IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH THROUGH
PROMPT RESPONSE TO CONSUMER COMPLAINTS
AND CONSISTENT CUSTOMER FEEDBACK
NORTHAMPTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT & THE QUABBIN HEALTH DISTRICT (MASSACHUSETTS)
FTES: 8/POPULATION SERVED: 54,000 (COMBINED)

1. Getting Started
The PHAB self-assessment showed a lack of consistent procedures to ascertain customer satisfaction. A team brainstorming activity pointed to an activity that happens frequently - consumer complaints about housing, food, and environmental public health risks where feedback is needed.

2. Assemble the Team
The team consisted of: Health Directors of Quabbin & Northampton LHDs, a project consultant, inspectional & administrative staff of both departments, and a volunteer literacy consultant.

3. Examine the Current Approach
The project consultant facilitated 90-minute meetings with each Department. Teams brainstormed to create a flowchart of the current approach and to review typical response processes.

4. Identify Potential Solutions
The team used a "fishbone diagram" to analyze root causes of problem.

5. Develop an Improvement Theory
If local health department staff respond promptly to consumer complaints and provide accessible information about public health risks and the role of a local health department, then customer satisfaction around environmental health services will be improved.

6. Test the Theory
The team documented response times, developed brief, online and postcard consumer satisfaction surveys, developed three easy-to-read handouts about LHD functions, and trained staff to use survey and educational tools.

7. Check the Results
✓ 100% of complainants received staff response within 48 hours
✓ 55% of complainants received surveys, but only 25% of them completed the survey
✓ 100% of survey respondents reported increased knowledge of health department functions and satisfaction with the complaint resolution process
✓ 32% of complainants received educational handouts

8. Standardize the Improvement or Develop New Theory
The team discussed and analyzed why they received surveys from so few complainants. They concluded that they should survey consumers after the case is closed.

9. Establish Future Plans
In the near future, the team will modify complaint forms & the database to document response times, add check boxes for survey & handouts distribution, tally survey results each month and discuss with staff. The team will also translate survey & handouts into Spanish and use the educational handouts routinely in complaint response and track distribution.