responding to pushback

a tool by **QUAKE LAB** & **OLIP** OTTAWA LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP
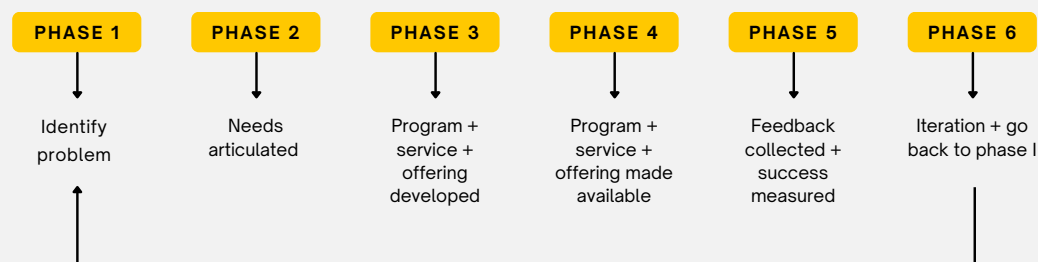
table of contents

how to use this resource

This tool is designed to help you respond to pushback as you attempt to make meaningful changes within your organizations in service of greater community health outcomes, worker empowerment, and an equity focused work environment.

While pushback may be frustrating to respond to as we make necessary changes within our organizations, especially when that pushback comes from decision makers, preparing and working through our response allows us to more clearly articulate the need for change and our plan for implementation.

Unlike some of the other processes our resources cover, pushback does not neatly fit into any one stage of the service planning and delivery cycle - and will likely feel inconvenient and stressful to address at any point.

However, you ensure that pushback does not negatively impact the health outcomes of those dependent on your services by anticipating where you are likely to receive pushback from and how you will respond to it. Use Phase 5, 6 and 1 as spaces to internally work through this resource and pushback so that it does not lead to service delivery being interupted.

service planning and delivery lifecycle

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4	PHASE 5	PHASE 6
Identify problem	Needs articulated	Program + service + offering developed	Program + service + offering made available	Feedback collected + success measured	Iteration + go back to phase I

external pushback

FROM COMMUNITY

If you are receiving pushback from the community you serve about substantial changes you are making to the way your organization functions internally or your service delivery, *PAUSE* - refer to the "Who Is This Service For" tool and the "Community Engagement Framework" before proceeding to implement changes that counteract the needs or wants or your core client base.

If after going through both tools you still feel that the changes you are implementing make sense, follow the steps in the checklist on page

FROM FUNDERS

We recognize that receiving opposition from those that have the power to halt or drastically reduce your organization's operations is not easy, nor is it simple to overcome. It will be necessary to properly assess the power dynamic, risk level, and separate interests of this external body and create a plan accordingly.

Take a look at page to work through our prompt questions to help craft a response.

internal pushback

FROM BOARD

Similar to funders, there is a clear power imbalance between the board of an organization and the employees. This existential dynamic is more prevalent when the board of directors holds active hiring and firing responsibilities. When dealing with pushback from a board you will likely employ the tools you use with funders and managers. See the prompt questions on page and checklist on page

FROM MANEGMENT

If you are in a service delivery or client focused role, you likely have deep insight into the work that needs to be done to shift the community health outcomes and better serve your clients. It's important to remember that managers within your organization also have this goal - but are likely coming to alternative conclusions about the way forward based on having different information available to them. Take a look at page to work through our prompt questions to help craft a response.

FROM CO-WORKERS AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Pushback from people within your organization can be a useful litmus test of how the community and partner organizations may react to these changes. When responding to pushback from coworkers consider whether you have:

- Communicated the changes and implementation clearly
- Taken into consideration how the change will impact employees across your organization
- Looked to your coworkers for feedback and collaborative problem solving
- Approached their pushback or hesitancy with curiosity instead of defensiveness.

external decision maker
prompt questions

Focus on communications

You may not realize it, but as an employee within your organization you are likely the best placed to know the language and slant of information that is most compelling to decision makers - particularly ones that you and your organization have a long history with.

Ask yourself the following questions when thinking about communications:

- Do they respond well to informal conversations leading up to a formal presentation or do they prefer to have a full presentation/proposal as their introduction to new information
- How familiar are they with the particulars of the change? Will you need to simplify any language, set any definitions or create shared understanding?

Assess Motivations & Interests

- What is their flexibility and openness to change?
- What is their personal or professional relationship with the goals of your organization and its service provision?
- Do they have recent experience in service delivery that will give them shared context?
- How did they come into their role as a decisionmaker for your organization?
- Do they have political, social, or economic interests that will support or oppose this change?

Assess Risk and Power Dynamic
- Is a continued relationship with your organization important to them?
- Does your organization depend entirely on their support or funding to operate?
- Do they have the power to halt operations of your organization, your program, or your service delivery?
- Are there checks and balances in place for their decision making? What are they, and are they effective?

Do your research and keep clear documentation of your implementation
- Ensure that you are able to provide evidence, data, and secondary research that support the changes you are trying to implement
- Research past major shifts within your organization. What were the strengths in those implementation processes? What were the gaps? What will you replicate and what will you improve upon?
- Research past responses and decisions from the decision makers. Do they have a pattern of supporting changes or new initiatives at certain points within the year? What are the circumstances that lead to support versus opposition? When have they changed their minds - and what reasoning did they respond to?

For funders consider the differences in responding to pushback to government versus private foundations.
- For government, responding to pushback may take place in the form of advocacy and collective action from similar organizations
- For private foundations, open conversation about the needs of the foundation and the ways that your organization's changes can fill those needs in new ways.
- In both instances you should consider the bureaucratic barriers, overall requirements of the funding and how much flexibility lies within those requirements

internal pushback checklist

Clearly understand what your goals are in making this change.

☐ Write out your expected outcomes in the short term, medium term, and long term.

☐ Create a direct link between your implemented changes and these goals

☐ Consider: is your proposed change the best way to meet your goals, is your proposed change the only way to meet your goals?

☐ Consider: cost, competing priorities, resources, organizational goals, existing data, data you may need to collect to strengthen your position.

Acknowledge the source of their position.

☐ If you do not know why they are opposed to the changes - the first thing to do is ask. Don't assume. Be open to hearing their perspective and assuming that they are operating with the organization's best intentions in mind.

☐ Look for gaps within your existing plan that directly connect to their anxieties and the source of their pushback.

Look for shared goals and common ground.

☐ As you hear their opposition and concerns, look for overlapping priorities, values, and desired outcomes.

☐ Ensure that the messaging around these changes centers spaces of commonality.

Appeal to the goals and needs of your client base or community.

☐ If you have found that their priorities are in opposition to yours, consider whether their goals, priorities, values, and desired outcomes are in line with that of your clients or the communities you serve

☐ Emphasize that the needs of service users should be given a greater voice at the decision making table where they aren't present

Consider whether past changes have created mistrust within the organization

Create a plan for implementation

☐ Taking into account steps 1- 4, revise your plan for implementation and messaging to better the needs of your environment

☐ Within your plan, include time for sensitization of your board/managers/funders Within your plan include community consultations and engagement that directly give your client base agency in these changes

☐ Remember that changes created in an environment hostile to its implementation will likely be ineffective - so ensure that the road to its implementation is one that prioritizing education and positive communications