

# Key Strategies for Effective Change Management in Health Centers

For health centers (HCs), change is constant, even under normal circumstances. HCs make it their mission to increase access to care for patients and ease the health inequities in their service areas. To do this, HCs evaluate the health and social needs of their communities every 3 years,<sup>1</sup> and these results shape the goals in their strategic plans. Also, HCs stand at the front lines of emerging health crises, such as COVID-19, and must often shift priorities to quickly implement new goals.<sup>2</sup>

*How do HCs meet these demands for change while protecting staff from burnout? What approaches and practices will help them manage multiple change initiatives and remain in alignment with the HC's strategic plan?*

HCs must continually build upon their ability to manage change. This is an organizational skill set that focuses as much on people and behavior, as it does on workflows and systems. According to the World Health Organization:

**“Change management is the practice and process of supporting people through change, with the goal of ensuring that the change is successful in the long-term. Change management helps people to change their behaviors, attitudes, and/or work processes to achieve a desired business objective or outcome.”<sup>3</sup>**

This resource, with input from HC staff,<sup>4</sup> offers successful strategies for leading organizational change whether it be on a large or smaller scale, based on the six categories listed below of effective change management:<sup>3</sup>



**Governance  
and Leadership**

**Stakeholder  
Engagement**

**Communication**

**Workflow  
Analysis and  
Redesign**

**Monitoring and  
Evaluation**

**Training and  
Education**

# Key Strategies for Effective Change Management in Health Centers

## 1. Governance and Leadership: Set the tone from the top to lead change and prepare staff.

The board of directors and HC leadership must continually ensure that resources and policies are in place to support the HC's mission and that staff are prepared to implement a change. This means that both the board and leadership must set the expectation that effective change management techniques will be used for large and small change initiatives.

Board and leadership can:

- Adopt evidence-based models for organizational change management, project management and performance improvement.<sup>4,5,6</sup> For example:
  - A model designed to help HCs manage multiple change projects is the [Value Transformation Framework](#).
  - HCs report using the [Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle](#) for testing a change, before committing to it.<sup>4</sup>
- Provide a defined process with roles and responsibilities for change initiatives that do not affect the whole HC.
- Give mid-level managers the education, platforms, and resources they need to manage change projects and train and support staff.
- Monitor staff satisfaction and assess the expected impact of large change initiatives on staff capacity, resilience and wellbeing.
- Keep the board informed with frequent reports on changes occurring in the HC and its communities.<sup>3,4</sup>



## 2. Stakeholder Engagement: Inform staff of the “why” and provide clear leadership for the change initiative.

When HC staff are aware of the reason for change and know who is leading the project, it helps them better understand and be on board with the initiative. Engagement strategies include:

- Make sure staff understand up front how the change will benefit their work and their patients.<sup>4,7</sup>
- Identify roles and responsibilities for each change initiative and create staff committees to guide projects.<sup>3,8</sup>
- Activate “**change champions**” from all levels within the organization who will celebrate successes, encourage behavior change, and help staff become comfortable with the changes happening.<sup>9,10</sup>

### **3. Communication: Focus on communication during change initiatives.**

Regular and frequent communication from leadership helps staff feel that their needs matter during a change initiative.<sup>4</sup> Develop a communication plan<sup>7</sup> and ensure all staff are updated and aware of steps in the change initiative process.<sup>7</sup> Communication plans can include the following strategies:

- Identify all the people involved/impacted by the change and ensure they have access to the HC's communication channels.
- Determine the content and timing of key messages to teams and stakeholders during the planning process.<sup>10</sup>
- Use all-staff meetings, emails, and HC newsletters to keep staff informed about how the HC is staying on track with its change initiatives and strategic goals.<sup>4,7</sup>

### **4. Training and Education: Provide timely training or educational sessions.**

Well timed trainings make it less of a burden for employees to adopt new behaviors and skills. Build a comprehensive, inclusive plan for providing the skills and understandings the staff will need to create the change.

- Conduct educational sessions early in the onset of change projects, then conduct skills training closer to the onset of new procedures and protocols.<sup>3</sup>
- Ensure staff have time to practice and apply the skills/training they have received to confirm their understanding of the change.

### **5. Monitoring and Evaluating: Monitor change projects by evaluating both individual and systems level results.**

Effective monitoring means looking for successes and challenges in both staff behavior and attitudes, and organizational performance metrics, before, during and after the change. Identify how you will evaluate the management of the change initiative itself and at what points in the process.<sup>3</sup>

For example:<sup>3</sup>

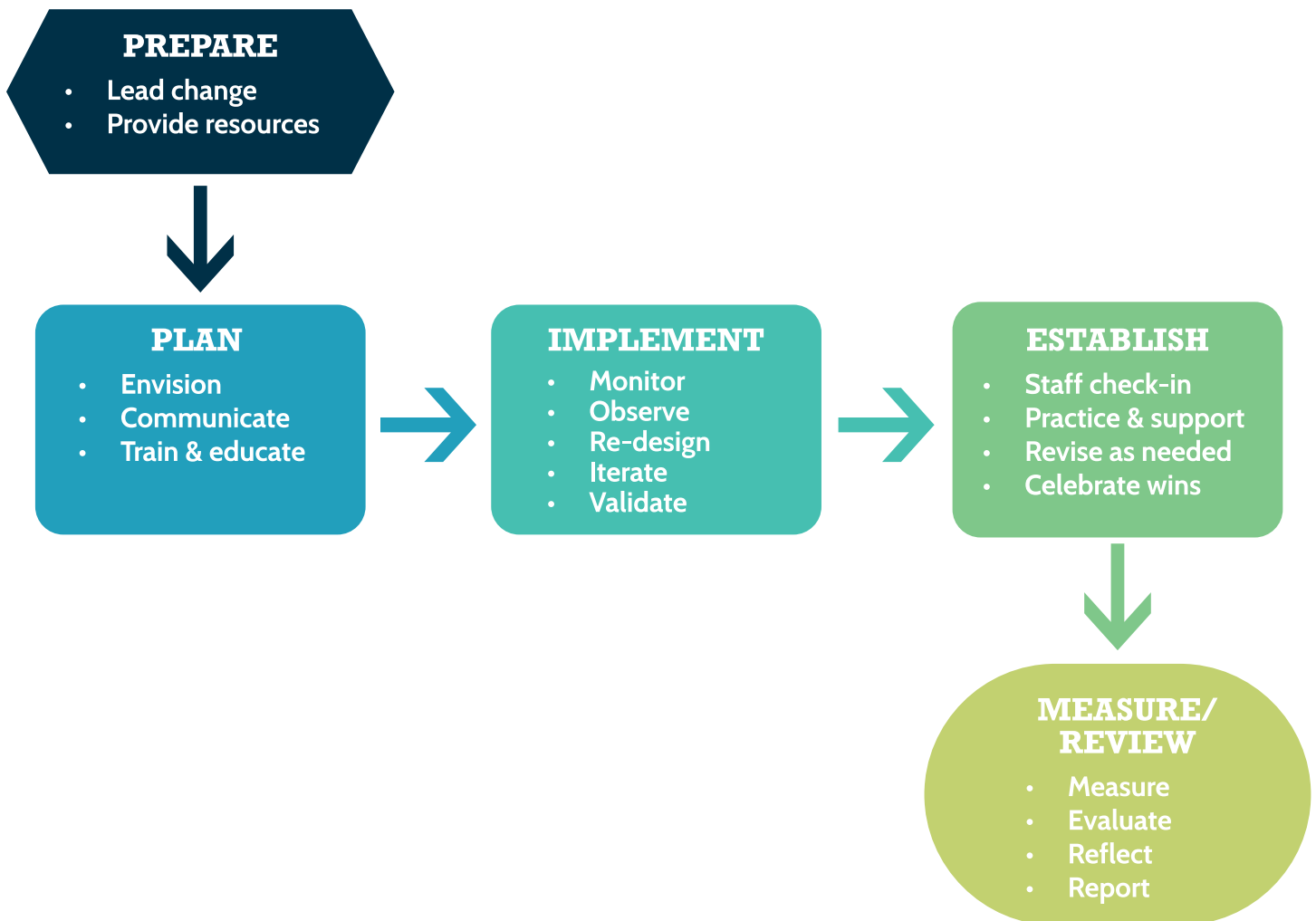
- Will you evaluate staff readiness? How do you know staff are prepared for the change?
  - When will you ask staff for feedback (1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year)?
  - How will you know staff training is effective?
  - How will you know how staff feel about the change?
  - What key performance indicators are directly changed by the project?
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## 6. Workflow Analysis and Redesign: Be flexible and make adjustments as you evaluate results.

To understand the impact of the change, analyze data often throughout the initiative.<sup>3,4</sup> Then, be willing to readjust the plan and redesign or remove workflows that hinder success.<sup>3</sup> HC boards must also take this attitude, as they receive updates on the progress of the HC's overall 3-year strategic plan. In fact, redesigning workflows early in a change initiative can give project leaders early successes to report that encourage buy-in and momentum for the project.<sup>3,5</sup>

- Conduct small projects or pilots and communicate the results before committing to larger changes.<sup>4</sup>
- Implement new workflows or procedures early in the project and share successes with staff.<sup>3</sup>
- Continually improve the HC's access to reliable data to understand needs and see the impact of change across all service sites.<sup>4</sup>

### Sample Change Process<sup>11</sup>



# How could these strategies affect a small change initiative?

Here is a quick example of a small HC change, that demonstrates the strategies above - implementing a new recruitment policy for attracting, vetting and hiring new, diverse staff.

- 1. Governance and Leadership:** HC board has reviewed and approved a proposed policy change from management outlining a new policy and procedures for recruiting, vetting and hiring new staff. The goal is to ensure compliance with federal and state laws and to successfully recruit more culturally diverse employees. Managers sought the input from Human Resources (HR) staff and a group of department managers before finalizing their recommendations to the board.
- 2. Stakeholder Engagement:** HR personnel and hiring staff have been identified as key targets for communication, training, and support. A staff person is assigned as a point of contact to answer questions via email throughout the implementation process. Another role required in implementation will be HR staff members who review the documentation for each new hire for 6 months to monitor compliance with the policy and identify any need for adjustments.
- 3. Communication:** Project leads have created a simple communication plan for this change, which includes a kickoff meeting with HR staff and employees who will participate in the hiring process to explain the purpose of the changes and the additional training that will be required. At an all-staff meeting, the new policy is described more generally to all HC employees with an emphasis on the purpose of the changes and how success will be measured. Key persons in charge of implementing the change are identified. Project leads print out copies of the new policy to hand out, and also send it via email to all staff.
- 4. Training/Education:** A training schedule is created and the project leads send invitations and reminders to staff who will be trained to enact the new policy. Training is conducted and the new policy begins.
- 5. Monitoring and Evaluating:** The HR department is responsible for monitoring new hire documentation to make sure that the new policy is followed. A report to the board is scheduled for 6 months in the future to report on the impact of the new policy and hiring results.
- 6. Workflow Analysis and Redesign:** Managers have agreed to review staff feedback and adjust the procedure as needed throughout the first 6 months of the new hiring policy. At the end of 6 months, the project team will re-evaluate the implementation of this policy and determine results and next steps. If the policy and procedures are revised, they will be published and communicated to all staff via email, with acknowledgement and thanks to everyone who participated in the implementation.

*“To implement change in an orderly manner (it) is important to adopt a model of change and educate all stakeholders on the model. Including all people who will be impacted by the change initiative should be a priority, as well as keeping everyone informed along the process.”<sup>4</sup>*

*—Dr. Francisco Limon, PhD. Greene County Health Care, Inc.*

## Resources

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