

November 20th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

11:00 am - 1:00 pm EST

Virtual: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87533291697>

Voting members in attendance:

Kristel Bennett, Billerica - joined late
Donna Greenwood, Chelmsford
Shannon Gillis, Tewksbury
Kerri Oun, Tyngsborough

Non-voting members in attendance:

Shelagh Collins, Billerica - joined late
Bethany Slack, Billerica, incoming Regional Public Health Specialist
Manizeh Afridi, BME Strategies
Cynthia Baker, BME Strategies
Haleigh Schultz, BME Strategies
Darcy Beall, Chelmsford
Elise Pierce, Chelmsford
Siobhan LaFreniere, Tewksbury
Ashley Pavlakos, Regional Public Health Nurse

Opening

3/4 voting members present, quorum was met.

Motion to start the meeting

Kerri Oun made a motion to start the meeting. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Arrived late

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Haleigh Schultz called the meeting to order at 11:06 am.

Motion to approve outstanding meeting minutes

Donna Greenwood motioned to approve the October 9th meeting minutes. Kerri Oun seconded the motion.

Billerica: Arrived late

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Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Announcements & Reminders

SSC Transition Planning

Welcome, Manizeh Afzidi! Haleigh Schultz is transitioning to a new BME contract and will now be serving as the Mosaic Municipal Training & Technical Assistance Program Northeast Regional Coordinator. She will provide opioid-related technical support to towns and organizations in northeastern Massachusetts, including NEPHA's member communities. Manizeh will take over as the group's primary BME consultant and Shared Services Coordinator.

In the coming weeks, Manizeh will take the lead on:

- **Hiring & Onboarding:** Overseeing recruitment processes and onboarding new team members.
- **Event & Program Coordination:** Managing the Community Baby Shower and broader Maternal & Child Health (MCH) activities.
- **Coalition Facilitation:** Leading and organizing coalition meetings.
- **Partner Communications:** Serving as the primary communicator with relevant PHE partners and stakeholders.
- **Administrative & Support Functions:** Coordinating with HR, the Training Hub, Program Coordinators, and other relevant internal teams.

As Manizeh gets started and familiar with the coalition, Haleigh and Cynthia Baker will continue to support in the background. Manizeh, Haleigh, and Cynthia will all be at the December coalition meeting.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

- **11/25:** Youth Access Tobacco Compliance Checks Training (MHOA)
 - **Time: 1pm - 2pm via Zoom**
- **12/10:** Broadening the Lens:
Broadening the Lens: an introductory 3-hour learning event that explores how to examine public health questions through the lens of racial and social justice, and how to approach existing inequities in practical ways. Learners leave with a more expansive lens with which they can assess and address the public health concerns in their own communities.
 - **Upcoming session: December 10th - 11am - 2pm via Zoom**
- **12/18:** MHOA December Quarterly Meeting:

The MHOA December Quarterly meeting will take place from 10am - 11:30am on December 18th. This session's topic is Epidemiologists in Action: Your Local Health Department's Secret Weapon

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MHOA Conference Debrief

The group debriefed the MHOA Conference and main highlights of their experience. Session notes are available at request for those who are interested.

Regional Staff & Hiring Check-In

RPHS Hiring Updates

Welcome: A warm welcome to Bethany Slack, the new Regional Public Health Specialist for NEPHA! Bethany Slack also serves as the Community Services Coordinator for the Town of Billerica. Next Steps are to be determined:

- Schedule
- Onboarding timeline
- Engagement strategy with each town
- Priority project areas

Regional Inspector Hiring Update & Planning

We now have two vacancies for Regional Inspectors. The role is currently posted to all of our posting locations, and so far, we've received 5 applications. 4/5 meet the criteria for moving forward with phone interviews.

Hiring Next Steps:

1. **Reconvene Hiring Subcommittee:** Kerri Oun, Donna Greenwood, Siobhan LaFreniere and Elise Pierce.
2. **Conduct First-Round Phone Interviews.**
3. **Schedule Second-Round Panel Interviews.**
4. **Coordinate with Brigette and Kerri.**
5. **Continue Screening Applications.**
6. **Goal Timeline:** First-round interviews by winter holidays; second-round in-person interviews in early January; start dates by February.

Capacity Planning Summary

A decision was made to reallocate funding due to the reduced need for two Regional Inspectors, made possible by the existing MoJin contract.

- **MoJin Contract:** The group will continue utilizing MoJin for coverage and training support. Coordination with the PC is required to ensure this remains within the approved limit for the Consultant Line.

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- **Exploring New Roles:** There is significant interest in exploring the creation of a **Regional Epidemiologist** position.
- **Next Steps:** The group requires more information on the scope and potential contributions of a Regional Epidemiologist. A presentation will be given by Manizeh and the Massachusetts Epidemiology Collaborative at the upcoming MHOA December Quarterly Meeting, detailing the work that epidemiologists can perform.

Spending Status & Contingencies

- **Term 1 Spending Status**

As of 10/31, 25% of FY26 funds have been spent, all within budget. Spending successes include training, regional staff, inspection software, and contracted inspection support. However, we've exceeded the \$15k allowance for MoJin Solutions, which was intended to cover the first few months during Elise's training and the hiring of a second inspector. Due to staff changes, we anticipate additional funds freeing up from budgeted regional staff salaries.

- **Strategic Planning Discussion:**

The discussion centered on leveraging the PHE Grant's allowance for Strategic Planning as a way to invest in long-term sustainability and address current instabilities, especially since CHA/CHIPS are not allowable. Strategic Planning, initially tabled, is now seen as an opportunity to build a more resilient foundation, with a customizable scope that could focus on areas like workforce development, onboarding, mentorship, or standardizing processes. The full cost is estimated at \$70k-\$75k, but the project can be scaled down to fit budget and needs. A Strategic Plan is flexible to set shared goals and optimize the group's ability to work together, particularly around topics like workforce development and succession planning.

A core conflict emerged around the perceived time commitment versus the long-term benefit. While there was agreement on the value of a strategic plan providing broader context, looking beyond the one-year PHE cycle, and defining next steps post-grant and post-hiring concerns were raised about adding a significant time investment to already strained staff and capacity. An interest in a shorter, more focused Strategic Planning engagement was expressed, the idea of a 2-3 month "sprint" or focused workshops. The group expressed a desire to focus on essential services first, but acknowledged that the planning could be a necessary investment for future funding and to reduce future duplication of effort.

Ultimately, the group agreed to move forward with exploring the option, and will continue this discussion at the December meeting with more concrete materials. These materials would include a defined Scope of Work (SOW), clear expectations on the time commitment, and a proposed focus area. Manizeh Afridi will be conducting one-on-one outreach to each health director to further gather input and address outstanding questions to help shape the proposal.

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Budget Modification Discussions:

- **Discussion 1:**

The proposed budget modification focuses on reallocating funds by adjusting salary lines to increase the allowance for MoJin Solutions and create a buffer for Strategic Planning. The changes include reducing the Health Inspector salary lines (by accounting for Elise's 4.5 months' salary and adjusting two Regional Inspector hires to six months each), modifying the hiring timeline for Other Public Health Staff to seven months, adjusting fringe benefits accordingly, and significantly increasing the consultant budgets for both BME Contract and MoJin Solutions (from \$15k to \$30k), and adding a dedicated budget for Strategic Planning (\$45,690). Additional strategic planning funds could be sourced from programmatic spending areas like tech software and hardware.

Motion to approve the proposed Budget Modification

Donna Greenwood motioned to approve the outlined Budget Modification for submission.

Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

- **Discussion 2:**

The discussion focused on two main areas: A1C testing and updated CPR training materials. Darcy provided details on a CLIA-Waived A1C test that requires only a drop of blood, costing \$214 for 20 tests plus \$55 for controls, with an initial setup cost of \$269. The A1C test, which provides a three-month average of blood sugar, was viewed as a valuable tool for residents' overall health, even for those not officially diabetic or pre-diabetic, and would not require additional state permissions. If high results occur, Darcy would provide education and recommend follow-up with a PCP.

Separately, new CPR training materials, including videos and an instructor manual, are available, with an entire package for 144 books (enough for one class of 12 participants per month) costing \$896. Haleigh was tasked with submitting an expense request to justify the A1C testing as either a one-time clinic or ongoing supplies.

Motion to approve the procurement of A1C and CPR nursing supplies

Shannon Gillis motioned to approve the procurement. Kerri Oun seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

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All in favor.

Fiscal Year '26 Planning

Community Baby Shower Planning

The MCH Working Group shared updates on AnneMarie's recommendations, grant application, and Save-the-Date invitation! The group reviewed the invitation and provided feedback noting that there should be a call-out to the giveaways.

Motion to approve the It Takes a Village Save the Date

Donna Greenwood motioned to approve the proposed save-the-date. Kristel Bennett seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Adjournment

The next regular coalition meeting will be held on Thursday, December 11th, from 11AM-1PM in Chelmsford.

Motion to adjourn the meeting

Kerri Oun motioned to adjourn the meeting. Shannon Gillis seconded the motion.

Billerica: Y

Chelmsford: Y

Tewksbury: Y

Tyngsborough: Y

All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Documents used by the public body during the meeting:

- NEPHA November 20th Meeting Slides
- It Takes a Village Save-the-Date

NEPHA Coalition Meeting



NEPHA

NORTH EAST PUBLIC
HEALTH ALLIANCE

November 20th, 2025



BME STRATEGIES

Meeting Opening

Agenda

- I. Opening
- II. Announcements & Reminders
- III. Regional Staff & Hiring Check-In
- IV. Spending Status & Contingencies
- V. Fiscal Year '26 Planning
- VI. Community Updates
- VII. Adjournment

Meeting Minutes Approval

October 9th Minutes

Announcements & Reminders

Welcome, Manizeh!

SSC Transition Planning

As Manizeh onboards to the coalition and the SSC role, Haleigh and Cynthia will be available for support.

In the coming weeks, Manizeh will take the lead on:

- Hiring and onboarding
- Community Baby Shower coordination with the MCH Working Group
- Coalition meeting facilitation

Manizeh, Cynthia, and Haleigh will all be at the December coalition meeting.

Opportunity for group discussion and questions.

Announcements & Reminders

Upcoming Training Opportunities

- **11/20 (today!):** Narcan and Opioid Overdose Training (Tapestry and Opioid Task Force of Franklin County)
 - 1pm - 2pm via Zoom
 - [Register here!](#)
- **11/25:** Youth Access Tobacco Compliance Checks Training (MHOA)
 - 1pm - 2pm via Zoom
 - [Register here!](#)
- **12/10:** Broadening the Lens (Growing a New Heart)
 - 11am - 2pm via Zoom
 - [Register here!](#)

Announcements & Reminders

MHOA December Quarterly Meeting

The MHOA December Quarterly meeting will take place from 10:00am - 11:30am on **December 18th**. The topic is Epidemiologists in Action: Your Local Health Department's Secret Weapon.

- More information and registration details coming soon!

MHOA Conference Debrief

Haleigh can circulate notes from the sessions attended by BME SSCs. Favorite sessions?

Regional Staff & Hiring Check-In

Welcome, Bethany!

Welcome, Bethany!

Regional Public Health Specialist Update

After a long back-and-forth with legal, the RPHS role has been approved. Thank you Kristel for the final push for Billerica sign-off!

Bethany will be starting as NEPHA's RPHS in the coming weeks. As we prepare for onboarding, we need to consider:

- Schedule
- Onboarding timeline
- Engagement with each town
- Priority project areas

Regional Inspector Hiring Update

Current Hiring Status

We now have two vacancies for Regional Inspector. The role is currently reposted to the Tyngsborough site, NEPHA site, MMA, MEHA, MHOA, and Careers in Local Public Health.

So far, we've received 5 applications:

- 2 applicants were former Health Inspectors
- 1 applicant was a Health Inspector Trainee through the Pathways to Local Public Health program
- 1 applicant is a recent MPH grad

Regional Inspector Hiring Next Steps

Hiring:

- Reconvene the Hiring Subcommittee (Kerri, Donna, others?)
- Reach out to candidates for first-round phone interviews
 - Goal: Complete before the winter holidays
- Align on a date and calendar hold for second-round panel interviews
 - Goal: Early January
- Continue to coordinate with HR for efficient hiring
- Continue to screen incoming applications

Regional Inspector Capacity Planning

We are now backfilling Elise's position, but we also built out a second 1.0 FTE Regional Inspector in our FY26 budget...

- What is each town's current capacity and need for additional inspection support?
- Will a 1.0 FTE Regional Inspector fill that gap, or will additional support be necessary?
- If additional support is needed, what FTE feels appropriate?

We can continue to use MoJin for interim coverage* as we hire and train incoming regional staff, but our hires are meant to eventually replace contract support.

*We will need to coordinate with our Program Coordinator to ensure our Consultant line item is within the approved limits

Spending Status & Contingencies

Term 1 Spending Summary

As of 10/31, we've spent just over 25% of our FY26 funds.

Spending successes include:

- Training investment
- Regional staff salaries
- Inspection software
- Contracted inspection support

Given recent staffing updates, we expect additional funds to free up from our salary budgets.

PHE Budget Status

Total Spent to Date

\$117,506.85

% Spent to Date

25.2%

Remaining Budget

\$349,149.38

Contract Amount

\$466,656.23

Spending Contingencies & Sustainability Planning

At our Term 1 check-in with Pat, we heard that Community Health Assessments are not allowable for PHE spending. Strategic Planning, on the other hand, is allowable and encouraged.

Strategic plans are flexible, with the ability to customize the process and intended output based on NEPHA's mission, local priorities, capacity, and the gaps we're trying to fill across the four towns. A plan might focus on:

- Workforce development - staff allocation and retention
- Onboarding and mentorship
- Standardizing processes

A strategic plan:

- Results from a deliberate decision-making process to define where an organization is going and align around a common understanding of mission, vision, goals, and objectives
- Provides a local health department or shared services arrangement (SSA), and its stakeholders a clear picture of -
 - Where it is headed
 - What it plans to achieve
 - The methods by which it will succeed
 - How it will measure and monitor progress
- Is an allowable expense of PHE funds to help SSAs further develop their operational efficiency, collaboration, and identity to support sustainability
- Is a prerequisite for LHDs seeking national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB)

Strategic plans may consist of the following components:

Mission, Vision, & Guiding Principles/Values

Strategic Priorities

Goals and Objectives, including measurable & time-framed targets

Identification of external trends, events, or other factors impacting community health

Formal Analysis of the organization's strengths & weaknesses

Implementation Plan

Strategic Plan FAQs

- How long does a strategic planning process take?
 - A full effort usually takes 6 months, but can be condensed or extended depending on the organization's desired deliverables, capacity, or intended purpose
- How much time and effort is required?
 - Facilitators of the strategic planning process lead the information gathering, logistics, framework development, and design of deliverables. However, participation and input from the organization (and its stakeholders) is critical to the success of the planning process.
 - Average: 2-4 hours per month during the engagement
- What are the benefits of strategic planning?
 - Documentation and process that increases operational efficiency, develops a shared vision for the future, enhances collaboration, charts organizational direction and promotes sustainability

Proposed Budget Modification

Line Item	Current Budget	Proposed Budget
Health Inspector	\$132,000	\$93,500
Other Public Health Staff	\$21,840	\$12,740
Fringe	\$44,880	\$31,790
Consultant	\$97,000	\$157,690

If strategic planning is a direction that the group wants to explore, this allocates a starting amount of \$45,690 for a strat planning engagement.

Fiscal Year '26 Planning

It Takes a Village Planning

Updates from the MCH Working Group

- Recently, the MCH Working Group met with AnneMarie Aquino (Lowell General), who provided an extensive list of recommendations and lessons learned from previous Community Baby Shower events
- The Chelmsford team submitted an application to the Emerson Health Gallery Community Benefit Grant program
 - The grant would provide additional funds for expenses that are unallowable under the PHE grant, such as food and giveaways
- We're now working on finalizing the Save the Date!
 - *Group review and feedback*

It Takes a Village

Additional Ideas & Considerations

- Teddy Bear clinic - engagement opportunity for kids in attendance
- Advertising:
 - Circulate the Save-the-Date (and flyer later on) to providers, community partners, towns, etc.
 - Leverage the digital display outside of the Tyngsborough Old Town Hall
- Reach out to pediatricians to confirm whether they're accepting new patients, provide translation services, have specific vaccine requirements, etc.
- Invite the Vaccine Confidence Project
- Reach out to local businesses and banks for donations or sponsorships

Community Updates

Meeting Adjournment

Next Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for:

- Thursday, December 11th

Volunteer to host?