

# Community Education: Benevolent Organizations Meeting Temporary Restaurant Food Safety Requirements

2010 - 2011

## Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute Fellow:

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Public food vendors in rural Union County Oregon are licensed by the Center for Human Development, a private not for profit organization. Historically the environmental health (EH) department was managed as a state program where EH specialists would travel throughout the state of Oregon to conduct sanitation inspections of licensed facilities and large temporary events similar to county fairs. In 2006 the program became Union County's responsibility and a local EH specialist became available to the community. Despite the time that has passed, there continues to be limited community knowledge of the local EH department and the services the department is required to enforce. This mainly involves the local "benevolent organizations" who regularly host public functions where food is served.

In the past 3 years, outreach by the local EH specialist has increased and, yet, is still limited to quick fixes like conducting surprise inspections of benevolent organizations. These limitations continue to burden the local EH specialist's resources and endurance for he is unable to be everywhere at the same time. Recognizing these limitations and the potential risks of not succeeding, the local EH specialist needs to take a different approach. Altering current practice to one with an emphasis on improving public outreach can shift the burden from limiting the EH specialist's available resources to enabling organizations and public to take some form of responsibility. This shift (or addition) of responsibility can happen through the EH specialist increasing his efforts in being more of a public presence through attending key meetings, formally contacting key stake holders, and promoting the program through various forms of local media outlets. If the general public is able to grasp the importance of this program and know what is required then, hopefully, the benevolent organizations will feel compelled to fulfill their responsibility.

## **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND:**

All individuals or establishments serving food to the public are to be licensed through the local Environmental Health (EH) department. In Union County Oregon, EH is managed through the private not-for-profit organization the Center for Human Development.

The EH department in Union County is a relatively new program, initiated in 2006 when responsibility shifted from the State of Oregon to the county. This was the first time a local EH specialist became available to this community of 25,038 residents <sup>1</sup>.

Initially, the EH department regulated licensed food service operations, swimming pools and spa pools, tourist and traveler facilities, school kitchens, child care, and other licensed facilities. Recently, temporary establishment inspections have increased, and public drinking water systems, on-site home lead inspections, food handler card trainings, and enforcement of Oregon's Smokefree Workplace Law have been added.

Licensed establishments were able to adapt quickly to the change of regulatory agencies, but community organizations have been slow to modify practices. To the local EH specialist, this is most noticeable when regulating temporary food establishments hosted by benevolent

organizations. A benevolent organization is defined as any person organized and existing for charitable, benevolent, eleemosynary, humane, patriotic, religious, philanthropic, recreational, social, educational, civic, fraternal or other nonprofit purposes<sup>2</sup>. In Union County, the benevolent organization base consists of 50 churches, 4 granges, 1 university, 6 school districts, 1 hospital, 3 fairgrounds, and a community who enjoys hosting fundraisers for anything from volunteer fire department pancake breakfasts to benefit dinners for an individual's medical expenses.

This slow adaptation of benevolent organizations may be attributed to earlier inspection practices. Previously, the State employed two EH specialists who were responsible for nine counties in Eastern Oregon, covering an area as much as 36,144 square miles<sup>1</sup>. Available time had to be focused on inspecting the licensed facilities and large temporary events, i.e. county fairs. When it came to the variable, yet frequent, benevolent temporary food events, no EH specialist was available to license them. This ultimately allowed them to operate unregulated with little enforcement.

For the past three years, the local EH specialist has been increasing enforcement activities in hopes of meeting the department's public health obligation of inspecting or providing a consultation for all temporary benevolent establishments serving food<sup>3</sup>. However, there are numerous temporary events, often occurring simultaneously in neighboring towns and the local EH Specialist is only a part-time position, making it difficult to inspect all of these events in addition to managing other job responsibilities. As a result, the local EH specialist is forced to choose which events to inspect, hoping that the other events are following safe food handling practices. Unfortunately, it is common for benevolent temporary food establishments to not fully comply with public health laws and safe food handling. Not only do they lack knowledge of safe food practices, they are also unaware of the existence of the EH department or temporary restaurant licensing requirements. In this case inspections are then often a surprise to the benevolent organizations. Recognizing these issues, the local EH specialist regularly shifts roles from rigid regulator to interactive educator by requiring operators to do one or many of the following:

- Not serve specific food items
- Halt operation to go to the store for missing items
- Halt operation to go home for missing items
- Borrow missing items from a neighboring vendor
- Rearrange their operation for safer food handling practices
- Follow specific guidelines written onto the temporary restaurant inspection report

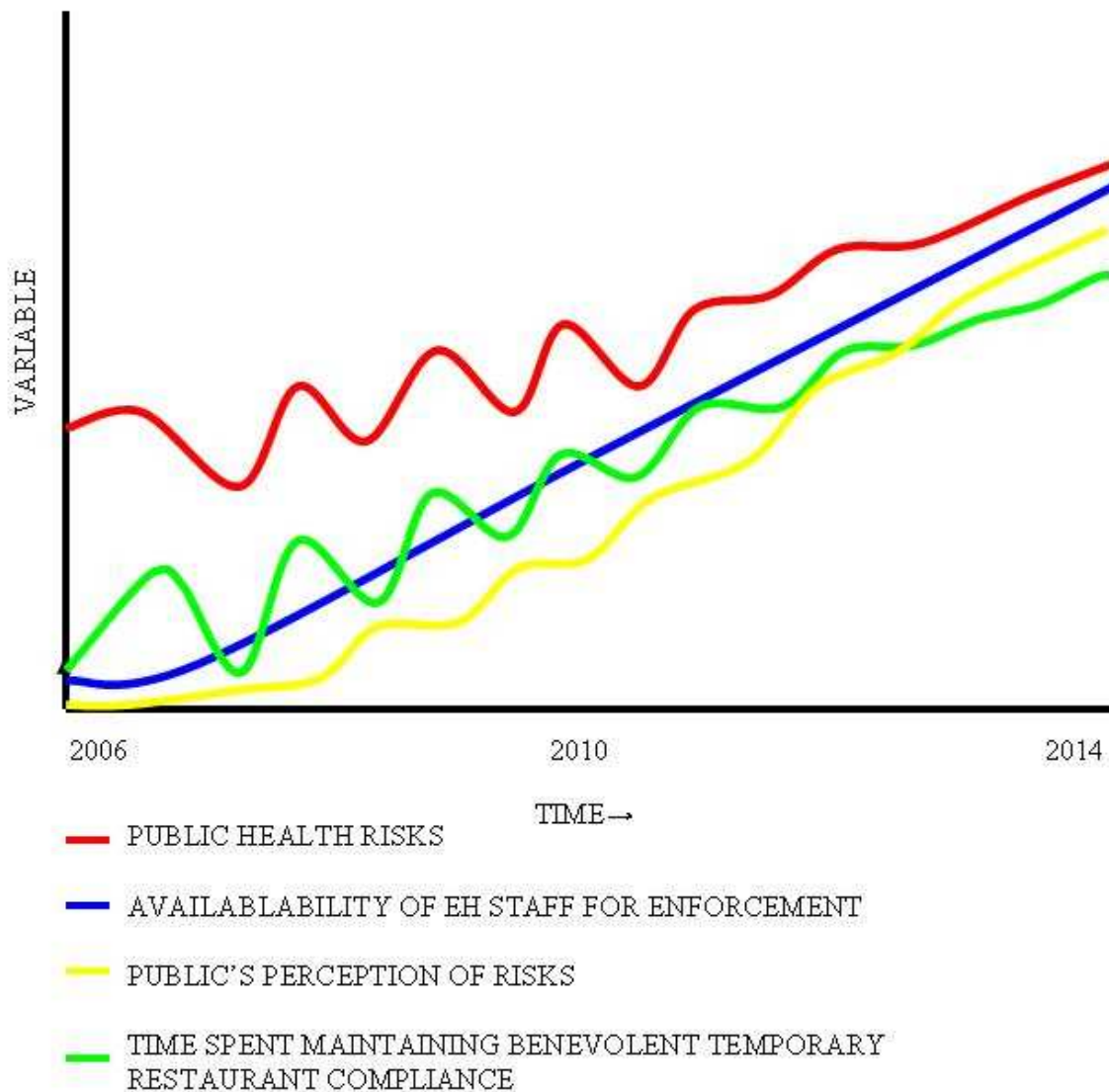
Interactive education has proven to be a positive tool. The persons in charge are receptive and make an effort to be better prepared for their future events. Unfortunately, this positive change seems to last only as long as those individuals are in charge. Volunteer turnover starts the process all over again.

***Problem Statement:***

Why, despite previous efforts to educate and enforce regulation, has the CHD Environmental Health Department not been able to effectively engage the public and local benevolent organizations in Union County to take steps change their temporary restaurant practices, thus, reducing the risks associated to food safety?

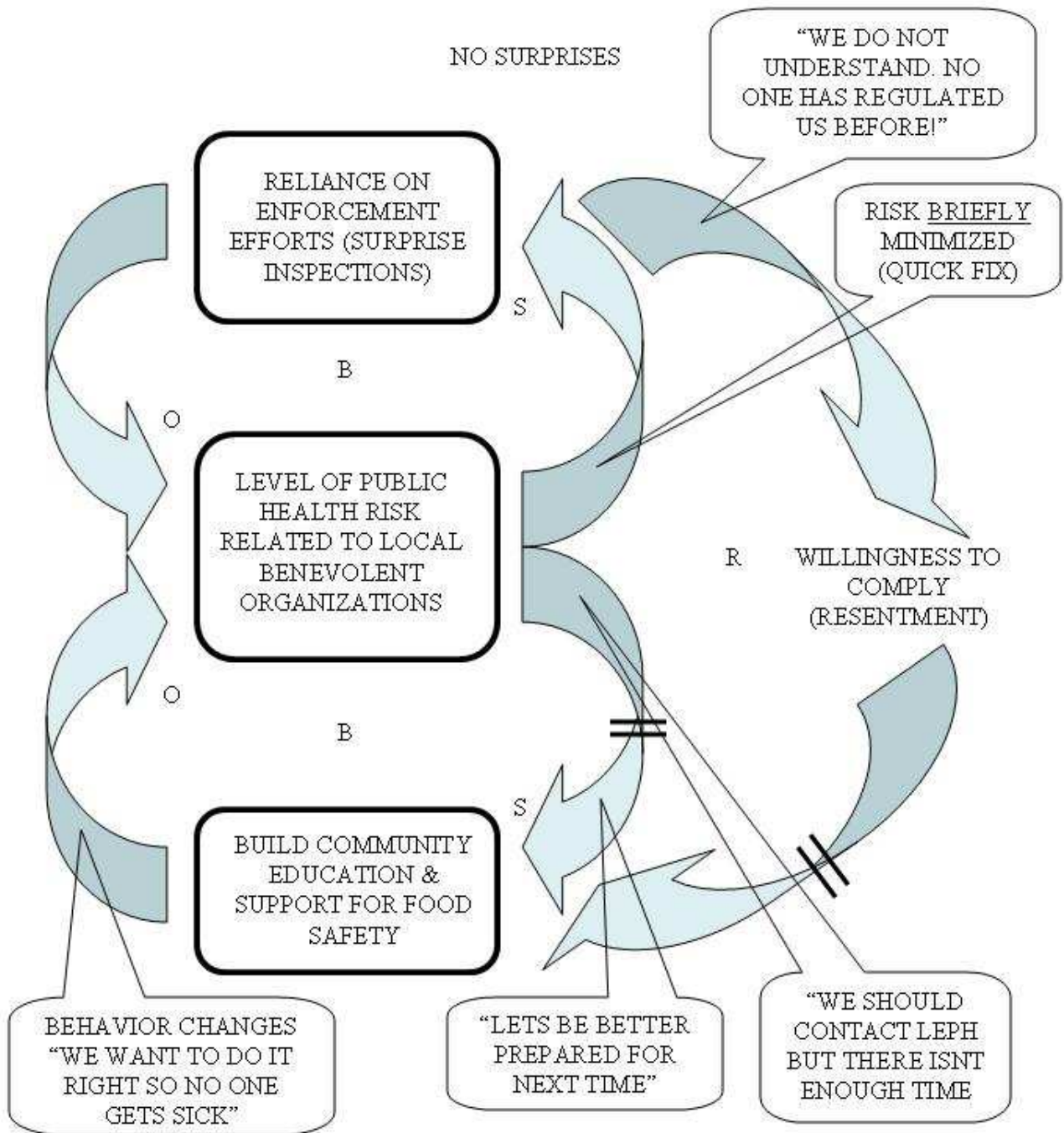
**Behavior Over Time Graph:**

Time spent maintaining benevolent temporary restaurant compliance affects the area’s public health risk and time availability of EH staff. As benevolent organizations learn of their responsibilities the time spent by local EH specialist will decrease. Summer is usually the time of year when more time is spent maintaining temporary restaurant compliance, while winter is the least. As the winter months progress and benevolent organizations introduce new volunteers, the risks and time spent by EH staff will increase. The public’s perception of the risks suffer little change throughout the year, except that the public seems to be most informed when the system is most efficient. The local EH department’s goal is to lessen the gap between EH staff availability and public health risks, and, though the public’s perception may not meet local EH availability, we want the public to be more informed, resulting in a decline in the time spent maintaining benevolent temporary restaurant compliance.



**Figure 1: Behavior Over Time Graph**

**Causal Loop Diagrams and applicable Archetypes:**



**Figure 2: Shifting the Burden Casual Loop Diagram**

### ***10 Essential Environmental Health Services:***

This project addresses several of the Ten Essential Environmental Health Services and Core Functions <sup>4, 5</sup>:

#### Assessment:

*Diagnose and Investigate environmental health problems and health hazards in the community.*

- Local EH specialist investigates health hazards in the community through conducting temporary restaurant inspections of benevolent organizations to identify unsafe food handling practices and other potential health hazards.

#### Policy Development:

*Inform, educate, and empower people about environmental health issues.*

- During an inspection, local EH specialist will educate food handlers of safe food handling practices.
- Local EH department will educate the public through marketing the program: using various forms of media advertisement, distributing printed material, attending benevolent organization meetings, and making a presence throughout the community.
- Local EH department will continually educate inquirers of safe food handling requirements and how they are able to meet these requirements.

*Mobilize community partnerships and actions to identify and solve environmental health problems*

- Local EH department will identify key stakeholders in the community and develop partnerships with these individuals so they may be able to convey to others of the public health laws, so that they may educate others in public health laws, i.e. educating new volunteers of benevolent organizations before they sell food.

#### Assurance:

*Enforce laws and regulations that protect environmental health and ensure safety*

- Local EH specialist will continue to conduct temporary restaurant sanitation inspections and enforce laws written in Oregon Administrative Rule 333-060 <sup>3</sup>.

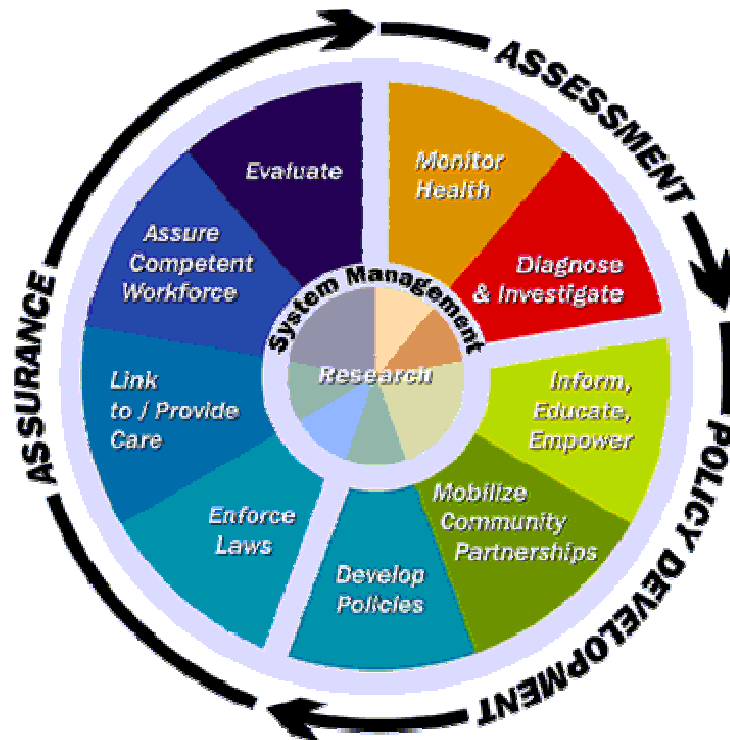


Figure 3: Reprinted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services”<sup>6</sup>

### *National Goals Supported*

1. This project supports the Healthy People 2020<sup>7</sup>
  - Food Safety, Objectives FS-5: Increase the proportion of consumers who follow key food safety practices, and FS-6: Improve food safety practices associated with foodborne illness in foodservice and retail establishments. Through educating benevolent organizations of safe food handling practices, safer food will be served at temporary events, organizational kitchens, home kitchens, and at other licensed establishments. Learning the importance of hand washing, cross-contamination, cooking temperatures and refrigerator storage will help individuals become more food safety conscience.
2. This project supports the following goals of the National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services<sup>6</sup>
  - Goal I: Build Capacity  
Activity IV-A-3: “Support the development and use of guidance documents to promote effective environmental public health services.” This project will make information more accessible to the public allowing the community to learn of the program’s existence, requirements, and motivate buy-in.
  - Goal III: Foster Leadership  
Activity III-3: “Develop environmental public health services guidance documents and recommendations and disseminate to stakeholders.” This project will make the local EH more visible, inform stakeholders, and help establish a partnership with these

stakeholders. This will help protect the public by ensuring benevolent organization stakeholders know they need to inform new volunteers that they need to contact the local EH specialist before they begin serving food.

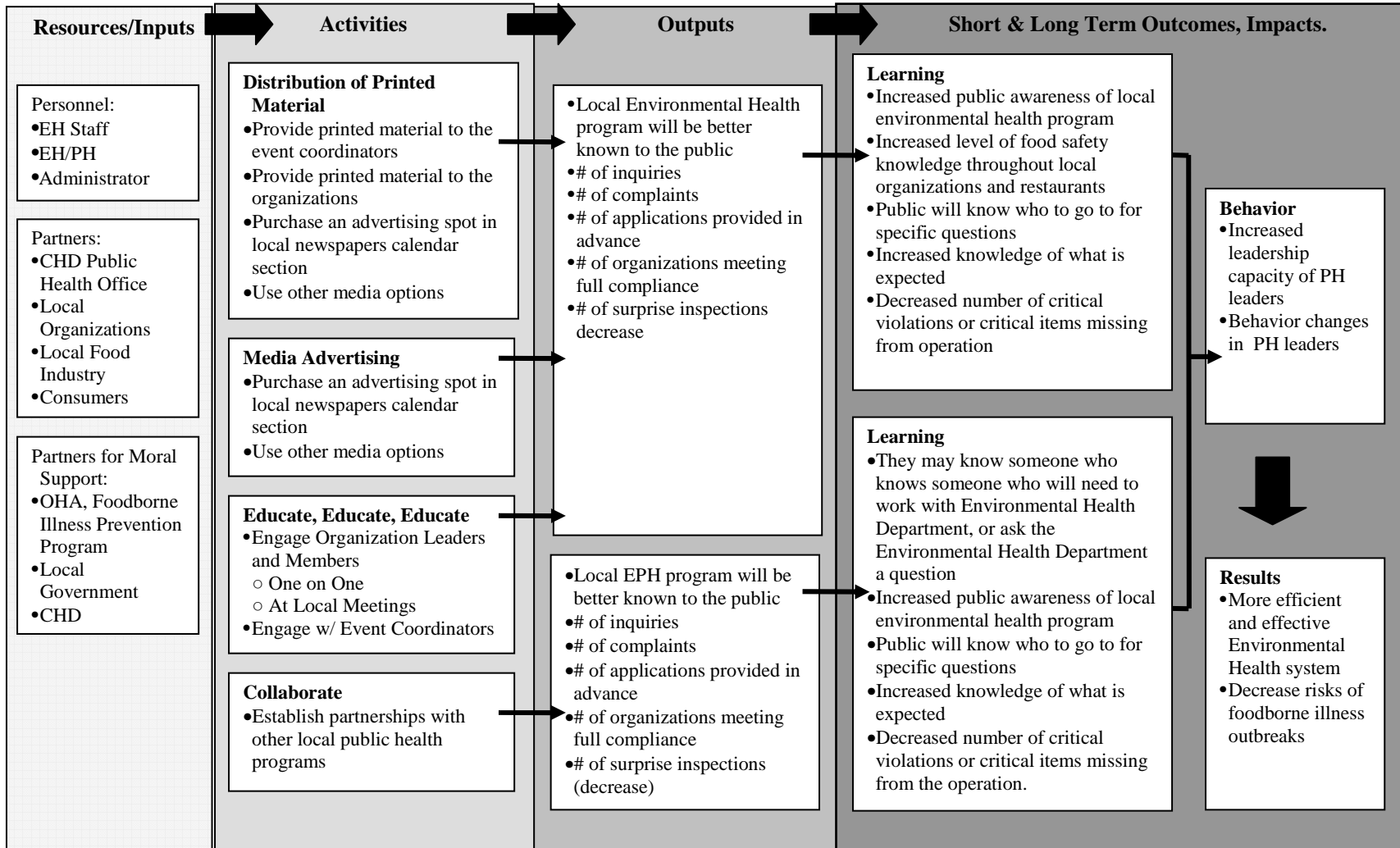
- Goal IV: Develop the Workforce

Activity IV-B-3: “Support activities that demonstrate effective methods for marketing environmental public health services to policy makers and the public.” By utilizing local media outlets for community outreach, this will help develop community knowledge of the program and health issues associated to unsafe food handling practices. This can help place responsibility on the community to act appropriately.

3. Environmental Health Competency Project: Recommendation for Core Competencies for Local Environmental Health Practitioners <sup>8</sup>

- Goal A3 *Evaluation: The capacity to evaluate the effectiveness or performance of procedures, interventions, and programs.* This project will evaluate the success of community, stakeholder and media outreach by reviewing temporary restaurant inspection outcomes
- Goal B1 *Problem Solving: The capacity to understand and solve problems.* In order for the project to succeed, the local EH specialist will need to adapt to new challenges that present themselves. Each event or inspection is different allowing the local EH specialist to analyze the instance and determine a solution that is best for future situations.
- Goal B7 *Partnering: The capacity to form partnerships and alliances with other individuals and organizations in order to enhance performance on the job.* By identifying key individuals, the local EH specialist will be able to develop partnerships with these individuals who will then be able to help convey to new volunteers and organizations of the public health laws before selling food.
- Goal C2 *Communication: The capacity to effectively communicate risk and exchange information with colleagues, other practitioners, clients, policy-makers, interest groups, media, and the public through public speaking, print and electronic media, and interpersonal relations.* It is imperative for the local EH specialist to effectively communicate to the public. Conveying the message appropriately will help motivate the inquirers within the community to shift their practice in a manner more desired by the local EH department.
- Goal C4 *Marketing Environmental/Public Health as a Service: The ability to articulate basic concepts of environmental health and public health and convey an understanding of their value and importance to clients and the public.* Local EH specialists are expected to be experts in the field of EH. Being able to effectively market public health issues in the community is essential for the program’s success.

Project Logic Model:



## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES/DESCRIPTION/DELIVERABLES:**

**Program Goal:** To increase compliance of licensed benevolent temporary restaurants.

**Health Problem:** Not all benevolent temporary restaurants meet the requirements to comply with public health laws to ensure safe food handling practices.

**Outcome Objective:** Community awareness of the local EH department, and increase knowledge of safe food handling practices.

**Determinant:** The number of benevolent temporary restaurant licenses will increase. The number of surprise inspections by local EH specialist will decrease.

**Impact Objective:** By December 2011, the number of benevolent temporary restaurant licenses will increase by 20% from the 2010 calendar year.

### **Contributing Factors:**

1. Newer program for Union County
2. Lack of knowledge of the EH program in Union County
3. Turnover of benevolent organization volunteer staff
4. Irregular enforcement
5. One part-time local EH specialist
6. The EH department is through a private not for profit organization instead of directly through the county or state
7. Habits are difficult to break

### **Process Objectives**

1. By May 30, 2011, local EH department will begin distributing printed material
2. By June 30, 2011, local EH department will be marketed through advertising in local media outlets
3. Throughout 2011, local EH department will educate the general population and stakeholders.
4. Throughout 2011, local EH department will continue to collaborate with other public health departments and establish partnerships with other local government programs

## **METHODOLOGY:**

1. By May 30, 2011, local EH specialist will begin distributing printed material

**Event:** Awareness of local EH program campaign

### **Activities:**

- Mail printed material to event coordinators and organizations
2. By June 30, 2011, local EH department will be marketed through advertising in local media outlets

**Events:** Newspaper, search engine and webpage improvement launch

**Activities:**

- Purchase advertising spot on La Grande Observer's Thursday calendar page.
  - Establish Union County EH as a relevant online search result
  - Refine CHD webpage so it is easier to locate EH information
3. Throughout 2011, local EH department will educate the general population and stakeholders

**Events:** Educating the public on requirements

**Activities:**

- Engage organizational members and stakeholders
  - Engage other stakeholders one-on-one
4. Throughout 2011, local EH department will continue to collaborate with public health departments and establish partnerships with other local government programs

**Events:** Educating other public entities

**Activities:**

- Local EH specialist will continue attending Public Health team meetings to provide updates within the EH department and inform the team of any new information.
- Local EH specialist will collaborate with other local government departments

**NEXT STEPS:**

The next steps for successful implementation are to:

1. Establish an in-house scoring system so local EH department can measure temporary establishments' level of preparation.
2. Maintain a record that includes the temporary establishments' given score. This will be used for monthly, annual, and multi-annual comparisons.
3. Maintain a record of EH related inquiries and ask inquirer how they learned of local EH department.
4. Continue to market the program and regularly train the new benevolent organization volunteers.
5. Continually adapt to the changes in the community and take appropriate measures to resolve them creatively.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES:**

The expected outcome from this project is for improved community awareness of the local EH program and importance of safe food handling practices. By focusing initially on benevolent organizations we will be able to impact a large part of the community, as benevolent organizations have a significant influence in Union County. If the local EH specialist is able to motivate these individuals to change their behaviors, some may take responsibility onto themselves to educate others. If this continues, more community members will develop an increased awareness of safe food handling practices, in turn affecting how they handle food in their place of residence and increasing their discernment in observing others handling food. The more aware a community is, the more effective the local EH department will be in ensuring overall food safety.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:**

### ***Ryan Zastrow***

I feel very fortunate to have been given an opportunity to participate in the Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute. This program has had a great impact on my personal and professional life. Through the Skillscope 360, Myers-Briggs, and Change Style Indicator, I learned much about myself: my thought processes, my communication style and how I work with others. Learning the Systems-Thinking approach has given me a new set of skills to approach difficult problems. I have enjoyed meeting others involved in similar fields and being part of a “bigger picture”. I am grateful for my mentor, coach, team members and EPHLI staff who have encouraged my growth over the past year. Thank you for such a rewarding experience.

## **ABOUT THE EPHLI FELLOW**

Ryan Zastrow is an Environmental Health Specialist with the Center for Human Development’s Environmental Health Department in La Grande Oregon. He is the only employee in the department and has been with this program for 3 years. In addition to the core duties of the Environmental Health department, he is a member of a Public Health Team where he works closely with Emergency Preparedness Communicable Disease, Tobacco Prevention and Education (TPEP), Healthy Communities, Immunization, and Family Planning. Ryan received his bachelor degree in Foods and Nutrition from San Diego State University. During the Cohort VI program, he passed the NEHA REHS/RS exam and was promoted from Trainee to Registered Environmental Health Specialist.

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