Health Communications Consultants
Knowledge, Innovation, & Equity.

NNPHI AIxPH Roundtable Discussion Summary



On October 16, 2026, Health Communications Consultants, Inc. (HCC, Inc.) had the privilege of hosting a roundtable discussion at the NNPHI AIxPH Conference focused on preparing the public health workforce for the future. Our goals were twofold: (1) Present new AI-relevant information on the public health workforce of the future; and (2) gather expertise and feedback to inform the continued development of our emerging workforce model.

As with all our facilitation efforts, we put people first. We began by welcoming participants, learning their backgrounds and expertise, and of course, sneaking in a little networking along the way.



A total of 10 individuals participated in the roundtable, with 7-9 participants engaged at the table at any given time as attendees moved between the discussion. Participants represented state and local health departments (4), consulting firms (2), and national public health organizations (4). Collectively, they brought expertise in data governance, recruitment, consulting, training, preparedness, education, and data systems.

At the heart of our work at HCC, Inc., is a fundamental question: **How do we prepare the public health workforce for a range of possible futures?**

We began exploring this primary question through three guiding questions:

- What is changing as it relates to the tasks of public health?
- What public health workforce capabilities have become more valuable?
- What do we need to change and put into place now to prepare the workforce?

These questions, together with HCC, Inc.'s research and evaluation work, informed the concepts presented in our *Future Public Health Workforce* infographic. The roundtable provided an opportunity to explore these concepts with public health professionals, examine our initial assumptions, and gather insights based on participants' diverse experiences and expertise.

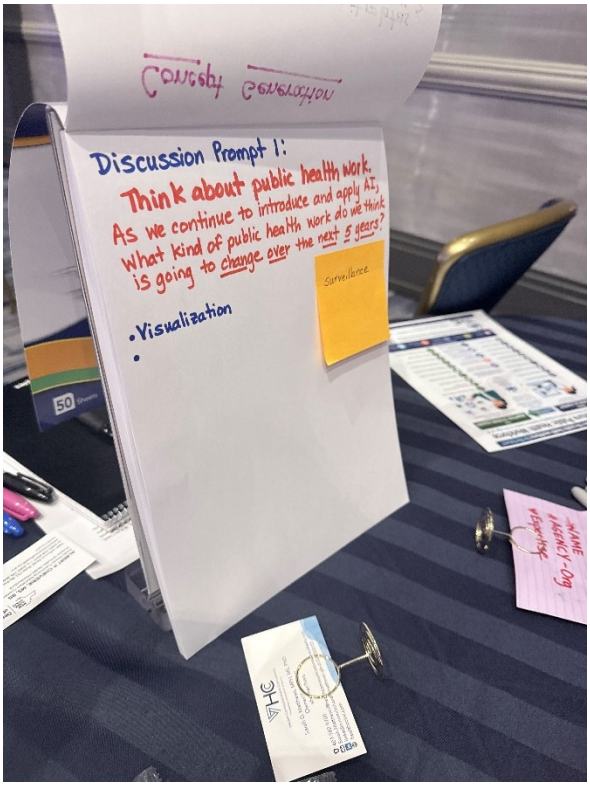
We began with Discussion Prompt 1 to encourage participants to think about how AI may change the nature of public health work over the next five years. This provided an opportunity for participants to share their perspectives before being introduced to the workforce capabilities identified in HCC, Inc.'s emerging model. We wanted to first explore what participants anticipated would change before discussing the capabilities needed to prepare for those changes. Their responses are summarized below.

Discussion Prompt 1: Anticipating Changes in Public Health Work

Think about public health work. As we continue to introduce and apply AI, what kind of public health work do we think is going to change over the next 5 years?

Responses:

- Visualization.
- Automation of processes for saving time and for projects.
- Data consolidation.
- Data integration.
- Fewer people doing more jobs.
- AI will make jobs faster which may lead to information overload and bottleneck.
- Quality of data. Source of data and discernment of that. How can the quality of data be good from bad output.
- Clarity on measures of success.
- As systems get faster does not mean better.
- More data means more answers and more questions. What will we consider success?
- Grant writing.
- Document writing
- Policy writing.
- No coding skills will require prompting skills.
- Need to understand coding.
- Human in the loop uncertainty.
- Consultants will increase instead of in-house experts.



- Increase in social activity, more connection with humans and collaboration (e.g. housing, food issues).
- Data stewardship.
- Increase demand to answer questions more quickly.
- Communication skills both with data and internal.
- Prioritizing questions to ask.
- Increase community input and community engagement.

We then organized the responses into 5 descriptive headings in the table below. Note: These are not validated themes, just one method to group the responses for ease of record keeping.

Categories	Responses
Changes in tasks and processes	Visualization, automation, data consolidation, data integration, grant writing, document writing, policy writing
Workforce roles and skills	Fewer people doing more jobs, coding versus prompting skills, consultants versus in-house experts
Data quality and performance	Data quality, information overload, measures of success, speed versus quality
Communication and engagement	Communication skills, collaboration, community input, community engagement
Oversight and decision-making	Human in the loop, data stewardship, prioritizing questions

Following this discussion, we introduced HCC, Inc.'s *Future Public Health Workforce* infographic and briefly described the proposed transition from technical expert to adaptive systems leader. Participants were then invited to review the workforce capabilities presented in the infographic and share their perspectives on their relevance in an AI-influenced public health environment.



Discussion Prompt 2: Exploring Future Workforce Capabilities

Take a look at the right side of the infographic. What do you think about these? Do you agree they will be valuable in an AI-influenced environment?

√ Yes

X No

Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the value of the following proposed capabilities:

- Systems thinking and strategic vision
- Data literacy & data science across systems
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Adaptive & innovative mindset
- Communicates to inspire & mobilize
- Navigates complexity & uncertainty
- Technology fluency & AI readiness
- Builds teams & empowers others
- Leads & manages change
- Connects knowledge across systems

Overall, participants agreed with most of the proposed capabilities but frequently requested clarification about what each meant. This highlighted the need for more specific definitions. One participant also emphasized that the capabilities needed depend on the intended outcome, whether advancing one's career, achieving a business objective (e.g. to improve revenue), or improving community health. As a group, we agreed to focus the discussion on public health work and its ultimate goal of improving community health.

Another participant distinguished between macro and micro-level competencies, raising questions about whether training in specific skills alone would be sufficient. The discussion also addressed whether every technical expert could develop these broader capabilities and whether all professionals would have equitable access to the training and development opportunities needed to do so.

Adaptive and Innovative Mindset

When discussing an "adaptive and innovative mindset", participants explored the relationship between attitude, capability, and whether organizations value these attributes. One participant posed an interesting question: "could you really train mindset as a skill?" HCC, Inc.'s response was an enthusiastic yes! We believe mindset can be developed through training (stay tuned for more on what that looks like).



Communicates to Inspire and Mobilize

Communication skills surfaced repeatedly throughout the roundtable. When discussing the capability "communicates to inspire and mobilize", participants challenged the word "inspires," observing that many current managers may be effective at mobilizing people without necessarily inspiring them.

Leads and Manages Change

The discussion on "leads & manages change" capabilities introduces concepts of loss management. Participants explored how actual or perceived losses can influence responses to change, including the perspective that change management is, in many ways, loss management.

Organizational Culture and Opportunities to Practice

The conversation also extended beyond individual capabilities to the environments in which those capabilities are developed and applied. Participants discussed the importance of having opportunities to practice skills, concerns about training and competency loss, and the need for human resources (HR) training, and the loss of civil service structures.

Organizational and system culture also emerged in the discussion, including the importance of celebrating curiosity, respecting subject matter experts (SME), and recognizing innovation.

Prioritizing a Capability for Further Discussion

To narrow the discussion, the facilitator asked participants, “If you had to pick out of the list which ones to discuss now, which would you prioritize?” Participants selected “Leads & Manages change”, which became the focus of the third and final discussion prompt.

Discussion Prompt 3: Preparing the Workforce to Lead and Manage Change

How do we prepare our public health workforce for the future? How do we prepare our workforce to Lead & Manage Change?

Participants identified the following considerations:

- Data literacy.
- Communicate with data literacy.
- Leadership role in change management. A top-down approach is important, as challenges or shortcomings in senior leadership's ability to lead and manage change can negatively affect the rest of the organization.
- Technology acceptance and workforce resilience. Addressing technology acceptance across the workforce while strengthening employees' resilience and ability to adapt to change.
- Managing instability and uncertainty.
- Change management in light of uncertainty requires participation and buy-in at every level and with key stakeholders.
- Leaders clearly communicate and articulate outcomes.
- There are silos of work and those working with AI.
- Identify primitives for workflows (PHAB workflow not usable).



Additional Considerations for Workforce Preparation

The discussion expanded to include the importance of receiving feedback constructively, establishing processes to retain subject matter experts (SMEs), and examining how novice public health professionals learn from AI-generated outputs. Participants also raised concerns about AI replacing tasks and experiences that traditionally help early-career professionals develop foundational knowledge, practical skills, and professional judgment. The need for quality assurance (QA) processes when using AI was also identified.

Questions about the current technology landscape also surfaced, including the uncertainty about which technologies are available, who is using them, and how they are being applied. Participants raised

concerns about gaps in science communication and the need to maintain an appropriate balance of scientific information in conversations.

Participants also discussed the challenges of managing multiple changes simultaneously and the importance of understanding how academic partners approach workforce training. Additional considerations included data literacy training at all leadership levels, change management, continuity of operations, succession planning, accountability, communicating strategic approaches to staff, and the implementation and long-term sustainability of AI systems.

Examples of Workforce Development and Training

The facilitator invited participants to share examples of training programs they had experienced that supported the development of these capabilities.



Several participants referenced their Master of Public Health (MPH) programs. Other examples included the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) programs addressing communication and change management, as well as leadership development courses in Indiana designed to train leaders at all organizational levels.

The Indiana leadership courses were described as having operated for 18 years, reaching approximately 60-80 participants annually. Although AI training is not included in these courses, the participant identified them as a successful example of leadership development.

While several participants reported having completed training in many of the capabilities discussed, they also acknowledged the need for consistent refresher training to maintain and strengthen those skills.

Closing Reflections

We appreciate the perspectives, experiences, and expertise shared by everyone who joined our roundtable. The discussion provided valuable feedback on HCC, Inc.'s emerging *Future Public Health Workforce* model, including the need for clearer definitions of proposed capabilities, opportunities to develop and practice those capabilities, and the importance of preparing leaders to manage change. We will use these insights to inform the continued development of our model and explore how we can better support the public health workforce's preparation for a range of possible futures.