

## NEHA NEWS

**Call for Nominations**

By Angelica Ledezma ([aledezma@neha.org](mailto:aledezma@neha.org))

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is governed by a board of directors who oversee the affairs of the association. There will be four board positions up for election in 2021:

- Region 2 vice-president (represents Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada; 3-year term);
- Region 3 vice-president (represents Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, and all NEHA members residing outside of the U.S. [except members of the U.S. armed forces]; 3-year term);
- Region 8 vice-president (represents Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, DC, West Virginia, and all NEHA members of the U.S. armed forces residing outside of the U.S.; 3-year term); and
- second vice-president (national officer; 5-year term that progresses through the national offices and will serve as NEHA president in 2024–2025).

We seek diversity on the board in terms of gender, ethnicity, and a balance between regulatory officials, academia, and industry. Most importantly, we want people who will help us develop a new strategic vision, have experience managing diverse organizations, and can open doors for NEHA in building relationships with industry, academia, federal and state agencies, foundations, and other associations.

Requirements to serve on the board include

- membership with NEHA (individual or life) for 3 consecutive years prior to assuming office on July 15, 2021;
- not simultaneously holding a voting position on the board of a NEHA affiliate;
- endorsement by at least five voting NEHA members (from members residing in the region for regional vice-president candidates and from members residing in at least three different regions for second vice-president candidates); and
- willingness to commit the time necessary to actively serve on the board.

If you are interested in serving on our board of directors, please visit [www.neha.org/elections](http://www.neha.org/elections) for information on the nomination and election process. You can also contact NEHA Immediate Past-President Dr. Priscilla Oliver, chairman of NEHA's Nominations Committee, at [immediatepastpresident@neha.org](mailto:immediatepastpresident@neha.org). The deadline to submit a nomination is **December 1, 2020**.

**NEHA Staff Profile**

As part of tradition, NEHA features new staff members in the *Journal* around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to one NEHA staff member. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on page 36.



**Jesse Bliss**

It was with great pleasure that I joined NEHA as director of Program and Partnership Development (PPD) starting in October 2019. This new chapter in my professional career takes the many individual threads of my experience and expertise from nearly two decades of academic, research, teaching, community engagement, and public health practice

and weaves them together to form a multifaceted fabric of innovative, visionary, needs-based, and targeted resources that I use to guide and support the growth of PPD. My background and experience that comprise this fabric include workforce engagement and higher education administration, teaching and research; public health practice and environmental health workforce development; emergency preparedness, community resilience, disaster response, and recovery program development; environmental health strike team creation and deployment; and global health engagement, to name a few.

While this background has helped to prepare me for this leadership role at NEHA, I am honored to work with a vibrant, dedicated, passionate, and knowledgeable staff who work in PPD who help make our programs successful. I count myself blessed to work with a fantastic team who love the work they get to do, bring great energy and ideas on how to implement new programs, and pursue growth opportunities. PPD staff actively engage our members, both to learn from subject matter experts and to provide resources and support for the workforce.

My wife and I and our two boys ages 8 and 5 relocated from Salt Lake City, Utah, to the Washington, DC, metro area in December 2019 to establish stronger leadership support for NEHA's Washington, DC, staff and to support further growth of our presence in the eastern part of the U.S. We embraced this opportunity wholeheartedly and have since planted roots in a great community just outside of Frederick, Maryland. We are enjoying getting to know the East Coast as it is the first time we have lived on this side of our nation.

As I write this staff profile, our global community is in the throes of battling a pandemic that has challenged everyone, has highlighted ongoing issues with health disparities, and has pressed the public health workforce harder than ever before as we contend with this novel infectious disease. If there was ever a time to be involved in public health and more specifically, environmental health workforce development, it is right now. I am honored to work for an organization committed to the health, well-being, educational, and occupational needs of the nation's environmental health workforce.

To environmental health professionals, I want to share that I am inspired by your work, commitment, and by the numerous ways you are helping to make an essential difference in this unprecedented pandemic response. I share my heartfelt thanks to each and

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every one of you and offer my commitment to pursue excellence in all we endeavor to accomplish for our membership and for the environmental health workforce across the nation.

### **NEPHIP Goes Remote During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Part 2**

How do you successfully turn an in-person, multistate travel internship into a robust virtual program in 1 month? The secret is simple: establish strong partnerships and retain strong staff who are passionate and innovative. In the September 2020 *Journal*, former NEHA project coordinator Christine Ortiz Gumina wrote about the National Environmental Public Health Internship Program (NEPHIP) that is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional in-person travel program was innovated into a remote/virtual platform, constructing what public health internships could potentially look like in the future.

In any project, success is determined by the strength of its partnerships. Having a solid foundation and strong communication can move mountains and in the case of NEPHIP, transform an in-person internship with challenging travel logistics into a robust virtual program within 1 month. NEHA managed NEPHIP through the lens of partnerships and built strong communication channels between Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC) academic program directors and Leslie Mitchell, EHAC director. When news of the COVID-19 pandemic began to fill the media and cities and states were closing down in March, it became apparent that the NEPHIP internships were in jeopardy.

Mitchell helped connect NEHA with many of the academic directors at EHAC-accredited schools by creating an opportunity for NEHA to speak with the directors about their concerns, the foreseeable challenges, and the needs of the selected NEPHIP students. What ultimately came of these multiple meetings was that an in-person internship would not be a safe option. To continue the program, it would have to be transformed to a virtual program. Simultaneously, meetings with the selected host health departments were also occurring to access their capabilities of hosting a student remotely and what potential projects the student could contribute to in this remote manner.

In order to innovate you must have passion. Understanding the connection between environmental health education and the field of practice is what makes NEPHIP such a vital internship for environmental health. NEPHIP's goal is to be the pipeline for graduating environmental health students to the public sector. Coming from a health department background, Ortiz Gumina understood this connection and the need to establish this pipeline. Canceling the program due to COVID-19 was not an option.

NEPHIP's first change was recognizing host health departments that could support and mentor students remotely. Many previ-

ously selected health departments could not understandably support the new logistics while others were able to host multiple students. Once the new host health departments were established, projects were worked through based on the needs of the health departments. Students participating in the NEPHIP 2020 summer program contributed to improving preparedness plans, air quality programs through asthma community outreach, harmful algal bloom programs, veterinary programs, hazardous waste, and issues associated with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), just to name a few.

In addition to working on a project remotely, a National Environmental Public Health Network web page was created through the Higher Logic platform. The web page housed a continuously updated list of environmental health and public health trainings. The curated list of trainings consisted of trainings from CDC, NEHA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Tulane Public Health Learning Management System, and many other reputable learning platforms. In addition to the training resources, the network page housed a calendar that shared webinars ranging in topics from race and health inequality to COVID-19 and disinfectants. The platform creation was initially established for the use of students selected for the NEPHIP internships. Many EHAC-accredited program students had lost their summer internships, however, due to the pandemic. Academic directors at these universities and colleges expressed the great need to expand the National Environmental Public Health Network page to all EHAC-accredited program students who had lost their internships. This expansion allowed for more students to network with each other from multiple schools across the country.

The final transformation for NEPHIP was sharing on-site food establishment inspections, hazardous waste site assessments, and vector control field inspections virtually. To address this issue, NEHA purchased GoPro cameras and sent them to health departments that were willing to use the cameras to record inspections to share with the students through the network page. These videos allowed not only NEPHIP students to observe field work but also EHAC-accredited program students who had access to the network page.

The success of this transformation was confirmed by check-in calls between NEPHIP students, academic advisors, and the NEPHIP project coordinator. While a remote internship by no means can fully replicate the priceless experience of an in-person field work program, many of the students during the check-in calls expressed that it came close. The program still provided foundational skills, knowledge, and experience within the environmental health practice.

The pandemic has drastically changed our lives and our futures. Innovations can come from earth shaking events. Moments like these are occasions to reflect, change, and grow. NEHA would like to thank all those who helped in supporting the NEPHIP program this summer. Check out part 1 of this story published in the September 2020 *Journal* at [www.neha.org/publications/journal-environmental-health/jeh-issue-september-2020](http://www.neha.org/publications/journal-environmental-health/jeh-issue-september-2020). 🐼