, then talking about our dreams makes for nothing more than a discussion of fantasies. It is imperative in other words that we continually day after day hammer away at making our organization a stronger and more contemporary one. Only as NEHA becomes stronger, in tune with the times and more sustainable will we have the ability to achieve both today's and tomorrow's aspirations.

This direction will always be relevant to us – no matter how the outside world changes. Major initiatives that we have embarked upon or continued this past year include:

- Major revisions to the web site to bring it into the Web 2.0 world
- Creation of the EZ to help insure our ability to stay innovative and profitable
- Continued focus of the financial implications of what we do – from saving money to bringing in new sources of revenue
- Constant emphasis on staff creativity and ways to become more financially successful
- Implementation of a reorganization
- Building the staff resource to higher and higher levels
- Steady influence on staff to:
 - maintain and improve our core services/programs
 - build upon our other services/programs, and
 - at all times be on the lookout for where we can introduce new services/programs (such as our San Diego and Saudi projects and our new online NEHA Training product)
- Maintain *and* expand our program of grants
- Maintain and expand our program of credentials
- Addressed areas where there were staff challenges