

Key Competencies and Training Framework for Health Diplomacy: A Guidance Document

Developed by the Global Health Diplomacy Institutional Network

HEALTH DIPLOMACY

Health diplomacy is the art and science by which governments, the private sector, civil society, and individuals navigate political processes to improve health outcomes. It operates in both domestic and international contexts, encompassing bilateral and multilateral agreements, the use of health as a foreign policy tool, and the finding of solutions to cross-border health challenges.

A key subset of health diplomacy is **Global Health Diplomacy**, which operates at the intersection of health and international relations on the global stage. It encompasses global health governance, the coordination of efforts, and the negotiation of priorities among international organizations, states, and non-state actors. While its primary focus is global, it also intersects with domestic policies on complex issues such as climate change, crisis preparedness and response, and health financing.

Who are health diplomats?

Health diplomacy involves a wide range of professionals, recognizing that health outcomes depend on cross-sector collaboration and cannot be achieved by the health sector alone. Health diplomats include individuals working in Ministries of Foreign Affairs, government agencies, public institutions, the private sector (both corporate and not-for-profit), and humanitarian organizations. These professionals use the tools of health diplomacy to advocate for and advance health objectives across sectors.

KEY COMPETENCIES FOR HEALTH DIPLOMACY

Through extensive consultations with institutions across Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia – and drawing on established expertise in health diplomacy – the **Global Health Diplomacy Institutional Network (GHDIN)** has identified five key competencies that are fundamental for effective performance in health diplomacy worldwide. These include:

1. **Essential global health knowledge:** understanding the architecture, institutions, and policy and legal frameworks that shape global health systems and governance, as well as contemporary challenges to human health.
2. **Political analysis and diplomacy skills:** ability to navigate political dynamics and decision-making structures to influence health agendas and priorities.
3. **Strategic decision-making and leadership:** capacity to lead under uncertainty, use data to inform decisions, and drive innovation to advance health outcomes.

4. **Cross-cultural and interpersonal communication:** skills to collaborate effectively across cultural and political contexts and adapt communication strategies to different audiences.
5. **Coalition-building and advocacy:** ability to build trust, networks, and alliances across sectors and influence decision-making through effective advocacy.

The table below presents core descriptors for each competency, providing a structured foundation for training and professional development in this field. Examples of how these competencies are applied in practice can be found in *Annex A*.

KEY COMPETENCY	The participant will be able to
Essential global health knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand health systems, governance, and financing and their interconnections with negotiation processes (e.g. bilateral, multilateral). • Situate global health within broader development and policy frameworks, demonstrating its relevance to wider societal goals. • Apply legal frameworks pertinent to health systems and diplomacy to address complex challenges and support decision-making. • Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary challenges to health (e.g. climate change, humanitarian crises, geopolitical tensions), and their implications for global health systems and diplomacy.
Political analysis and diplomacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and navigate political dynamics and power structures across diverse contexts. • Demonstrate awareness and understanding of formal and informal political decision-making processes, including the powers and influence of various stakeholders. • Apply negotiation skills and strategies to build relationships and foster collaboration effectively. • Integrate health diplomacy priorities with broader political objectives to align and advance shared goals. • Navigate the intersection of global health and foreign policy with domestic and regional priorities, ensuring coordinated approaches.
Strategic decision-making and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate strong leadership skills and drive change and innovation. • Assess and take calculated risks in complex environments. • Uphold ethical principles and values. • Use data and evidence to shape and influence high-level decisions. • Manage uncertainty effectively and adapt to evolving challenges.

Cross-cultural and interpersonal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust, nurture relationships, and form effective networks across sectoral, geographical, cultural, and political boundaries. • Leverage health to influence political and policy-related decision-making. • Understand how the private sector impacts and can contribute to political and health policy decisions.
Coalition-building and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand when, how, and what to communicate. • Engage effectively with diverse stakeholders, including governments, international agencies, and communities. • Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability in multicultural settings.

HEALTH DIPLOMACY TRAINING FRAMEWORK

The Health Diplomacy Training Framework takes an **outcomes-based approach** to capacity development in health diplomacy. It supports institutions in designing training programs that are adaptable, practical, and responsive to participant needs, using key competencies – as observable and measurable abilities required for effective performance – as the foundation.

The framework offers a **structured yet flexible method** for aligning these competencies with clear learning outcomes (i.e. what participants are expected to do) and appropriate methodological approaches. Rather than prescribing a fixed curriculum, it enables the design of programs that reflect institutional priorities, participant profiles, and contextual realities.

Developed by the Global Health Diplomacy Institutional Network (GHDIN), the framework enables participants – from health practitioners to seasoned diplomats – to use diplomacy as a tool to advance health outcomes. By addressing real-world challenges and fostering peer learning and intergenerational exchange, it ensures that educational programs are both practical and impactful, while preparing participants for current and future leadership roles in health diplomacy.

Specific educational programs do not need to address all key competencies. The content and focus of each program should be tailored to the specific needs of the target audience and build on the skills participants already possess. For instance, experienced diplomats may benefit most from a focus on global health decision-making and the interplay between health and politics, while seasoned health leaders may gain more from enhancing their negotiation and diplomatic skills.

By adopting these key competencies and tailoring their programs accordingly, institutional members of GHDIN affirm their commitment to advancing high-quality health diplomacy as a means of improving health outcomes globally.

Steps for Institutional Implementation

To support effective, outcome-driven training programs, this framework provides guidance for institutions to adopt and implement key competencies and learning outcomes with flexibility. *Annex B* outlines sample activities and methodologies that can support the development of each competency.

To operationalize the framework, institutions may follow the steps below – designed to align training design with core competencies while allowing for adaptation to local contexts and priorities.

1. Adopt the key competencies for health diplomacy as a shared foundation for training programs

Key competencies represent the practical skills and abilities essential for success in roles involving health diplomacy. These competencies address the varying skill requirements of different roles while supporting progression toward increasingly demanding leadership responsibilities. Institutions are encouraged to integrate key competencies into their programs while adapting learning outcomes or objectives to align with their academic structures and participant needs.

In addition to their practical application, key competencies offer a structured pathway for professional development, enabling individuals to assess their current level and identify steps for advancement.

2. Adapt learning outcomes or objectives for health diplomacy training

Learning outcomes articulate the specific knowledge, skills, or abilities that participants are expected to achieve by the end of the training. Unlike key competencies, which focus on performance on the job, learning outcomes are designed to reflect measurable achievements within the scope of the training program.

Knowing what participants should be able to do by the end of the training allows institutions to adapt learning outcomes or objectives to fit their educational approach while ensuring alignment with the key competencies.

3. Implement educational programs for health diplomacy aligned with key competencies and learning outcomes

Educational programs translate the framework into practical training through modules, activities, and assessments that align with the targeted competencies. These programs are also tailored to reflect regional and domestic issues relevant to participants.

Annex A: Key Competencies for Health Diplomacy in Practice

The **Health Diplomacy Training Framework**, developed by the **Global Health Diplomacy Institutional Network (GHDIN)**, outlines five key competencies essential for effective performance in health diplomacy roles:

- Essential Global Health Knowledge
- Political Analysis and Diplomacy Skills
- Strategic Decision-making and Leadership
- Cross-cultural and Interpersonal Communication
- Coalition-building and Advocacy.

Each competency can be demonstrated at one of four levels of mastery: *basic*, *intermediate*, *proficient*, and *expert*.

- **Basic:** performs tasks with guidance, focusing on foundational knowledge and supervised application.
- **Intermediate:** works independently in familiar contexts, applying knowledge and skills to meet defined objectives.
- **Proficient:** leads initiatives and performs effectively in complex or high-stakes environments, managing ambiguity with confidence.
- **Expert:** shapes policy, strategies, and global health frameworks, mentors others, and drives innovation.

The table below illustrates how these competencies are applied across varying levels of professional practice in health diplomacy.

Key Competency	Basic <i>e.g. Desk Officer or Junior Health Attaché</i>	Intermediate <i>e.g. Health Attaché or Technical Adviser</i>	Proficient <i>e.g. Head or Alternate Head of Delegation to WHA</i>	Expert <i>e.g. Global Health Ambassador, Minister of Health or Foreign Affairs</i>
Essential global health knowledge	Understands the structure of global health systems and governance frameworks with guidance	Applies knowledge of health systems to address challenges and proposes appropriate solutions tailored to political and health system contexts	Integrates deep knowledge of health systems into country-level diplomatic engagement or cross-border initiatives	Leads initiatives to reform or strengthen global health systems, influencing policy at the highest levels

Key Competency	Basic	Intermediate	Proficient	Expert
Political analysis & diplomacy skills	Recognizes political dynamics and stakeholder power structures with guidance, while supporting negotiations and relationship-building strategies	Navigates political dynamics and decision-making processes independently, applying entry-level negotiation strategies in formal and informal settings	Develops and leads complex policy dialogues and diplomatic negotiations aligning health priorities with foreign policy objectives	Shapes global health strategies, mentoring others and influencing international agreements
Strategic decision-making & leadership	Supports leadership initiatives. Identifies risks and adheres to ethical principles in supervised decision-making processes	Leads initiatives, applying data and evidence. Evaluates and mitigates risks within assigned responsibilities while upholding ethical standards	Leads larger initiatives, effectively using data and evidence to influence strategic decisions. Manages uncertainty by adapting strategies	Shapes organizational strategies and policies in complex and high-stake environments. Drives change and innovation to advance health outcomes
Cross-cultural & interpersonal communication	Demonstrates awareness of cultural differences and applies communication skills with guidance	Communicates effectively and independently in diverse cultural settings. Builds collaborative relationships and communicates persuasively across cultural and institutional contexts	Mediates conflicts and builds trust, even in cross-cultural, politically sensitive contexts	Fosters and sets the tone for inclusive and effective dialogue, leading by example in cross-cultural communication
Coalition-building and advocacy	Supports collaboration and advocacy efforts by contributing to clear and persuasive messages under supervision	Builds and maintains partnerships across diplomatic, health, and development sectors to advance shared goals	Leads advocacy campaigns and fosters coalitions in complex, multi-stakeholder environments - including in multilateral and intergovernmental environments	Champions global health causes, shapes movements and inspires widespread, sustainable collaboration

Annex B: Learning Activities to Develop Key Competencies for Health Diplomacy

This annex provides a non-exhaustive selection of learning activities and methodologies to support the development of the five key competencies identified in the **Health Diplomacy Training Framework** developed by the **Global Health Diplomacy Institutional Network (GHDIN)**:

- Essential Global Health Knowledge
- Political Analysis and Diplomacy Skills
- Strategic Decision-making and Leadership
- Cross-cultural and Interpersonal Communication
- Coalition-building and Advocacy.

The activities and methodologies can be used across a range of program formats – from short workshops and executive education to postgraduate degrees – and are adaptable to the participants' varying levels of expertise and knowledge. Institutions are encouraged to tailor these approaches based on available resources, learner profiles, and contextual priorities.

Intended as a living resource, this annex recognizes that methodologies may evolve over time and that many learning activities can contribute to more than one educational goal. The first section introduces each of the five key competencies with a brief overview of recommended pedagogical approaches, followed by a table with flexible learning activities. The second section provides a glossary of key terms to support consistency across institutions and geographical regions.

Learning Activities or Methodologies

Essential Global Health Knowledge

This competency is supported primarily through the **analysis of existing written materials**, reinforced by group discussion and applied learning. Content should be adapted to participants' existing knowledge. For example, those with limited prior experience may focus on global health actors and domestic legislation, while more advanced learners can explore systems thinking, global health governance, and legal frameworks such as international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The participant will be able to	Learning Activity or Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand health systems, governance, and financing and their interconnections with negotiation processes (e.g. bilateral, multilateral). Situate global health within broader development and policy frameworks, demonstrating its relevance to wider societal goals. Apply legal frameworks pertinent to health systems and diplomacy to address complex challenges and support decision-making. Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary challenges to health (e.g. climate change, humanitarian crises), and their implications for global health systems and diplomacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lectures (live or recorded) by senior leaders or experienced delegates. Case studies – based on participants’ cases in longer programs. Pre-reading assignments or curated video materials. Group exercises. Scenario-based policy simulations Collaborative research or group project (in longer training formats). Site visits or case analysis of health programs in conflict settings. Foresight exercises (targeted to executive and master’s-level participants).

Political Analysis and Diplomacy Skills

This competency is best developed through **experiential and intergenerational learning**, including structured practice, peer-to-peer engagement, and storytelling. Training should be tailored to participants’ level of experience and the duration of the program. For example, undergraduate learners may benefit from a focus on leadership types and power structures (the ‘what’), while executive-level training should emphasize applied methods such as simulation exercises and reflective storytelling (the ‘how’). In short-format offerings (e.g. masterclasses or executive sessions), priority should be given to practical exercises.

The participant will be able to	Learning Activity or Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and navigate political dynamics and power structures across diverse contexts. Demonstrate awareness and understanding of formal and informal political decision-making processes, including the powers and influence of various stakeholders. Apply negotiation skills and strategies to build relationships and foster collaboration effectively. Integrate health diplomacy priorities with broader political objectives to align and advance shared goals. Navigate the intersection of global health and foreign policy with domestic and regional priorities, ensuring coordinated approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential learning: simulations, mock negotiations, resolution or MoU drafting Reflective storytelling by experienced practitioners. Lectures on political theory and how health features in foreign policy. Readings of classical texts on health diplomacy. Curated video clips of health-related diplomatic or negotiation scenarios. Recording and feedback on participant performance (particularly useful for emerging leaders).

Strategic Decision-making and Leadership

This competency is best developed through **experiential and intergenerational learning**. Content should be matched to participants' professional experience and decision-making responsibilities. For example, those newer to the field may benefit from exploring leadership principles and strategic frameworks, while more experienced participants can focus on systems thinking, policy design, and high-stakes simulations such as crisis leadership or emergency scenario planning.

The participant will be able to	Learning Activity or Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate strong leadership skills and drive change and innovation.• Assess and take calculated risks in complex environments.• Uphold ethical principles and values.• Use data and evidence to shape and influence high-level decisions.• Manage uncertainty effectively and adapt to evolving challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simulations of strategic or crisis decision-making.• Leadership case studies involving ethical dilemmas.• Strategic planning simulations using limited or conflicting information.• Facilitated debriefs to reflect on decision-making processes and extract lessons.

Cross-cultural and Interpersonal Communication

This competency is developed most effectively through **experiential and peer-to-peer learning**, including role play, and group work. Activities should be adapted to participants' communication experience and cultural awareness. For those earlier in their careers, training might focus on listening skills, non-verbal cues, and basic protocol, while more experienced participants may benefit from working on facilitation, negotiation across cultures, and managing communication in politically sensitive environments.

The participant will be able to	Learning Activity or Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build trust, nurture relationships, and form effective networks across sectoral, geographical, cultural, and political boundaries.• Leverage health to influence political and policy-related decision-making.• Understand how the private sector impacts and can contribute to political and health policy decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intercultural dialogue workshops.• Role plays focused on cross-cultural scenarios and interpersonal negotiation.• Debrief sessions to examine communication styles and cultural dynamics in case studies.• Personal storytelling.• Structure peer-to-peer learning.

Coalition-building and Advocacy

This competency is best developed through **experiential and intergenerational learning approaches**. Methodologies such as stakeholder mapping, message framing, and simulated advocacy in multilateral or crisis settings are particularly effective. Training should be adapted to participants' experience level – for example, undergraduates may begin with basic trust-building and communication strategies, while postgraduate and executive learners can explore complex coalition dynamics through advanced simulations.

The participant will be able to	Learning Activity or Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand when, how, and what to communicate.• Engage effectively with diverse stakeholders, including governments, international agencies, and communities.• Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability in multicultural settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder mapping and influence pathway exercises.• Coalition-building role play.• Workshops on message design, influence strategies, and audience targeting.• Public speaking and message delivery sessions.• Reflective storytelling by experienced communicators.

Glossary of Terms

This glossary provides brief definitions of selected methodologies and learning approaches used in health diplomacy training. It aims to ensure clarity and consistency across institutions delivering programs within the Health Diplomacy Institutional Network.

Case Study: a real or hypothetical example used to analyze and discuss specific challenges, decisions, or outcomes. It can be used to teach policy analysis, strategic planning, or stakeholder engagement.

Debriefing: a reflective discussion that follows an exercise or activity, allowing participants to analyze what occurred, extract lessons, and connect them to theory or practice.

Experiential Learning: a process where learners gain knowledge and skills through direct experience. This includes simulations, field exercises, or case-based problem solving, followed by structured reflection.

Intergenerational Learning: an approach that encourages knowledge exchange between individuals from different generations or career stages, often combining the experience of senior professionals with the perspectives of emerging leaders.

Mock Exercise: a large-scale, scenario-based activity designed to simulate a high-stakes event (e.g. multilateral negotiation, public health emergency). It usually follows a formal process and often includes observation, feedback, and debriefing.

Peer-to-Peer Learning: an approach where participants learn from each other's experiences and insights, often through discussions, group tasks, or joint problem-solving activities.

Role Play: a method where participants assume specific roles (e.g., diplomat, health adviser) in a fictional scenario to practice communication, negotiation, or leadership skills. It focuses more on interaction and character-driven situations than simulations.

Simulation: a structured activity that imitates real-life scenarios to allow participants to practice skills or decision-making in a safe environment. Commonly used in diplomatic negotiations or emergency response training.

Storytelling: a learning method in which personal or professional experiences are shared to illustrate complex ideas, build empathy, or enhance understanding of historical, diplomatic, and political contexts.

Structured Practice: planned, repetitive exercises designed to build specific skills (e.g. speaking, writing, negotiation), often with feedback from facilitators or peers.