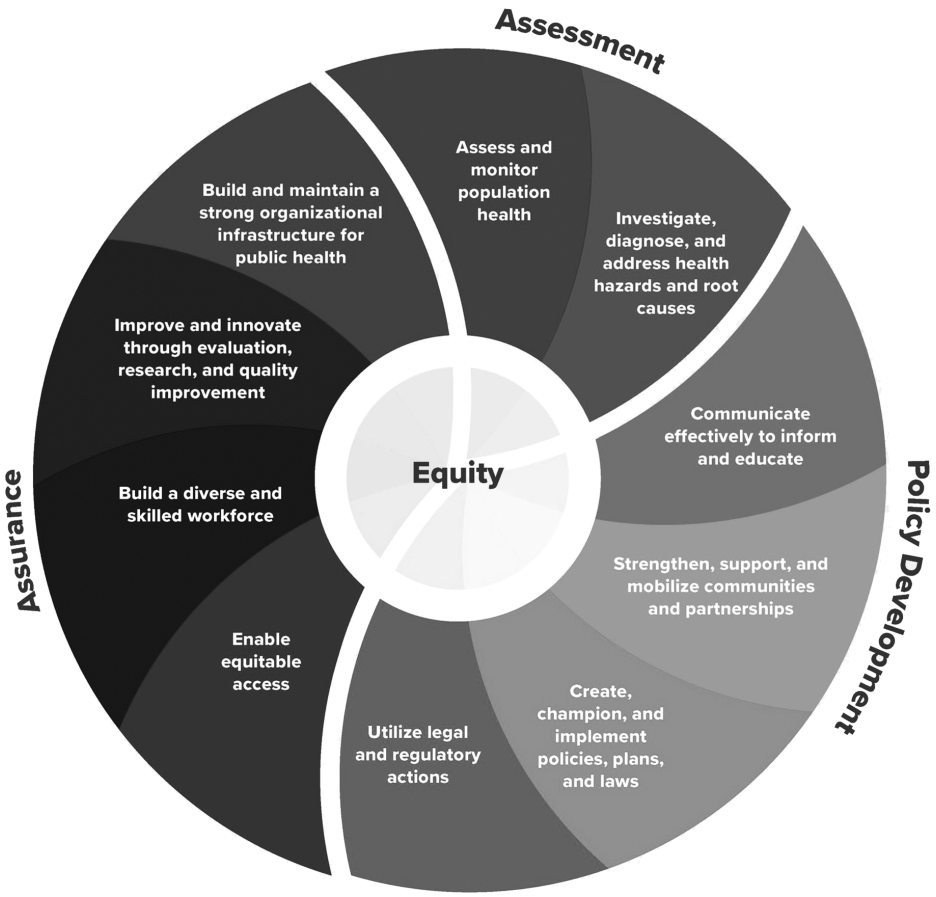
Introduction

This book is meant for public health practitioners and for those interested in becoming public health practitioners. You may find this book valuable if you work in the public or nonprofit sectors or in any of the fields adjacent to or part of the sprawling field of public health: health care, higher education, social services, philanthropy, and beyond.

This book aims to describe the key skills needed to manage financial and human resources in ways that sustain a successful organization or program to improve the public's health. Many of us enter management or leadership roles with little training for the important work of stewarding resources; more often, we have a particular expertise in managing programs, designing policies, or evaluating interventions. This book aims to close the gap by offering introductory resources to help you navigate newfound responsibilities (or to consider a new perspective on long-held responsibilities) and to identify where you may want to seek more help.

This book does not attempt to address the economic forces acting upon the public health sector or to tangle with academic research on resource management, finance, or organizational development. It does not grapple with the challenge of being comprehensive or providing graduate degree–level depth on any of the topics presented, nor does it contend with the important work of advocating for greater societal investment in public health systems. Rather, this is an introductory text and hopes to whet readers' appetites to pursue some of the ideas contained herein and learn more where there is interest and motivation.

There are copious resource management and finance challenges facing public health: the wrong pocket problem, the challenge of measuring return on investment, the perverse interplay between the health care and public health sectors, and much more. This, however, is not a book that contends with those problems. Instead, the book is a short, practical, and introductory guide for people working in public health—or for people who aspire to work in public health—who find themselves responsible for managing financial and human resources. In many situations, public health practitioners were hired for their experience or expertise in a certain domain—maternal and child health, environmental health, addiction, medicine, communicable disease transmission, epidemiologic modeling, among others—but then find themselves promoted into positions where they are suddenly responsible for managing financial and human resources. You have likely learned about the 10 Essential Public Health Services and become familiar with our field's assurance, assessment, and policy development responsibilities, visualized in Figure 1.[1]



Source: Reprinted from Public Health Accreditation Board.[1]

Figure 1. The 10 Essential Public Health Services

But now you are in charge of people and budgets, and you manage teams who assemble workplans that feed into strategic plans. Your days are spent thinking about how best to organize people and resources to achieve your public health organization or program's mission. You might even find yourself responsible for setting the strategic direction for an entire organization or a large and important program. What's a person to do? Public health or medical school didn't necessarily prepare me for how I now find myself spending my days.

Beyond the content of each chapter, this book is interspersed with case studies from public health practitioners from every corner of the United States. The goal is not only to present relevant skills but also to illustrate how those skills have been made useful in the messy, turbulent, chaotic real-world settings in which we work.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on key financial management skills for public health practitioners: building and communicating budgets and displaying complex financial and management data in accessible ways and then using those data to make decisions. Chapter 3 focuses on managing the tangle of public funding while navigating complex procurement and technology constraints in the public and nonprofit sectors.

In Chapter 4, I turn to managing people, including the nuance required of managing in times of feast and famine, and managing in ways that inspire trust and confidence among colleagues collectively working toward a common mission. Chapter 5 describes the core responsibility of all public health practitioners: communicating, leading, and managing the change our organizations and programs require. Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on managing the scarcest and most precious resource: time.

Sister Corita Kent was a Catholic nun who became famous in the 1950s and 60s for her social justice pop art. She's a favorite artist of mine. Kent made screen prints and was inspired by medieval art and, in turn, by Andy Warhol and her contemporaries. She spoke out, with other progressive nuns, on the social justice issues of the day, and, for many years, worked as an art professor at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, California. In her classroom, she posted a list of rules that have since become famous. My favorite is Rule 7: "The only rule is work. If you work, it will lead to something. It's the people who do all of the work all the time who eventually catch on to things."[2] I agree.

REFERENCES

1. Public Health Accreditation Board. The 10 Essential Public Health Services. September 2020. Accessed March 15, 2026. https://phaboard.org/infrastructure/public-health-frameworks/the-10-essential-public-health-services
2. Corita Art Center. Ten rules. Accessed July 13, 2026. https://www.corita.org/tenrules