

PACE Setting for a Long and Healthy Life

NACCHO's Community-based Environmental Health Assessment Methodology is Maturing in its Tenth Year of Use

By: Jonathan Schwartz, Senior Analyst



The *Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH)* is a methodology designed to assist local public health agencies in collaborating with their communities in designing and conducting innovative environmental public health assessment activities. The *PACE EH* guidebook was published in May 2000 and has since been adopted and utilized in approximately 100 communities across the United States, and in several international locales. The guidebook offers thirteen detailed tasks that can serve to walk a facilitating agency through the complex process of community-based environmental health assessment. It includes numerous worksheets and tested tips that simplify the assessment process and clarify both its value and composition.

PACE EH is one among only a relatively few community-based environmental health assessment methodologies to continue to flourish and grow as it nears completion of its first decade of use. Each successive year has seen more local health agencies adapt the methodology for their own use, and an increasing number of community collaborations that return to the methodology, and the programs it supports, on a cyclical basis.

NACCHO, and *PACE EH*'s sponsors at the National Center for Environmental Health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NCEH/CDC), are very proud of *PACE EH*'s ongoing, and growing, success. A brief look at the reasons for *PACE EH*'s vitality reveals that the secret to its success very much mirrors the kind of common sense advice our nation's health care providers have been sharing with us for years.

Get Out as Much as Possible

PACE EH is not growing in the shade. NACCHO staff and a plethora of local and national community-based environmental health experts are consistently and vigorously promoting the *PACE EH* methodology and the overall value of collaborative local environmental health assessment across the country

through a program of webinars, site trainings, publications and targeted "word-of-mouth" campaigns.

NACCHO staff has organized and facilitated *PACE EH* webinars focusing on introducing the methodology to local public health officials that have never previously been exposed to it, and complimentary site trainings that utilize local public health participation in describing and planning for a locally appropriate *PACE EH* project.

Ongoing *PACE EH* success stories, including examples from across the state of Florida and in NCEH/CDC-sponsored *PACE EH* Demonstration sites, have been analyzed and described in a number of readily available resources on NACCHO's Web site (www.naccho.org). Also available through NACCHO's Web site are documents and toolkits that can serve to simplify the *PACE EH* process for new adapters.

The *PACE EH* methodology is further sustained by the ongoing efforts of NACCHO's Community Environmental Health Assessment (CEHA) workgroup. This four person committee actively promotes the *PACE EH* methodology through representation at NACCHO events and in their roles as spokespeople for improving local public health as advisors to NACCHO's Board of Directors. In the last few years this group has been instrumental in assisting in a formal assessment of the *PACE EH* methodology and in serving as peer advisors to numerous communities and facilitating agencies considering conducting a *PACE EH* project. They have also been called on to provide context and background information in support of *PACE EH* at national conferences and focused trainings.

PACE EH further maintains its healthy vigor by reaching beyond national borders, and seeking to have impact across the globe and in a variety of non-traditional venues. Since its inception, *PACE EH* has been used in South America and Australia. NACCHO staff has educated local public health

experts from China, and a number of tribal communities located in United States and Canada. *PACE EH* has been presented as a tool for environmental health assessment to U.S.-Mexican border communities in New Mexico and Texas. The *PACE EH* guidebook has been translated into Spanish (available in print and for download from [NACCHO's Web site](#)).

Stay Connected to Friends

PACE EH appears younger than its initial decade of life would suggest in large part by maintaining a large and vibrant social circle. NACCHO staff recognized long ago that for *PACE EH* to remain significant over time it had to partner with strong and important allies as it matured. To this end, *PACE EH* has made impressive strides in connecting with complimentary environmental health directives developed in a number of state and federal arenas.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified *PACE EH* as a primary tool for realizing the goals of their ongoing Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) project work. EPA's CARE project has placed millions of dollars across approximately 50 US communities to organize and conduct multi-year focused collaborative environmental health assessments and facilitate community led actions to address identified threats to human health from environmental pollutants. Over the last few years NACCHO staff and partners have been instrumental in providing training and resources to EPA CARE grant recipients and worked closely with EPA leaders at the national level to dovetail our collective assessment activities whenever possible. (Information about EPA's CARE program can be found at: www.epa.gov/care/.)

PACE EH has also been revitalized by the ongoing assessment work taking place across the state of Florida. Through the concerted efforts of visionary leaders in the Florida State Department of Health, approximately half of Florida's 67 counties have received financial and educational support as they undertake local level *PACE EH*-inspired activities. The Florida Department of Health already boasts a long list of successful implementations, including communities that have not only used their *PACE EH* work to alleviate specific, and potentially devastating, environmental conditions, but also to bring social and media attention to statewide environmental health disparities around drinking water, housing, and pedestrian safety. Florida *PACE EH* work in Indian River County has been recognized by NACCHO as a Model Practice and included in an accessible database. (To learn more about Florida's *PACE EH* activities, visit: www.doh.state.fl.us/ENVIRONMENT/programs/PACE-EH/PACE-EH.htm; to learn more about NACCHO's Model Practices and view the database, visit: <http://www.naccho.org/topics/modelpractices/>.)

PACE EH also boasts a viable and valuable partnership with the Indian Health Service. In order to better serve the distinct environmental health assessment needs of tribal communities, NACCHO staff has an ongoing partnership with the Indian Health Service that has resulted in small scale targeted funding for tribal communities to utilize the *PACE EH* methodology. NACCHO and NCEH/CDC initially supported the *PACE EH* work of four tribal communities between 2004-2006. Future funding for tribal *PACE EH* work is under the discretion of the Indian Health Service. NACCHO, however, remains connected to these ongoing efforts. As recently as last year NACCHO sponsored *PACE EH* trainings that incorporated sessions focused on tribal adaptations of the *PACE EH* methodology.

The *PACE EH* methodology further maintains its youthful glow by establishing significant connections among like-minded NACCHO projects and programs. Over the last five years, staff has developed resources and trainings that serve to unify *PACE EH* with ongoing health disparities research and broad health systems strategic planning. Staff has collaborated to produce publications describing the steps required to adapt *PACE EH* as a tool specifically designed to address local environmental health disparities, and presented on the topic at a variety of conferences and trainings. Staff has also begun working more closely with NACCHO's Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) program, which has developed the MAPP methodology, thematically similar to *PACE EH*, to facilitate a broad collaborative health systems strategic planning process designed to improve the efficiency and efficacy of all the key players in a local public health system, including public health agencies, community planners, hospitals, first responders, etc. NACCHO staff has identified these two similar processes as complimentary and is developing tools and presentations that will assist local public health agencies in understanding the differences and similarities between the two tools, and providing some guidance for contextualizing each in relation to the other. (More information about NACCHO's MAPP Program can be found at: www.naccho.org/mapp.)

Never Stop Growing

It has been an operating motto for the CEHA program at NACCHO that the only consistent aspect of the *PACE EH* methodology is that it has never stopped changing. Perhaps more than any other factor, this fact has ensured that *PACE EH* has remained relevant for close to a decade, and surely will continue to be vital for the foreseeable future.

As recently as 2003, NCEH/CDC contracted with the Battelle group to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact *PACE EH* has had on the field of environmental health assessment (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CEHA/Docs/PACE_EH_Final_Report_Process_Evaluation.pdf). Battelle concluded that

PACE EH has had a significant, positive and far reaching effect on the arena of environmental public health. The vast majority of *PACE EH* users have benefited from their exposure to, and use of, *PACE EH* and strongly recommend that non-adapters consider using the tool at their earliest convenience.

However, despite the overwhelmingly positive results of the Battelle evaluation, responses also indicated some key areas in which NACCHO and NCEH/CDC could improve the tool, and facilitate greater utilization of it in the future. NACCHO is committed to ensuring that every effort is made to pay credence to these comments and revitalize *PACE EH* in part by responding to the results of the Battelle evaluation. To that end, staff is currently taking steps to address some of the key areas of concern identified in the Battelle report.

Staff is working diligently to provide a wider and more diverse selection of tools that can be used to assist local jurisdictions in their *PACE EH* work. A new and improved *PACE EH* toolkit has just gone “live” on the Web inside NACCHO’s Toolbox (www.naccho.org/toolbox/program.cfm?id=19). Although just in its initial stages, as more resources become available, tools and documents will be added to the toolkit. In particular, staff is looking to shore up tools and resources in the field that will assist in the identification and development of viable environmental health indicators, a point of particular complexity in *PACE EH* acknowledged by responders to the Battelle evaluation.

Finally, NACCHO staff is growing *PACE EH* through the continuous inclusion of new staff and workgroup members, new peer advisors, and new field experts available for consultation by current and future *PACE EH* adapters. In the last two years, NACCHO has hired a new associate to help bridge the gaps between MAPP and *PACE EH*, established a brand new CEHA workgroup, identified approximately half a dozen potential new consultants and peer advisors, and served as situational *PACE EH* advisors to numerous related EPA CARE projects, a Kellogg funded health disparities project, start-up statewide *PACE EH* initiatives, and a few other unique applications of *PACE EH* just getting off the ground.

PACE-ing for a Marathon, not a Sprint

Longevity was never the motivating force for the development and design of *PACE EH*, but it has proven to be one of its most endearing, and enduring, characteristics. The combination of flexibility, ideology and clarity found in the *PACE EH* methodology has given it a vitality far beyond anything that could be planned for, or expected. Thus it has become a primary concern, and point of pride, among NACCHO staff to

never fail *PACE EH*, or hamper its potential value, by growing complacent with our enviable success. *PACE EH* will stay vital because NACCHO and NCEH/CDC staff is committed to large-scale targeted and focused promotion of an ever evolving and endlessly adaptable environmental health assessment tool to numerous and strategic partners and complimentary programs found across the full breadth of environmental health concerns in the US and across the globe. As such, the only thing limiting *PACE EH*’s shelf-life is the value it provides to users, which by all indications will only continue to grow in the coming decade.

REPORT

July 2008



Contact Information

To connect with peers or to receive technical assistance for the *PACE EH* process, contact NACCHO's CEHA Senior Analyst, Jonathan Schwartz, at jschwartz@naccho.org or (202) 507-4263.

To learn more about *PACE EH*, visit the CEHA Web site at www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/CEHA.cfm.

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health



NACCHO is the national organization representing local health departments. NACCHO supports efforts that protect and improve the health of all people and all communities by promoting national policy, developing resources and programs, seeking health equity, and supporting effective local public health practice and systems.

1100 17th St, NW, 2nd Floor Washington, DC 20036

P (202) 783 5550 F (202) 783 1583

www.naccho.org