

Stakeholder Buy-in

Every initiative is surrounded by people who have power to help the effort succeed or fail. Your ability to lead change depends on explaining clearly the need for change and what benefits it will deliver. Your stakeholders need the same thing you needed to support a new initiative: what is the problem you intend to solve, how you know the problem is real, and how will this approach improve the system. To gain buy-in, you must share your vision for what the work could achieve.

Why is buy-in so important?

- **Necessary consent** Some stakeholders control resources or hold authority needed to determine what moves forward.
- **Stronger decision making** Multiple perspectives help identify more potential barriers and a fuller range of opportunities beyond the view of agency leaders.
- **Effective collaboration** Shared ownership builds commitment to the success of the initiative, providing support to move the work forward, remove barriers, and share in problem-solving as the work unfolds and refines.
- **Legitimacy** Influential stakeholders improve perceptions of the initiative when they support it. The credibility they grant can sway the views of those who are uncertain.
- **Promotion** New initiatives gain traction the more often and more broadly they are discussed positively. Spreading the word in turn can secure support and resources from agencies, other stakeholders, and the public.

These elements point to who you need on board. Looking at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats also can reveal where buy-in is needed. Knowing who has high interest in your initiative and a lot of influence tells you where buy-in is needed most.

What should you know about your stakeholders?

- Are they supporters, indifferent, skeptics, or active opponents?
- What resources do they control that impact success?
- How important would this be to them?
- What type of influence do they have and on whom?
- Are there other important considerations?

CHALLENGERS TO BUY-IN

- **Complacent** with the status quo
- **Naysayer** seeing only risks
- **Opponent** thinks it's the wrong idea
- **Novice** unsure on what and why
- **Skeptic** distrusts agency leaders

Elements to Gain Buy-in

- 1. Groundwork** You need a good foundation for buy-in: clear messages on what will be achieved and how, and why it is needed. These, along with a thorough list of those with influence, where they stand, and what they value gets you started.
- 2. Planned communication** Who needs to hear what scope of messages? For each, know who delivers it and by what means, then how updates will occur.
- 3. Current versus future state** Detail your current condition to show the need for doing better and the cost of doing nothing. Comparing now to what could be shows the what and why: it informs, but also responds to naysayers and skeptics.
- 4. Explore limitations** Predict stakeholders' concerns and have your honest responses ready. Discussing issues is good for the planning process, so listen and engage.
- 5. What's in it for me?** Assess how this fits stakeholders' priorities: data, research, ego/status, experiences elsewhere, who else is on board. Loosen status quo's grip!
- 6. Persistence** Buy-in is dynamic. Track progress, deliver regular updates, celebrate successes, and share potential concerns so others can promote the initiative too.
- 7. Leadership** Show your commitment to change, disproving skeptics and reducing resistance. Lead confident of success with the support of your stakeholders!

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