



## Overcoming Resistance

### Description:

This tool provides examples of resistance, strategies for managing resistance, and suggestions on how to respond.

### How it can be used:

All planning efforts will encounter resistance somewhere in the process. It's human nature to ask questions, especially if it relates to change. An understanding of your community allows you to tailor an approach that can deal directly with the types of resistance you are experiencing. This tool helps you examine the types of resistance you may face and provides examples of how to respond.

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#### 1. **Seek to understand the root cause of the resistance.**

Find out what people are most concerned about. Be careful not to label resistance as impediments or barriers. Resistance is really a form of communication as it is exposing people's concerns. Your role is to understand those concerns and take action to validate and inform. People may feel resistant because:

- a. They may not understand the issues.
- b. They may feel invested in certain programs or solutions already and are not prepared to look any further.
- c. They may not be ready to deal with this particular issue.
- d. They may have felt that previous approaches didn't work so this won't either.

#### 2. **Address personal concerns first.**

Most organizations justify the need for change by telling their employees all of the wonderful things the change will mean for the organization. But, when faced with a change, people react first with their own concerns: *"What's in it for me?" "Does this mean I'll have more work?"* So, first deal with the personal concerns and focus later on the organizational benefits.

#### 3. **Link the changes to other issues that matter to your organization.**

The need for a particular change can be enhanced by linking it to other issues that your organization already cares about – for example, improving the health outcomes of your community. Tie it back to your key strategic priorities or your health plan.

#### 4. **Tap into the human desire to avoid loss or pain.**

People are more sensitive to loss than to gain. Therefore, rather than just telling people what they stand to gain from the change, you may have a greater impact by telling them what they or the





organization stands to lose by *not* making the change.

**5. Consider how you present the information to different groups.**

Overcoming resistance to a new program or way of doing things will be more effective if you work with different groups separately, tailoring the message and the approach to their needs. How you present to leadership (identifying the positive outcomes for the community overall, the value for the cost, etc.) will be different than how you explain the need for change to your staff (the ability to make a difference, the improved outcomes, the enhanced relationships with stakeholders and partners, etc.).

**6. Show how the change will make a positive change within *your* organization and *your* community. Show how it is *local*.**

It is human nature to want to disregard issues that aren't close to them. However, if the situation affects them, then there is a more compelling reason to accept the change and buy-in. Provide concrete examples of exactly how the change will positively affect their organization and their community.

**7. Use a variety of approaches to reach different learning styles.**

Improvement is often demonstrated with numbers, results, and statistics. However, that approach is only effective for people that respond to facts and figures. Other people process information through an emotional lens; for example, seeing how improved care helps their family and friends. Include both types of information so you can appeal to different learners. Combine analytic information with vivid messages that include relevant personal experience.

**8. Be honest about the pros and cons of the change.**

Although this may sound like a contradiction, it is helpful to be able to validate the concerns that people have. Using accreditation as an example, a 'con' is the extra time it takes to fill out the standards and demonstrate how you comply. Discussing this openly can be helpful to allay the fears of your employees' workload. But it also gives you the opportunity to frame it a different way. For example, the extra time spent now will reap rewards later as we implement systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Give both sides a voice so concerns are addressed.

**9. Demonstrate your own commitment to the change.**

Show how you are doing things differently to demonstrate your commitment.

**10. Identify and constantly reinforce your organization's priorities.**

It is the role of the organization's leadership to help people allocate their time appropriately. For example, if a key priority is to improve access to mental health programming, then efforts related to other non-priority areas should be put on the shelf if it compromises the change efforts.





## Types of resistance

Identify the types of tactics that people may be using to oppose your efforts. These may include:

- Deflecting – opponents with power may divert the issue or pass off the responsibility to someone with no real power.
- Delaying – people could say they are addressing the problem and then do nothing.
- Denying – people suggest that your issues and proposed solutions are invalid.
- Discounting – people may minimize the importance of the problem and/or your role as a change agent.
- Deceiving – people may deliberately mislead others and say they are working on it when they have no intention to do so.
- Dividing – people may promote dissent within the organization or community.
- Discrediting – people may try to cast doubt on your motives and methods.
- Destroying – people may try to destabilize or eliminate the change through legal, economic, or scare tactics.
- Dealing – people may offer a deal or a mutually acceptable solution.

Techniques to deal with resistance:

- Anticipate potential opposition and meet to convince them either to join you or not actively oppose you.
- Meet with opponents to discuss your differences and clarify possible misunderstandings.
- Create a solution that meets both organizations' needs and shared interests.
- If attacked, turn negatives into positives by deflecting the attacks or highlighting the issues to gain support from the community.
- Openly label the resistor's tactics and use them to rally your members' and community's support.
- Clearly frame the debate around how your group views the issue, not your opponent's point of view.
- Use multiple response strategies to keep them off-balance.
- If your opponents honestly seek solutions to the problem also, you may decide it benefits you both to work together. Know when to negotiate and how to read your opponent's willingness to do so.





<b>Common forms of resistance and how to combat them</b>		
<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Root Cause</b>	<b>Solution</b>
“This is just another ‘flavor of the month.’”	Many past initiatives have been launched with lots of fanfare and little results or staying power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Select effective people to be involved and assign them to the key roles in managing the change</li> <li>- Minimize fanfare and drama</li> <li>- Integrate the change into daily operation of the organization</li> </ul>
“I don’t have time...cannot free up resources.”	Too many projects/activities in process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify and stop other initiatives that aren’t priorities</li> </ul>
“This does not apply in my part of the organization.”	Misconception about how the change works; lack of information about how it applies to the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlight that the new change has been successfully integrated into all types of health organizations</li> <li>- Have team members make presentations to co-workers throughout the organization</li> <li>- Share experience from other successful organizations</li> <li>- Invite outside speakers to make presentations to managers and employees</li> </ul>
“How is this different from past similar initiatives?”	Fatigue from multiple initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain and demonstrate key differences.</li> </ul>
“Does management really believe/support it?”	Lack of confidence that everyone is on board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Show that leadership is genuinely engaged in the process</li> </ul>

