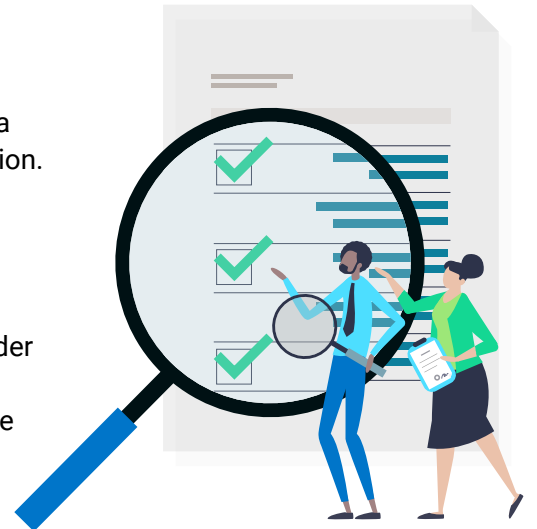


Communicating the value of data modernization: A checklist for crafting messages

Purpose

Under the umbrella of data modernization, public health agencies have made changes to systems, processes and policies to solve data challenges and equip their workforce to take timely public health action. **The success of data modernization activities requires sustained engagement and support from representatives across the agency and external partners across the public health landscape.** Effective communication is crucial for building trust and connecting people to the public health impact of this work. This checklist is part of a broader [Data Modernization Communications Toolkit](#) and is designed for public health staff involved in data modernization activities to provide recommendations and cautions when developing communication strategies and elevator pitches for various audiences.



Considerations for data modernization communication

RECOMMENDATION

Provide context on what you mean by the term data modernization

SUGGESTED ACTION

Work with internal staff to collaboratively define what data modernization means to your organization to help increase buy-in and understanding

CAUTION

Refrain from data modernization as a standalone term, which leaves the listener to decide what it means

RECOMMENDATION

Connect to a public health outcome that is familiar and relatable

SUGGESTED ACTION

Consider linking to a specific public health issue in your community and how timely data saved lives

CAUTION

Try not to select examples that may be polarizing, as this could distract from your intended goal

 **RECOMMENDATION**

Use plain language guidelines even when working with internal teams¹

 **SUGGESTED ACTION**

Use referenced plain language guides and the Jargon Crosswalk on the next page to help craft the message

 **CAUTION**

Avoid acronyms and complicated language, which have the potential to create an immediate disconnect between you and your audience

 **RECOMMENDATION**

Show progress along the way and discuss what will be done in the future

 **SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

Celebrate small wins throughout the work

Be transparent with timelines, challenges and delays

 **CAUTION**

Refrain from waiting until a project is complete to share results

 **RECOMMENDATION**

Take time to listen and answer questions, which gives people an opportunity to feel seen and heard

 **SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

Host listening sessions with key audiences to hear their perspectives, and follow up after the sessions with a summary of what you heard and ask them to verify accuracy

Make time for one-on-one conversations as a powerful way to gain trust and ease fears

When possible, provide those impacted by data modernization changes with choice and ownership over how a change will be implemented

 **CAUTION**

Do not skip over the critical step of gaining insight from those impacted by change

 **RECOMMENDATION**

Unite interested parties around a common purpose and recognize that data belongs to the people, and public health serves as a steward of that data

 **SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

Develop clear rules for how data is used, shared and protected; and engage frontline staff and the community in these discussions

Emphasize the impact of data modernization activities on improved outcomes for the people served

 **CAUTION**

Remove phrases like “your data” and “my data,” which reinforce the culture of data silos and increase hesitancy around sharing data

¹ U.S. General Services Administration. “Plain Language Guide Series.” [Digital.gov](https://digital.gov/guides/plain-language). Accessed November 11, 2025. <https://digital.gov/guides/plain-language>.

Jargon Crosswalk²

Effective communication involves connecting with your audience. One way to accomplish this is by using familiar terms that are clear and to the point. This crosswalk provides suggested alternatives for common jargon used when describing data modernization projects.

Modernize	→	Upgrade, enhance, simplify, increase efficiency
Infrastructure	→	Systems, tools, foundation
Governance	→	Make and follow rules to ensure data is used, shared and protected
Redundancy	→	Repetition, extra steps, duplication
Proactive	→	Plan ahead, take action early
Mitigate	→	Reduce, lessen
Seamless	→	Fewer manual steps, continuous, complete, unified
Cloud migration	→	Store data online, transfer to a shared network
Holistic approach	→	Look at the whole system, all-around strategy
Actionable insights	→	Timely recommendations, clear next steps
Digital transformation	→	Updated technology, improve how we use data

² Inspired by: Coalition of Local Health Officials, Public Health Modernization Communication Toolkit, 2016, https://cdn.oregonchho.org/docs/2015/org/PH_Mod_Comm_Toolkit_WEB.pdf



Examples of elevator pitches

Below are examples of how you can apply these principles to key audiences impacting the success of data modernization efforts.³



AUDIENCE 1

Health officials, executive leaders and legislators

- Data modernization activities ensure the people, processes and technologies are in place to provide secure and timely access to data, enabling informed decisions about the health and well-being of our community.
- Data modernization projects are more than technology—they are about creating processes and policies that improve efficiency, minimize duplication and ensure that data drives public health initiatives at every level, from identifying the cause of a foodborne illness to keeping systems online during a natural disaster.



AUDIENCE 2

Program staff and data users

- Data modernization activities help make data more accessible and usable, allowing you to be more effective in your role.
- Data modernization projects support staff by updating processes and systems, allowing you to shift time from burdensome tasks to activities that directly benefit the people you serve.
- Data modernization spans all programs and divisions to enhance systems and processes so we can all work together to serve the community better.



AUDIENCE 3

External partners

Healthcare

- Data modernization efforts help simplify data exchange and reduce the reporting burden on healthcare. Data modernization gives us tools to work together to improve outcomes for the people we serve.

General public

- Data modernization is about improving systems and processes to provide better access to data while protecting privacy and building trust. Providing timely information helps us serve our communities more effectively.

³ Pitch language was developed using insights from conversations with representatives of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)'s Informatics and Data Modernization Network and the Public Health Informatics Institute (PHII)'s Data Modernization Learning Community.

Spotlight

In April 2025, Theresa Sokol, State Epidemiologist for the Louisiana Department of Health, provided testimony on behalf of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) for the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies. The **Data Modernization Communications Toolkit** includes a [link to the transcript of her testimony](#) as a real-world example of the use of plain language and storytelling to communicate the value of data modernization.⁴

⁴ Theresa Sokol. Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, April 9, 2025. <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118097/witnesses/HHRG-119-AP07-Wstate-SokolT-20250409.pdf>.

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