

Public Health Narratives To Break Down Silos

A Communication Toolkit To Foster Collaboration

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About This Toolkit

A growing challenge in public health communications is motivating sector-specific audiences to see the value of collaboration. To successfully break down silos, leaders in other sectors need to understand what public health professionals do and realize the benefits of partnering with them.

To meet that need, this toolkit includes research-based language, guidance, and best practices for communicating with sectors such as education, business, health systems, and housing.

The tools contained here can help you build bridges to other sectors by articulating shared goals, the problems that stand in the way of reaching them, and the solutions that come from partnering with public health professionals.



Methodology

This toolkit consists of two sets of research to offer strategic messaging that can help you communicate more effectively with sector-specific audiences.

Frame Elements: Sector-specific research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute identified three frame elements that are particularly effective in explaining public health concepts and motivating other sectors to understand the benefits of collaboration. Frame elements are communication devices that alter the presentation (but not the content) of a message—like a metaphor that helps clarify a concept, a cultural value or shared principle that signals broad relevance, or a particular tone that the messenger adopts. Every communication involves many different frame elements. This toolkit takes these frame elements, designed specifically to close critical gaps in understanding between public health experts and professionals in other sectors, and puts them into practice.

Narrative Development: The frame elements identified in the research were each translated into a narrative. A narrative is a simple but powerful framework that helps audiences understand complex topics by identifying the people involved, their goals, the problems that stand in the way, and the potential solutions. Insights from psychology and cognitive science informed the most effective words, phrases, and ideas to capture the motivating power of the frame element in a narrative that will be easy to communicate.



How To Use This Toolkit

These tools can help you communicate more effectively with sector-specific audiences. Throughout, you will find language that you can use verbatim if you choose, but in many cases you may want to tailor them to your work and to the specific sectors you are communicating with.

Frame Elements that research suggests are particularly effective in explaining important concepts in public health and motivating other sectors to see the benefits of collaboration.

A **Narrative Structure** that organizes key ideas about public health. This framework can help you take each metaphor and translate it into a message about your work.

A **One-Minute Message** that brings each metaphor to life, and **Winning Words** that give each message its motivating power.



Frame Elements

Research with sector-specific audiences unearthed three frame elements that are particularly effective in explaining public health concepts and motivating other sectors to see the benefits of collaboration.



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.



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.



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.

To help you put these frame elements into practice, we have included each one as part of a one-minute message in the following pages. These messages include language you can use to bring each narrative to life.

Introduction To The Narrative Structure

The **Narrative Structure** shown below provides a useful method for communicating with maximum motivating power. It includes the pieces people need to understand the “story” of public health.

Below are general guidelines for how to shape each piece of a public health narrative. On the pages that follow, we will adapt these guidelines to one-minute messages about each of the three frame elements.

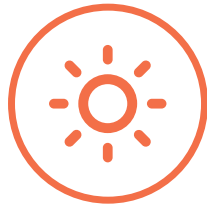
Narratives often flow in the order below—**people**, **goal**, **problem**, **solution**. But you can adjust the order in the way that is most intuitive for your work.



People

Who are the people involved in public health?

Other sectors need to understand the role of public health professionals—and to respect them as people.



Goal

What goals are they working toward?

People are motivated by aspirations that relate to their own lives and careers.



Problem

What problems stand in the way?

Problems should be intuitive. Overly complex problems can make action seem futile.



Solution

How will public health solutions benefit individuals and communities?

Your audience will be more motivated if they can see the tangible benefits of partnering with public health.

One-Minute Message: The Value Of Investment

A message about the financial and other benefits of investing in public health.



Public health experts know that communities only prosper when they're healthy. Their mission isn't just to protect individuals' health—they're making sure businesses, schools, hospitals, and more are set up for success.



Public health is a smart investment: It means a healthy workforce, students ready to learn, and an entire community that knows you're on their side.



Too often, we put off thinking about the community's health until there's a problem—a risky gamble that leaves us spending far more money and time digging ourselves out of a hole.



When we work together to protect the health of our community, we're protecting the investments we've made in our customers, students, neighbors, and more.



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.

One-Minute Message: Foundation Of Health

A message about the role different sectors play in addressing the social determinants of health.



Businesses, schools, hospitals, and government agencies—these are the pillars of communities that support our way of life. With the help of public health experts, they also have a role to play in keeping us healthy.



To have a solid foundation of health, different pillars of a community have to reinforce each other. Students learn best when they have homes that keep them safe and rested; businesses thrive when their employees and customers are healthy.



When we wait to treat individual health issues one at a time, we ignore the structural flaws that keep causing problems.



Public health professionals can diagnose the health of our community, but they can't fix it alone. Business leaders, educators, and property owners all have the tools we need to build healthy communities.



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.

One-Minute Message: GPS Navigation

A message about how the field of public health uses data to support other sectors.



Public health experts are trained to spot patterns in data and translate them into concrete actions that leaders in our community—teachers, property owners, business owners, and more—can take to protect our health.



Data helps map out steps organizations can take to find innovative solutions to reach their goals more quickly—all while improving the health of their communities.



It's easy to get lost in mountains of data. Numbers can point us in different directions and leave organizations feeling stuck.



Partnering with public health experts can provide organizations with a GPS to pinpoint where they are and find the different paths to reach their goals.



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.



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For more information about and tools for
communicating effectively about public health, visit:

www.phrases.org



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