

How can we talk about public health?

ACTIVITY: ONE-MINUTE MESSAGES | SCHSAC RETREAT

Why do we need to practice talking about public health?

We want to meet our listeners where they're at in their lives, using words they understand.

As humans, we're programmed to look for meaning before we remember details. If we don't provide a frame for our listeners, they won't have anywhere to slot in the details.

Why me?

Even if you don't work in public health, **you're an expert on your community and what makes it healthy.**

How can I describe public health in everyday words?

Here are three tried-and-true ways, and you can come up with even more:



Public health shows the value of investment. This frames how public health professionals work with other sectors to save money in the short term whenever possible and make wise investments over the long term that support community health, increase efficiency, and reduce unnecessary costs for everyone.



Public health is the foundation of community health. This is a metaphor for how the health of a community is supported by the work of many different sectors. It can also help professionals in other sectors understand the social determinants of health.



Public health is like GPS navigation. This is a metaphor for how the field of public health engages data to support the work of other sectors in innovative and forward-thinking ways. GPS is a powerful tool for visualizing and navigating complex terrain, and public health professionals serve this function too.

Where can I go for help?

- Your local public health director or CHS administrator
- **PHRASES: Public Health Reaching Across Sectors** (<https://www.phrases.org/>)
- MDH Center for Public Health Practice: Allie Hawley March, MPH (allie.hawleymarch@state.mn.us)

Minnesota Department of Health
State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC)
651-201-3880 health.ophp@state.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us/schsac

October 2022. To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-3880.

Value of Investment

A deeply held and widely shared commitment to using monetary and other resources effectively, and with an eye toward long-term gains.



The story you're telling

Successful organizations manage their resources carefully to align short- and long-term goals. Public health professionals want to work collaboratively with other sectors to save money in the short term whenever possible, and make wise investments over the long term that support community health, increase efficiency, and reduce unnecessary costs for everyone.



Tasks that can be accomplished using this frame element:

- Orient thinking among potential partners towards the possibilities for joint endeavors that are mutually beneficial, both financially and strategically in terms of achieving organizational objectives and goals.
- Instill confidence that collaborations with public health can achieve attainable, measurable successes.
- Extend the timeframe of typical cost-benefit analyses to include multi-year considerations and increasing gains over time.



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- Controlling expenses is a chief priority for all professional sectors— including public health. Working together to improve health outcomes for the entire community is an investment that pays off for everyone.
- A long-term view is required to reap the cost savings and other benefits of building a strong foundation that supports community health.



User notes:

FrameWorks research found that broad claims by public health professionals about the general importance and beneficial nature of collaboration are ineffective with other sectors. In fact, when they lack concrete details and specificity, such claims cause frustration and invite skepticism or even pushback. A Value of Investment appeal can protect communications against this backfire effect, but its ability to do so depends on messages containing a sufficient dose of each of the following:

A clear timeline. Knowing when the rewards of collaboration are likely to be enjoyed empowers prospective partners to assess for themselves how they might want to participate—which makes participation itself more desirable.

A precise accounting. Other sectors' interest in collaborating with public health increases with the level of detail they are provided—about both the initial investment of resources that a particular initiative requires and the projected recuperations or other measurable outcomes it is expected to produce.

A dollar figure. While the full benefits of collaboration may not translate onto a balance sheet, fiscal arguments are uniquely enticing for many sector professionals—most notably in business. Whenever monetary advantages can be identified and itemized, explicit mention of them will add efficacy and expedience to a collaboration-focused communication.

Finally, Value of Investment productively orients thinking among professionals in the sectors of education, housing, health systems, and business—but it operates a little differently in each. Here are some sector-specific tips:

- **Education and Housing:** Pair Value of Investment with the sectors' commitment to Community Responsibility, to convey that, by using our resources wisely, we will be better able to strengthen systems and improve lives.
- **Health Systems:** Emphasize that collaborations can lead to greater efficiency over time, for example in helping institutions meet new accountability requirements and adapt to new (value-based) financing mechanisms.
- **Business:** Demonstrate the value in concrete monetary terms. Where this isn't possible, appeal to the image-boosting benefits of social responsibility and associated reputation rewards.
- **All Sectors:** Enhance the value's positive frame effects by incorporating Value of Investment into a specific and compelling success story about cross-sector collaboration.

Winning Words: The Value Of Investment

These Winning Words are the words and phrases that intuitively connect with people with maximum motivating power and word-of-mouth potential.

...communities only prosper when they're healthy

...they're making sure businesses, schools, hospitals, and more are set up for success.

This frames collaboration as empowerment and demonstrates that public health experts understand other sectors' needs.

Public health is a smart investment...a healthy workforce, students ready to learn...

Keep it positive and paint a vivid picture of the benefits collaboration can offer. You can tailor the imagery here to different sectors.

...a risky gamble...digging ourselves out of a hole.

This conveys that investing in public health is the responsible choice, and it demonstrates familiarity with the challenges many sectors are facing.

...protecting the investments we've made in our customers, students, neighbors...

Protecting one's investments leverages "loss aversion"—our psychological tendency to fear losses more than we desire gains.

GPS Navigation

A metaphor for how the field of public health engages data to support the work of other sectors in innovative and forward-thinking ways.



The story you're telling

GPS is a powerful tool for visualizing and navigating complex terrain and public health professionals serve this function too. We draw on a wealth of data to chart out routes from where we are as a community to where we want to be. Most of all, we put our data expertise to work to drive positive outcomes and move needed solutions forward.



Tasks that can be accomplished using this frame element:

- Foster greater understanding of data's problem-solving power, beyond its monitoring and tracking function.
- Build awareness among professionals in other sectors about the value and extent of public health's data expertise.
- Illustrate for potential partners how public health data, and public health professionals' data skills, could be harnessed to enhance the work they do.



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- Careful and informed planning is required to successfully navigate the complex terrain of community health.
- Data is an essential tool—not only for visualizing the landscape, but for mapping out a range of possible routes that lead from point A to point B.
- Expertise is required to seek out, sort, and make sense of relevant data—and public health professionals have the necessary skills.
- Like GPS, public health's data expertise is a practical and versatile instrument. It provides information and generates recommendations, based on user input, but doesn't give commands or take control.
- Public health's proficiency with data offers other sectors access to a wealth of practical knowledge—about intersecting priorities, important landmarks, optional shortcuts, and potential roadblocks that lie ahead.
- Forward-thinking ingenuity and social innovation are enabled by public health's data expertise. It functions like an infinitely adaptable device—accounting for numerous dynamic factors, enabling interactive step-by-step course-plotting, troubleshooting unexpected conditions, and maneuvering through traffic jams as needed to rev up community health outcomes and drive positive change.



User notes:

- Steer clear of messages that put public health professionals in the driver's seat. (Other sector professionals don't necessarily want to hand over the wheel!)
- Avoid describing public health's role as "giving directions."
- Be careful not to imply that public health professionals know how to pick "the best" route. In fact, it's best to show how data can be used to help identify multiple routes, rather than focus on any single one.

Winning Words: GPS Navigation

These Winning Words are the words and phrases that intuitively connect with people with maximum motivating power and word-of-mouth potential.

Public health experts are trained to spot patterns in data...

Foregrounding the data expertise of public health professionals builds confidence they can cut through complexity.

...actions that leaders in our community—teachers, landlords, business owners, and more—can take to protect our health

Put the leaders of other sectors in the picture to show how public health has transformed to meet 21st-century needs.

...innovative solutions to reach their goals faster.

Keep it positive: Frame public health as complementing, not competing with, other sectors' goals.

...it's easy to get lost in mountains of data... leave organizations feeling stuck.

Demonstrate your familiarity with challenges other sectors face. Where possible, insert specific challenges relevant to your audience.

...provide organizations with a GPS.

This metaphor frames collaboration as empowerment—and leaves other sectors in the driver's seat.

Foundation of Community Health

A metaphor for how the health of a community is supported by the work of professionals in many different sectors.



The story you're telling

The health of our community is like a building—it depends on a strong and stable foundation. Things like quality education, safe and affordable housing, access to healthcare, and employment opportunities structure positive health outcomes for everyone in important ways. As public health professionals, it's our mission to build thriving communities, so we work closely with many other sectors to assemble a solid foundation that supports long-lasting good health for us all.



Tasks that can be accomplished using this frame element:

- Enhance understanding among professionals in other sectors of the social determinants of health.
- Help other sectors appreciate that positive health outcomes should be actively supported, beyond just avoiding negative health outcomes.
- Encourage other sectors to see that community health is about much more than ensuring individuals make healthy lifestyle choices and have access to healthcare—it depends on reliable structures and strong social systems that we all help build.



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- Good health is much more than just the absence of illness. It is the overall state of wellbeing for individuals and communities.
- Health must be actively constructed, by promoting protective factors and creating positive conditions. It cannot be optimally achieved by only treating sickness and eliminating threats.
- It's not just individuals who experience health outcomes—entire communities do too. By strengthening supports for everyone, we can improve the health of the community as a whole.
- Laying the groundwork for good health is a task that requires an “all-hands-on-deck” approach. All skillsets, all people, and all communities are therefore assets in this collective endeavor. (They should never be mistaken for problems that need to be ‘fixed’.)
- Like any construction project, building community health requires careful planning, information-sharing, teamwork, and many skilled contributions. Ensuring the success of the project, through support and coordination, is the mission of public health.



User notes:

- Avoid placing public health in a leadership role. When applying the Foundation metaphor, it's best to avoid depicting public health professionals as the “foremen/forewomen” or “architects.” Doing so may feel presumptuous to professionals in other sectors—especially if they see themselves as leaders in the health sphere.
- Use the metaphor to explain the social determinants of health. The social determinants of health, as a framework, is tricky for non-experts to grasp. Rather than simply listing social determinants and asserting their importance, public health professionals should use the metaphor to explain how social factors support or undermine health.
- Instead of the phrase “social determinants of health,” consider describing the relevant factors or conditions in terms of “the foundations of health” or “the foundations of community health.”
- This alternative language is easier for people outside of public health to understand and focuses attention on the importance of working together to improve health outcomes for everyone.

Winning Words: Foundation Of Health

These Winning Words are the words and phrases that intuitively connect with people with maximum motivating power and word-of-mouth potential.

...the pillars of communities that support our way of life

This language builds positive associations with those you hope to motivate and establishes them as key to the foundation metaphor.

To have a solid foundation of health, different pillars of a community have to reinforce each other.

This frames collaboration as mutually beneficial and suggests we're stronger when we build health proactively.

Students learn best when they have homes that keep them safe and rested; businesses thrive when their employees are healthy.

This demonstrates familiarity with other sectors; use vivid language to help them visualize success.

...we ignore the structural flaws that keep causing problems.

This frames social determinants within the context of the foundation metaphor and explains how addressing them is in our long-term interest.

...all have tools we need to build healthy communities...

This frames collaboration as an empowering partnership.