



Manage Change: These Are the Keys

Follow these steps to make a successful change.

By Allison Quigney

Your nonprofit has a steady drive to improve the world. But have you considered that *internal* change can be just as important? Adapting your organization to meet the challenges of the day is essential to maximize your impact. If you remain static in your processes, goals, and technologies, you become stagnant — and less likely to achieve your goals.

So, how can you implement effective change strategies? While there's no single, one-size-fits-all roadmap for transformation, there are several keys that work across organizations of all sizes and missions. Below, find five strategies to help your nonprofit become the most effective organization it can be.

Decide if there's a need for change. To start, conduct an

audit. Take a close look at how and why your nonprofit operates, what your goals are, and whether you're meeting them. During this process, you may find that your programming is out of date. You may find your staff are hindered by inefficient or poor processes. You may find your stakeholders — the communities you serve — have changed. It may also be discovered that your donor base's interests or preferences have shifted. These reasons — and many others — are all evidence that your nonprofit is in need of change management.

Instill a sense of urgency. Once you've identified the need for change, it's essential not to waste time. According to the “bible” of organizational change, *Leading Change* by John Kotter (kotterinc.com), the first step in ensuring successful organizational

“Change is impossible without buy-in.”

“Change should come *from* employees, not happen *to* them.”

change is developing a sense of urgency. Nonprofit leaders must build within their community a collective sense that change is a top priority – and perhaps even an existential one. Otherwise, the complicated process of change management may be pushed to the back burner, where it can't be realized.

Change is impossible without buy-in, and buy-in requires a cultural shift within the organization. Make sure the people that surround you, from senior leadership to the newest intern, not only understand why change is necessary, but are eager and enthusiastic to make it a reality.

Gather feedback – lots of it. Once your organization is abuzz with a communal sense of urgency, it's time to begin the work of change management in earnest. It's time to determine what needs to change, why, and how – and you can determine much of this through feedback. Feedback about change should come from all levels of your organization, not just a small group of senior leaders at the top rung of the ladder. Further, feedback should also come from *outside* the organization: Solicit critical and candid feedback from your program participants, partner organizations, clients, and others in your larger orbit. Together, these varied inputs will paint a holistic picture of how your organization should evolve.

Tackle poor processes head on. With feedback in hand, you'll have a clearer picture of which processes, goals, and technologies are working – and which aren't. Roll up your sleeves and get to work removing or reforming your biggest barriers: inefficient workstreams, siloed work, poor organizational hierarchies, and so forth. But no need to go about this blindly, or in a scattershot way. Change management implementation requires a strategic workflow as well as clear and actionable metrics to ensure that the change is actually having the desired effect.

Check regularly to ensure your new goals, processes, and technologies are working as hoped. And if they're not, don't hesitate to course correct. Simply consider it a learning experience, and then move on to a new approach. Use the process of change to develop new and improved processes for your organization. Focus on efficiency, collective strategies, and inclusivity as you create and implement changes.

Create time for reflection and consensus building. Throughout the change management process, it's normal for some team members to feel reluctant. The solution isn't to charge ahead and ignore their apprehension. That will do more damage than good, since successful change requires buy-in and should come *from* employees, not happen *to* them. Instead, when you encounter resistance, take the time to

Coming Up

Watch for the next article in this series, “Take a Stakeholder-Centric Approach to Research” in our next issue.

slow down the implementation process, reflect, and rebuild consensus. These delays will be well worth it in the long run, as internal opposition to change will almost certainly doom the initiative.

Change management is a challenging process, but it's an essential one. With these strategies in hand, you and your team can begin the important work of updating and evolving your organization – and, as a result, doing even more good in the world. 

Allison Quigney is a principal at Public Works Partners, LLC (publicworkspartners.com), a WBE/DBE/SBE certified planning and consulting firm specializing in multi-stakeholder initiatives and building strong connections across the nonprofit, government, and private sectors.

“Feedback should also come from outside.”

Looking for Change

Find more articles about managing change, conquering resistance, and boosting results at NonprofitWorld.org:

The Best Leaders Are Change Agents (Vol. 34, No. 1)

End Excuses, Add Action (Vol. 38, No. 2)

Overcome People's Resistance with These Steps (Vol. 38, No. 3)

The Promise and Pitfalls of Organizational Change (Vol. 28, No. 4)

Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

Do You Know Where Your Goals Are? (Vol. 26, No. 5)

Change Is All Around You: How Can You Tame It? (Vol. 38, No. 1)

Build a Winning Workplace Culture (Vol. 39, No. 3)

Surveys Provide Crucial Feedback (Vol. 22, No. 5)

Match Your Change Strategy to Your Organization's Maturity (Vol. 21, No. 5)