



Tool 04:

Change management in remote Australia

04

Change management summary sheet

Change management in remote Australian communities requires a tailored approach that respects cultural contexts, local dynamics, and the unique challenges these communities face. Successful change management in remote areas centres on trust and long-term relationship building.

Community sensitive approaches are needed that consider geographic isolation – often resulting in limited material and human resources; workforce challenges – such as difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel; and the importance of Indigenous culture – ensuring any changes are culturally appropriate, community driven and co-designed.

Creating a change management plan in a collaborative environment:

- Enhances community involvement in decision-making.
- Builds trust and transparency.
- Mitigates resistance to change.
- Manages expectations regarding timeframes.
- Promotes positive outcomes that align with community values and needs.

Change management process

A. Preparation

- Assess the need for change
- Define clear objectives
- Identify stakeholders.

B. Planning

- Engage the community

- Think about cultural considerations
- Develop a change management plan.

C. Implementation

- Communicate effectively
- Provide training and support
- Foster participation.

D. Evaluation

- Monitor progress
- Gather feedback
- Adjust, as necessary.

E. Sustainability

- Embed changes into culture
- Strengthen local capacity
- Maintain engagement.

Change management plan

An effective plan template divides activities into three key phases, with practices and actions identified as either strategic or operational (Table 1).

Table 1. Change management plan phases and steps

Phase	Change steps
Preparing for change	→ Assess the opportunity or problem motivating the change → Select and support a guiding change coalition → Formulate a clear compelling vision
Managing the change	→ Communicate the vision → Mobilise energy for change → Empower others to act → Develop and promote change-related knowledge and ability → Monitor and strengthen the change process
Reinforcing change	→ Identify short term wins and use as a reinforcement of the change process → Institutionalise change in organisational culture, practices and management succession

Change management in remote Australia

This section of the Toolkit provides a remote-specific guide to change management, with exploration of timeframes for change in remote Australia, and the logistical and contextual factors that lead to delays and extended timelines in remote project management. This is based on the Project Team's direct experience in remote project implementation.

Introduction

Change management in remote Australian communities requires a tailored approach that respects cultural contexts, local dynamics, and the unique challenges these communities face. Successful change management in remote areas centres on trust and long-term relationship building.

Community sensitive approaches are needed that consider geographic isolation – often resulting in limited material and human resources; workforce challenges – such as difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel; and the importance of Indigenous culture – ensuring any changes are culturally appropriate, community driven and co-designed.

This guide provides a framework for effectively managing change initiatives, ensuring community engagement, managing expectations regarding timeframes, and promoting sustainable outcomes.

The primary intent of this guide is to equip community leaders, organisations, and stakeholders with strategies to implement change effectively and sustainably. By fostering a collaborative environment, the guide aims to:

- Enhance community involvement in decision-making
- Build trust and transparency
- Mitigate resistance to change
- Manage expectations regarding timeframes and
- Promote positive outcomes that align with community values and needs.

The change management process requires significant preparation and an understanding of the community into which the change is to be implemented. Before any change is broached, it is recommended that the following are completed first:

- The Matrix (see Tool 5 of this Toolkit) to determine the level of organisational maturity and readiness for community collaborative opportunities.
- The Aged Care Needs Assessment template (see Tool 6 of this Toolkit) to identify the community's and organisation's unique needs in relation to workforce.

Change management process

The following process is a guide to assist in the steps to the development of a change management plan.

A. Preparation

1. Assess the need for change

- Conduct a needs assessment to identify the specific issues or opportunities prompting the change (see Tool 6 of this Toolkit).
- Engage with community members to gather insights on their perspectives and experiences (also see Tool 2 of this Toolkit).

2. Define clear objectives

- Establish clear, measurable objectives for the change initiative. Ensure that these objectives reflect the community's values and aspirations (also see Tools 2 and 3 of this Toolkit).

3. Identify stakeholders

- Map out key stakeholders, including community leaders, local organisations, and affected individuals. Understand their interests and potential impact on the change process (also see Tool 2 of this Toolkit).

B. Planning

1. Engage the community

- Foster community engagement through workshops, focus groups, and public meetings. Encourage open dialogue and collaboration in developing the change plan (also see Tools 2 and 3 of this Toolkit).

2. Cultural considerations

- Integrate cultural values and practices into the change process. Collaborate with local elders and cultural advisors to ensure respect and relevance (also see Tools 1, 2, 3 and 5 of this Toolkit).

3. Develop a change management plan

- From the above planning activities, create a change management plan outlining both the strategic and operational changes that need to be made. Once this is developed, a more detailed activity plan can then be developed to outline the steps, responsibilities, resources, and timelines required for the change initiative. Include strategies for communication, training, and support.

C. Implementation

1. Communicate effectively

- Develop a communication strategy that provides regular updates on the change process. Use multiple channels (meetings, newsletters, and social media) to reach diverse community members.

2. Provide training and support

- Offer training sessions and resources to equip community members with the skills needed to adapt to the change. Ensure support systems are in place to address concerns and challenges.

3. Foster participation

- Encourage active participation throughout the implementation phase. Recognise and celebrate community contributions to reinforce ownership and commitment.

D. Evaluation

1. Monitor progress

- Establish key performance indicators to track progress against objectives. Regularly assess the effectiveness of the change initiatives.

2. Gather feedback

- Solicit feedback from community members on their experiences and perceptions of the change process. Use surveys, interviews, and informal discussions to collect insights.

3. Adjust as needed

- Be flexible and willing to make adjustments based on feedback and evolving community needs. Continuous improvement should be an integral part of the change management process.

E. Sustainability

1. Embed changes into culture

- Work towards integrating changes into the community's cultural practices and daily routines. Promote ownership and pride in the changes made.

2. Strengthen local capacity

- Invest in capacity-building initiatives to empower community members with skills and knowledge for ongoing development.

3. Maintain engagement

- Continue engaging with the community post-implementation. Regularly check in to ensure that the changes remain relevant and beneficial.

Challenges and considerations

Effective change management in remote Australian communities is a collaborative, respectful process that prioritises community engagement and cultural considerations. Engaging the community as active participants ensures that changes reflect their values, needs, and aspirations. Any change comes with its challenges, but this is more pronounced in remote and very remote communities.

There are a wide range of complex reasons for this.

Resistance to change

It is important to remember that, in many cases, these communities come with a complex history of external parties and organisations compelling or even forcing, change upon them. There is potentially an innate distrust of anyone advocating change.

It is important to acknowledge that resistance may arise due to fear of the unknown or past negative experiences. We are all the products of our experiences and people in these communities are no different. Be willing to address concerns with empathy and open communication. Take change slowly and always be guided by your stakeholders' pace and feedback.

High turnover of personnel

One aspect of health organisations in remote and very remote Australia is the high turnover of personnel. This is a particular problem when it comes to senior decision makers. People move in and out of roles and they are often temporarily filled by staff who lack the experience, corporate knowledge, and confidence to either juggle the competing priorities or make sound strategic changes. They are often 'just filling in' and reluctant to get involved in projects that will require them to make strategic long-term decisions. Project workers can continually find themselves establishing new relationships and reorientating personnel to the project.

While projects will struggle to change the nature of that high turnover in the short-term, it is imperative that there is sound and thorough documentation to support the project and explain the project trajectory. A Change Management Plan is an important part of that documentation to ensure knowledge transfer.

Cultural sensitivity

Any project in any community must always ensure cultural safety and respect throughout the change process. Be aware of the cultural needs and nuances in a community through involvement of the cultural leaders in any decision-making and planning associated with the project. Listen to stakeholders when they explain what will and will not work.

Complete the Collaboration Checklist (Tool 3 of this Toolkit) and ensure thorough research of the cultural considerations for the community involved.

Resource limitations

Remote and very remote communities often have limited resources, both material and human. Usually, it is a handful of key people that participate in multiple projects, and this can be a burden on them and on the community. This can lead to difficulties in relation to assigning responsibilities for aspects of the project. Refer to Tool 2 of this Toolkit which discusses consultation fatigue. Always be guided by the stakeholders in terms of pace, actions, communication methods etc.

Wherever possible, seek partnerships and external support to enhance capacity both for human and material resources. Project teams should, however, be cautious of just providing material resources into a community. This often does not promote lasting change and, in many cases, can just exacerbate the issues.

Remote Implementation Project experience

The Project Team found the high turnover of staff to be a particularly difficult problem to navigate. In one community the Project failed due to a key staff member leaving their role, resulting in no stakeholders available and willing to be involved. In the other two communities, there were, at times, different people involved each time they met. This highlighted the importance for the Project Team of having a change management plan and a brief project plan available to upskill stakeholders.

Change management planning template

An excellent change management plan template, based on the 2020 research of Kho, Gillespie and Martin-Khan,¹ divides the change management process into three phases, with each of these phases including both strategic and operational elements:

- Preparation for change
- Managing change
- Reinforcing change.

We have included a change management plan framework (Figure 1) and a change management action plan and reporting template (Table 1) to assist your organisation with change management.

Figure 1. Change management plan framework^{1,2}

Phase	Change steps	Strategic practices identified	Operational practices identified
Preparing for change	Assess the opportunity or problem motivating the change	Assess need for changes	Scope the requirements for organisation
	Select and support a guiding change coalition	Establish a working group or focus group	Include cross-section of representative types and ensure inclusion of 'champions' and executive sponsorship
	Formulate a clear compelling vision	Develop and articulate a clear, simple vision	Create visual communication tools for various stakeholders
Managing change	Communicate the vision	Communicate changes and understanding of the aims of the project	Regular communiques to all stakeholders Develop strategies to enhance communications
	Mobilise energy for change	Engage clinicians/staff/stakeholders	Establish 'champions'
	Empower others to act	Facilitate effective co-design principles and empower others to participate and act	Training for staff in new workflows Utilise 'train the trainer' model
	Develop and promote change-related knowledge and ability	Advocate for, and implement updated workflows/processes	Develop new agreed workflows/processes, protocols and procedures
	Monitor and strengthen the change process	Monitor change and maintain flexibility	Regular reporting against actions and performance indicators Continue regular communication
Reinforcing change	Identify short term wins and use as a reinforcement of change process	Implement actions or performance indicators for quick wins	Communicate success of 'quick wins'
	Institutionalise change in organisational culture, practices and management succession	Permanent changes to workflows/processes Support and training	Continued communication of collaborative change

Table 1



Change management action plan and reporting

Phase	Date added	Strategic or operational	Action	Responsible	Due date	Progress and completion
Preparing for change						
Managing change						
Reinforcing change						

References

1. Kho J, Gillespie N, Martin-Khan M. A systematic scoping review of change management practices used for telemedicine service implementations. *BMC Health Serv Res.* 2020;20(1):815.
2. Stouten J, Rousseau DM, de Cremer D. Successful organizational change: Integrating the management practice and scholarly literatures. *The Academy of Management Annals.* 2018;12(2):752-788.