

# Building Public Health Leadership Capacity for Greater Health Equity

**OUR POINT OF VIEW, RESEARCH, AND SOLUTIONS**



# Introduction



Building healthier societies around the globe requires investment in public health leadership. Leaders — from grassroots community change agents to senior executives at governmental or nongovernmental organizations — all face myriad challenges in fostering greater health equity. These challenges include, but are not limited to, navigating systemic barriers largely determined by different social identities and socioeconomic status; disparate and siloed systems and services; resource-constrained environments; polarized political ideologies; and overwhelming and confusing information the public struggles to understand and trust.

At the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)<sup>®</sup>, we have decades of experience partnering with a wide array of local, state, national, and global organizations focused on strengthening public health leadership. As a result, we have learned a lot about what it takes to develop effective leadership capabilities in this complex context. We offer some lessons from our own experience in this paper. We are committed to leveraging those lessons to continue providing human-centered, research-based population health-focused leadership development programs designed for individuals, organizations, and communities seeking to solve some of society's most vexing health challenges.

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# Our Research

By examining 360° assessment data from from over 400 leaders and 4,000 raters working in public and population health globally, we identified the top leadership competencies most frequently selected as “important for success” in this sector.

Our research found that the **top 6 most important competencies** for population health leaders are:

## **Building and Mending Relationships**

Knows how to build and maintain working relationships with co-workers and external parties; can negotiate and handle work problems without alienating people; understands others and is able to get their cooperation in non-authority relationships.

## **Communication**

Communicates organization goals effectively and is able to inspire through presentation of information.

## **Acting Systemically**

Understands the political nature of the organization and works appropriately within it; effectively establishes collaborative relationships and alliances throughout the organization.

## **Influencing Leadership Power**

Inspires and promotes a vision; persuades and motivates others; influences superiors; delegates effectively.

## **Valuing Diversity**

Avoids prejudging or making assumptions when dealing with others who differ by gender, race, or culture.

## **Resilience**

Maintains the energy to lead as the best version of one’s self. This involves the ability to adapt and effectively respond to interpersonal challenges, systemic barriers, competing priorities, project setbacks, and unpredictable circumstances associated with leading in organizations.



# Our Approach

## CREATING HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH A FOCUS ON BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Our pioneering and proven approach to developing leaders reflects our belief that effective development occurs over time through a process. Development is not a single event and not something that can be done “to” or “for” an individual. Rather, powerful development comes from lessons learned then applied through actual experience.

We **co-create solutions** with our partners that give participants the opportunity to examine and stretch their own ways of thinking and behaving as leaders, using the latest research on adult learning techniques and community development. This kind of complex, collaborative work requires reframing and expanding upon traditional leadership competencies (those noted above) to help leaders:

- **Improve their interpersonal communication skills** — Listen and facilitate conversations that develop shared understanding, language, and meaning to help multiple audiences work towards a shared purpose.
- **Develop a greater tolerance for ambiguity** — Accept uncertainty is part of leadership.
- **Elevate their ability to think and act strategically** — Think broadly, understanding decisions have ripple effects within and outside of an organization.
- **Deepen their understanding and ability to center the perspectives and issues facing people with underestimated social identities** — Address power asymmetries to tackle root causes of health inequities and meaningfully partner with people closest to the problem in the co-creation of solutions.
- **Span the boundaries that exist between people, organizations, and systems more effectively** — Build productive relationships with others to achieve common goals.
- **Manage polarities to leverage the power of both / and thinking** — Understand that seemingly unresolvable challenges may not be problems to be solved, but polarities to be managed.

## OUR IMPACT

“I have learned that you can become a stronger leader for your organization and community through dedicated attention to certain actions. This role as a leader is not about your job title but is about the impact you make and what you inspire in others.”

— Ladder to Leadership Fellow  
Sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

“This course has filled in a gap in my education. I spent 2½ decades learning the intricacy of medical practice in rural areas, but there was a piece missing which had a lot to do with leadership and advocacy. I can use what I learned to multiply my impact as a physician in a rural area.”

— Dr. Tom White  
Family Medicine  
Sponsored by The Colorado Health Foundation





## TAKING AN EQUITY-FIRST APPROACH IS CRITICAL

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are key to all of our leadership offerings. Our approach focuses on helping leaders make the leap from **raising awareness to taking meaningful action** and driving sustainable culture change. We help leaders shift their mindsets, behaviors, and practices so that they work to actively create conditions that enable everyone in the organization to attain their full potential.

Elevating equity is critical because even in organizations that are both diverse and inclusive, individuals who come from different backgrounds can still run into policies, practices, or assumptions that prevent them from being fully engaged, supported, and able to reach their potential. That's why rather than DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), at CCL, we refer to EDI — centering **equity as the first consideration** to emphasize its importance.

We've learned that when it comes to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace, language, challenges, norms, and solutions shift based on context, culture, and climate. Above all, leaders must consider people's different lived experiences to help their teams achieve their full potential.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERS


We have a specific and intentional focus on creating healthier, more equitable communities by providing high-impact leadership development experiences. At CCL, we believe **leadership is a social process** that happens in the context of relationships. Our approach emphasizes the importance of engaging all stakeholders of an initiative.

We adapt our approach to the unique challenges of all leaders working in this sector to advance transformational change in communities. Many of our population health leadership initiatives are funded by partnerships with philanthropy.


Whether you're a foundation executive, state health official, community advocate, healthcare professional, or public health educator, our goal is to help strengthen leadership skills in public health so that together, we can create a healthier society for all.

**What participants said about our programs to develop leadership skills at public health organizations:**


**94%**

would recommend course to others 

**96%**

were able to make meaningful connections 

**95%**

could apply program learnings to increase their impact 



# Our Solutions

Our Population Health team has extensive experience designing, delivering, and evaluating leadership development experiences. Our solutions are based on proven models grounded in research, formative evaluation, and impactful learning experiences.

We offer transformational, human-centered leadership programs, in both in-person and virtual program formats, tailored to the challenges faced and skills needed at every leader level.

We provide **scholarships** to attend our open-enrollment programs for leaders who are making a difference in their communities.



## **Custom Leadership Development Initiatives**

We partner with organizations to help invest in leaders and the communities they serve. With a combination of leadership analytics, talent diagnostics, 360 360° assessments, and personalized coaching services, we dive deep into the needs of the intended leaders, their context, priorities, and challenges to help inform investments in population health leadership development.



## **Better Conversations Every Day™**

Better Conversations Every Day™ (BCE) is a practical, evidence-based program that starts with a simple yet transformative premise: that better culture starts with better conversations. No matter the size of an organization, BCE helps build coaching skills and a common leadership language, drive organizational outcomes, and create lasting change at scale.



## **Burn Bright: The Resilience Advantage**

Burnout among public health workers is all too common, and maintaining resilience is a challenge. Support your team and create conditions for peak performance with our online resilience-building program designed to equip leaders to survive and prosper through unprecedented challenges. We can deliver this course as an adaptable 4-hour workshop, or as a schedule-friendly, self-paced online course.



## **Boundary Spanning Leadership Workshop**

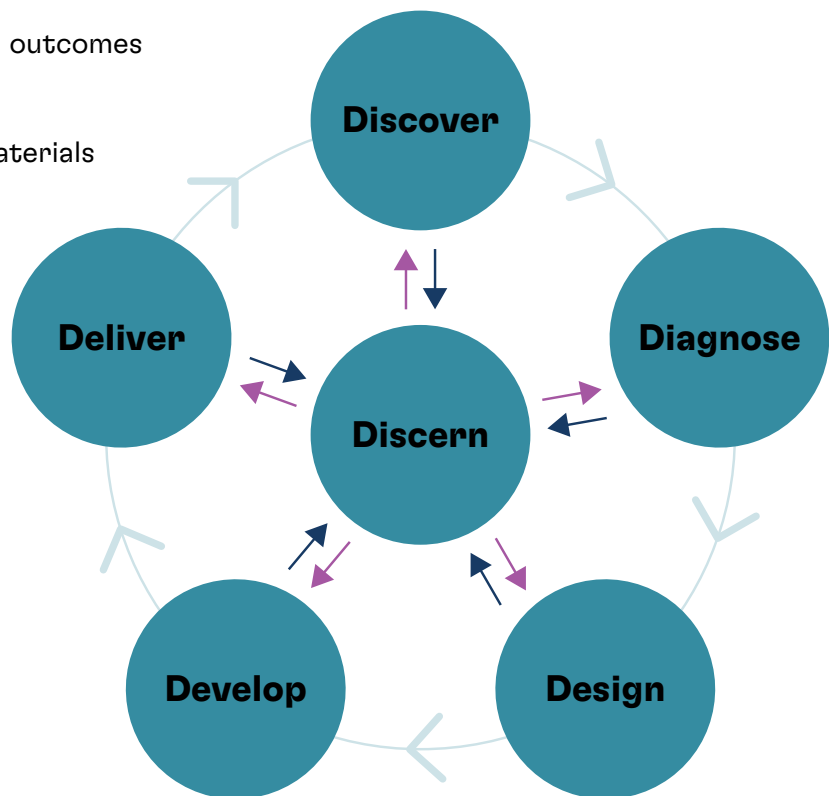
We offer customized workshops and tools to help you tailor this experience to the challenges faced in your context. The workshop focuses on 6 boundary spanning practices that increase collaboration, tear down organizational silos, and mitigate turf wars to increase productivity, efficiency, and innovation.



# How We Partner

Our client relationship process is built around understanding you. Our goal is to create solutions, insights, and impact that improve leadership in public health. With each partner, our approach is consistent, but the outcome is one of a kind. The D6 process is the basis for designing our leadership solutions and collaborating with you. Our methods of communication during the design process will range from face-to-face design meetings, design review webinars, weekly project team conference calls, and any other individual conversations needed to assure success.

- **Discover** your challenge and context
- **Diagnose** your leadership need and outcomes
- **Design** your customized initiative
- **Develop** the detailed design and materials
- **Deliver** your solution
- **Discern** the impact



## CONTACT US

Our Strategic Client Partners will rally a team of solution designers, project managers, evaluation experts, and other skilled individuals to begin planning your initiative. Visit our website at [ccl.org/population-health](http://ccl.org/population-health) to start a conversation.

**Contact us, and the process can begin. Let's create results that matter.**



# Additional Resources

## ARTICLES & PAPERS

[Confronting Wicked Problems: Reimagined Leadership Strategies for Societal Impact](#)

[It's Time to Break Up With Burnout. Here's How](#)

## CASE STUDIES

[Leadership Development for Executive Nurses: 10 Years of Impact](#)

[Ladder to Leadership: Developing the Next Generation of Community Healthcare Leaders](#)

[A Fellowship's Impact on the Networks of Women Healthcare Leaders](#)

## WEBINARS

[Using Resilience Strategies to Reduce Workplace Barriers for Emerging Leaders](#)

[Intentional, Inclusive, & Interdependent: Creating Effective Leadership in the Social Sector](#)





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At the Center for Creative Leadership, our drive to create a ripple effect of positive change underpins everything we do. For 50+ years, we've pioneered leadership development solutions for everyone from frontline workers to global CEOs. Consistently ranked among the world's top providers of executive education, our research-based programs and solutions inspire individuals in organizations across the world – including 2/3 of the Fortune 1000 – to ignite remarkable transformations.