

▶ USING DATA TO IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Part 3: Informatics—Existing and Developing Resources

What Is Informatics and Why Is it Important to Environmental Health?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines public health informatics as the “systematic application of information, computer science, and technology to public health practice, research, and learning.” At the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), we are focusing on environmental health data standardization, collection, sharing, and use. Local, state, and federal agencies collect environmental health data through many avenues: inspections, complaint investigations, community interactions, monitoring and surveillance, and illness outbreak investigations. When these data are collected, they create a broad picture of an environmental health condition that can be used to inform environmental health initiatives and improve policies, interventions, and programs. By moving toward a wider adoption of informatics and data driven decision-making, we can expect positive impacts on population health.

What Is NEHA Doing?

Environmental health is profoundly local, however, collecting and using data at the local level can be a challenge. At NEHA, we’ve identified the limitation of resources as a key hinderance to meaningful data use and informatics systems adoption. In response, this year we worked to develop new resources, tools, and success stories that you can refer-

ence and adopt to improve the policies, interventions, programs, and health of the residents of your jurisdiction.

NEHA Informatics Committee

In Fall 2017, NEHA developed the Informatics Committee that is made up of local, state, federal, and industry professionals. Committee members provide expertise and support by identifying data related needs of environmental health professionals, existing tools, and developing new resources. Since that time, the committee has met monthly to discuss emerging issues, provide subject matter expertise, and provide guidance as NEHA develops informatics and data related projects and activities.

In March 2018, two subcommittees were developed under the Informatics Committee—the request for proposal (RFP) subcommittee and the best practices subcommittee. The RFP subcommittee is committed to developing resources to support and improve the RFP process, while the best practices subcommittee will focus on identifying successful data collection, sharing, and use initiatives and programs to highlight these efforts and create models of practice.

New Resources

In April 2018, the Informatics Committee met in person for a 2-day meeting at the NEHA office in Denver, Colorado, to discuss future priorities for the committee and NEHA. The meeting included presentations

Editor’s Note: The National Environmental Health Association is publishing a three-part series that describes the development and application of tools, trainings, and resources available in informatics. This series will serve as a guide for identifying new and existing resources that can be adopted at the local environmental health level. This series is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Contract 200-2013-57475. The conclusions in this series are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of CDC.

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from committee members that showcased personal projects, meaningful conversation around obstacles, and successes related to data use, as well as provided a deep dive into selecting activities for the committee to move forward. Activities for the committee were identified as follows.

Request for Proposal Activities

1. Development of a glossary of RFP related terms to facilitate common understanding and use of terminology associated with procurement practices.
2. Development of a RFP decision matrix, including a pre-RFP needs assessment to assist in understanding the diverse elements included in developing a RFP, as well as determining if a full RFP is required.
3. Development of a repository of RFP materials to serve as a resource and guide for agencies going through the RFP process.

Best Practices Activities

1. Completion of key informant interviews to further inform projects and identify areas of need.
2. Development of a repository of free and low cost trainings and resources to centralize useful tools that can be used to support informatics activities and programs.
3. Identification and development of success stories through website content and webinars to utilize as models and inspiration for data use.

Since the April meeting, the Informatics Committee has been building and developing these identified resources. We invite you to visit NEHA's website to view developed content that includes a webinar series, a listing of free and low cost resources, and more.

Additional Resources

Over the past year, we have identified and developed additional resources to support environmental health professional data collection, sharing, and use. In February 2018, NEHA hosted the Integrating Data to Empower Advancement—Environmental Health Virtual Conference (IDEA EH). This conference brought together professionals from across the country in a virtual environment to exchange information and explore resources, innovative solutions, and programs in data driven decision-making. IDEA EH included

over 20 presentations from passionate professionals who recognize the value and importance of environmental health data. These presentations are available to view on NEHA's Learning Management System.

At the NEHA 2018 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition in Anaheim, California, NEHA had a full conference track dedicated to data and technology. This track included 3 days of educational sessions relevant to all audiences. Presentations spotlighted informatics and data programs across the country, innovation initiatives, and available tools and resources. NEHA's presentation provided an overview of its informatics program and this year's activities. Multiple software developers also attended the conference to present on the power of open data and the innovation that stems from an environmental health/technology

partnership. Finally, the Informatics Committee delivered multiple presentations that focused on topics such as the cloud and data visualization.

We are continually impressed and inspired by the innovative programs and initiatives that are executed by environmental health professionals. We invite you to share your stories with us and are eager to learn about your experiences with data collection, sharing, and use. If you have any questions, thoughts, or concerns, please contact Solly Poprish at spoprish@neha.org.

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Did You Know?

NEHA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Colorado Integrated Food Safety Center of Excellence (CoE) have developed a suite of tools, trainings, and resources on environmental assessments conducted as part of foodborne illness outbreak investigations. A video has been posted (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah8i0zuzw7I&feature=youtu.be) that summarizes the available trainings and resources. The CoEs have also collaborated with NEHA and others to develop core competencies for environmental health professionals who investigate foodborne illness outbreaks. The core competencies will be used to standardize training curriculum development, identify training gaps, and guide practitioners to the most appropriate trainings. Learn more at www.COFoodSafety.org.



REHS/RS

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