



Leading change

Strategies for success

September 2025

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This guide is published by Te Pou in September 2025.

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ISBN 978-1-991076-56-4

Recommended citation:

Te Pou. (2025). *Leading change: Strategies for success*.

Introduction

He waka eke noa | We are all journeying together

This resource is for people leading and managing organisational change in the mental health and addiction sector. It presents various strategies that can support change initiatives to succeed.

A change initiative might build workers' (kaimahi) knowledge and skills with a framework like [Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika](#), introduce a new model of care, integrate new technology into practice, or be required to meet policy and contracting changes.

The strategies in this resource are based on implementation science and distributed leadership literature.¹ These promote an interchange of knowledge and expertise. So, everyone understands and values the change initiative because its goals, design, and delivery reflect and respond to their concerns. The overarching theme in each strategy is everyone working together on the change journey, as expressed in the earlier whakataukī.

Key strategies for leading change include the following.

- **Put people at the centre** by understanding its impact on different groups, enabling their active participation in initiative activities, and preparing leaders and influencers to be best able to support others throughout the initiative and into the future.
- **Clear, transparent, and responsive processes** that work for people, including collecting data, planning communications, identifying and responding to barriers, creating an intentional implementation plan, providing support for the change, and planning how to sustain it into the future.

The respective principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti) and the [Pae Ora \(Healthy Futures\) Act](#) should underpin all change initiatives. These principles describe the rights of Māori, tāngata whai ora, people with lived experience (tāngata mātau ā-wheako), whānau, and communities to partnership and participation in services, as well as choice, equity, and active protection.

Applying [Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika](#) values within change initiatives promotes an environment of openness and trust that is transparent, reflective, and responsive to people. These values are respect, manaaki (hospitality and care), hope, kotahitanga (collaboration and unity), wellbeing, and whanaungatanga (building relationships).

¹ See the Resources section at the end of this document for more information.

How to use this resource

These change strategies can be selected individually or used together and incorporated within your change initiative process. Each strategy summarises practical questions and actions you can tailor so your change initiative is reflective of and responsive to the people it affects. The strategies do not form a continuous process in themselves. So, focus on those most relevant, practical, and achievable for your situation.

Strategies can be selected and applied at different stages within your change process, including during its planning, design, delivery, and beyond. Some strategies may be used more than once across your change initiative for different purposes. For example, engaging tāngata whai ora and kaimahi in planning can help to identify their priorities for change, and barriers and challenges to be addressed in plans. Subsequent engagement with kaimahi can reinforce new practices and support them to sustain new practices over time.

A short case study is provided on page 14, to illustrate how these using some of these strategies might inform your change initiative.

As inferred by the whakataukī at the start, these strategies are collective activities. So, it helps to work closely with key people who have relevant knowledge, skills, position, and influence to support success. This might mean bringing in skilled facilitators to support meetings and discussions, or working with influential kaimahi to ensure others can access the right information at the right time.

Te Pou has incorporated these strategies in our workforce planning and development guides, available on our [website](#) with supportive templates and other guidance. Links to useful reading and resources are provided at the end of this document.

Put people at the centre

People are at the heart of any successful change initiative. This means working with kaimahi and others, according to their preferences. The following strategies help ensure people's expertise, aspirations, and concerns drive organisational change and are visible at every stage of the initiative. The effect is reciprocal, because when people see themselves within the change, they are more likely to understand, value, and commit to it.

Know your people

Start by building a good understanding of the different people affected by your change initiative. They will have varying interests, depending on their circumstances and needs. So, it helps to understand people who will:

- ☐ be **impacted** by or receive new practices, including tāngata whai ora and whānau, local communities, and kaimahi who work alongside those directly involved
- ☐ be **involved** by learning and adopting new practices, such as kaimahi who will be enacting a new procedure in their day-to-day work
- ☐ **influence** others' perceptions of new practices, these are often trusted and influential kaimahi (or champions) and early adopters who are already committed to the change
- ☐ **lead** and role model the new practices, including senior and line managers, team leads, and supervisors. Leadership buy-in is an enabling factor for any change
- ☐ **have other** knowledge, skills, position, and influence and can support your initiative, like facilitators, coordinators, financial controllers, and thought leaders.

People prefer to engage in ways that suit them, so tailor your activities for diverse needs. For example, whānau, hapū and iwi, and hāpori Māori will likely expect kanohi-ki-te-kanohi or in-person approaches including te reo Māori. Disabled people may also require specific modes of communication.

People likely have differing levels of readiness to change. Below are some useful questions that can help understand people's views.

- ☐ What do you feel about the situation?
- ☐ What should be our priorities for moving forward?
- ☐ What are the most exciting prospects about this change for you?
- ☐ Which aspects will be the hardest to accept or apply, and why?
- ☐ What will we need to do to make it work for your role or circumstances?
- ☐ What has not been considered or should be included?
- ☐ What would success look like for you?
- ☐ What would result from doing nothing?

After seeking people's input, being openly accountable and responding to their views in your initiative demonstrates that you have heard them.

Create a shared vision and goals

People will respond more positively to an initiative when they are partners in developing its vision and goals. This creates clarity and a collective sense of purpose and ownership. The partnership should include kaimahi expertise as well as Māori, tāngata whai ora, and tāngata mātau ā-wheako values, practices, aspirations, and concerns.

What are positive reasons why people would commit to and accept the intended change? For example, providing a more satisfying experience of services for tāngata whai ora and whānau; addressing current service gaps or dissatisfaction with the current state; enabling appropriate use of te reo and tikanga in services; aligning better with local cultures and values; or improving kaimahi wellbeing at work.

The following are some useful questions to ask of people.

- ☐ Why do things need to change?
- ☐ What is the vision for the future that we want to achieve together?
- ☐ How desirable is this future vision for you in your role or circumstances?
- ☐ What are our goals?
- ☐ What needs to change to achieve this success?

Some useful resources for co-creating a vision and goals for change include:

- ☐ [Oranga Hinengaro System and Service Framework](#)
- ☐ [Co-designing with the Mātau ā-Wheako Workforce](#)
- ☐ [Understanding co-design e-learning](#) by Te Tāhū Hauora Health Quality and Safety Commission.

Once a shared vision and goals are established, these can be incorporated and repeated across the different stages of the change initiative. This helps you to tell a compelling story about why the initiative is important for everyone.

Make decisions collaboratively

Collaborative decision-making helps understand what people want and need from the change. This strategy supports designing your change initiative to reflect peoples' views and benefit from their expertise. You may need to seek support from a skilled facilitator to get the most out of this strategy.

Below are some questions you might consider asking of people to hear their views.

- ☐ What actions do you think could achieve the desired change?
- ☐ What do you think are the benefits, and for whom?
- ☐ Can you see any barriers to achieving success, how might these be overcome?
- ☐ What can you do to support the change initiative?
- ☐ What do you think would work better, and why?
- ☐ What do you think has not been considered and what else do we need to know?

- Who are the experts to talk to?

These and similar questions support designing and delivering change initiatives using collective knowledge and expertise from across the organisation and wider community.

Engage people

When people are engaged directly at different initiative stages, they are more likely to feel comfortable and positive about a change initiative. This requires good relationships. It may include engagement with kaumātua and Māori and other communities, tāngata mātau ā-wheako, tāngata whai ora, whānau, other organisations, and kaimahi.

You can engage people appropriate to their position and interests using various approaches. For example:

- regularly updating groups like mātau ā-wheako and kaimahi networks
- creating opportunities for tāngata whai ora, whānau, and communities to understand new service options, for example in meetings, group sessions, and online
- conducting internal and external events and meetings to educate and inform kaimahi and organisation leaders, tāngata whai ora and whānau, and tāngata mātau ā-wheako, for example wānanga, workshops, and education sessions
- enabling kaimahi groups or committees to create resources that support new practices and sustain the change, for example digital resources like video tutorials, factsheets, and brochures, and revised policies and procedures
- providing kaimahi with tuakana-teina relationships and other reflective practices, and learning opportunities
- linking kaimahi and tāngata whai ora into external networks, communities of practice, and other supportive relationships.

Think about how best to engage with people so they can get the most out of the experience. That might mean conducting specific cultural engagement activities like wānanga, or tailoring activities to suit people with differing abilities and availability. You may need the support of a skilled facilitator.

Prepare leaders and influencers

In addition to understanding and supporting the change, it is important leaders and influencers play strong roles in the change process and can speak positively about it with others. Early, active, and meaningful support from leaders and influencers builds people's confidence in the initiative and increases their ability to adopt and successfully apply new practices and to feel safe doing so.

Leaders include senior leaders, as well as line managers and team leads. Leaders may also include people from outside the organisation like kaumātua and community leaders, and leaders from mātau ā-wheako networks and other organisations. Committed, skilled, and

informed leaders are crucial to create and maintain relationships and to lead kaimahi and others through the change.

Consider, how all leaders can be informed and knowledgeable about the change process and the importance of their role. This might include leaders:

- ☐ ability to positively communicate key messages and discuss these externally and within the workplace
- ☐ knowledge of the change initiative, including why it is important, how to find and deliver answers to people's questions, and be a conduit for ideas and concerns
- ☐ vocabulary to clearly articulate understanding of Māori, community, and others' aspirations and concerns and demonstrate enthusiasm for the initiative
- ☐ role modelling the expected new practices and behaviours
- ☐ knowledge of the initiative's progress and ability to share about it
- ☐ access to and distributing relevant resources, so that everyone on their team is ready and supported to put changes into action
- ☐ ability to provide role and team-based coaching on a regular basis.

Influencers role model new practices to people in their peer group. Influencers are kaimahi already committed to the initiative's vision and goals and are early adopters of new practices. Influencers may also be present in the community, mātau ā-wheako networks, and other organisations.

You can build influencers' knowledge to help them effectively support their peers through the change. This might include developing similar knowledge and skills as previously described for leaders, tailored to their position and relationships.

Clear, transparent, responsive processes

Change initiatives are more likely to succeed when processes are clear, transparent, responsive, and linked into the organisation's usual activities. Processes provide the platform for tāngata whai ora, kaimahi, and others to see themselves and their concerns reflected in the initiative.

Collect data

Planning for regular data collection is part of the change initiative process and helps measure its progress, outcomes, and supports responsive decision-making. It helps show how the change is tracking and what challenges remain to be solved. Planning to collect data at relevant points during the initiative enables efficient collection as events unfold.

Data can include facts and numbers, as well as people's ideas and opinions. When collecting data from or about people, it is important to understand and uphold their rights to control how their data is used. Te Mana Raraunga [Principles of Māori Data Sovereignty](#) guides thinking about how to behave appropriately towards Māori data, and can inform your thinking about other peoples' rights, including tāngata whai ora and tāngata mātau ā-wheako.

People affected by the change can decide on two to three clear measures, which directly reflect its progress that are appropriate to collect at each stage of the initiative. These could measure:

- ☐ people's readiness for change before the start and their views about the change at different stages
- ☐ progress on organisational changes, such as policies successfully updated, number of referrals to new partner entities, or kaimahi satisfaction with new practices
- ☐ workforce changes, for example the number of kaimahi with new skills, who have completed training, who are applying new practices successfully, who are engaged in tuakana-teina or other reflective practice supports, or who need additional support
- ☐ the performance of your change strategies, for example the share of initiative tasks completed, number of people who have been engaged or completed events, like wānanga and public meetings.

Consider the following questions when developing measures and collecting data.

- ☐ What are the key measures of success at each stage of the initiative?
- ☐ Which measures are most important to show the initiative's progress?
- ☐ How can the data be collected? Are there any existing data sources?
- ☐ How will you ensure informed consent for kaimahi and tāngata whai ora if collecting data directly from them?
- ☐ What needs to happen to ensure data is available when you need it?
- ☐ How will the data be analysed to evidence success, what is the goal or milestone?
- ☐ How will the data be shared back to kaimahi and tāngata whai ora for their benefit?

- How will you be accountable to the people who own the data?

Plan communications

People feel more confident about a change initiative when they receive active and frequent messages about its purpose and progress. Communication is ideally tailored to people's preferred language and mode of delivery. A [plan template](#) is provided on our website.

A communications plan shows key messages for delivery to different people at each stage of the initiative. For example, the initiative's vision, goals, and benefits relevant to them. The plan can be regularly updated as new knowledge emerges from your activities.

Consider the messages people will be most interested in, how these are best delivered, and by whom at each stage of the initiative: before, during, and after its introduction. Models like ADKAR² can be helpful for developing messages suited to different people and initiative stages. The following is based on the ADKAR model.

Before the initiative starts, what messages will build people's awareness and encourage them to want to participate and support its success? Include messaging tailored to people's needs and interests about the initiative, why it is important, and how to engage or be involved.

You might consider messaging for the following groups. People who:

- will be **impacted** by the initiative, internal and external to the organisation including tāngata whai ora and communities, so they will know what changes to expect, how to provide feedback, and how they will be included
- will be **involved** in the initiative, like trainees, so they know why it is important and understand the process that will occur, how to provide feedback, and how they will be included
- have **influence** so they can positively engage with and support their peers
- **lead** the organisation, such as senior management to show high level leadership support for the initiative and set organisation expectations for its outcomes
- **manage** teams to enable them to positively engage with kaimahi about the initiative across a range of workplace activities, especially line manager conversations.

During the initiative, key messages will continue to build each group's knowledge about the initiative and keep them engaged. For example:

- linking peoples' values and interests to the shared vision and goals
- showing the initiative's progress so far and next steps
- highlighting ongoing opportunities to provide feedback and engage
- addressing knowledge gaps and other challenges that have been identified

² ADKAR and Awareness Desire Knowledge Ability Reinforcement are Prosci Inc. registered trademarks. All rights reserved.

- ☐ providing information and resources tailored to meet people's needs
- ☐ demonstrating how specific questions, barriers, and challenges have been addressed.

After the initiative has been introduced, key messages will help reinforce and sustain the change in people's practice. These communications might:

- ☐ show how the change is integrated into ongoing learning and development in the organisation
- ☐ inform kaimahi about accessing supportive resources so they can continue to apply new practices
- ☐ provide other supports and resources that will help sustain the change
- ☐ outline the process for providing feedback that will support ongoing and continuous improvement practices.

Respond to barriers

Understanding barriers to success from multiple perspectives enables you to better prepare and plan to address these as they arise. You might respond to mitigate barriers with specific key messages, new or updated resources, and other supports that aim to contribute to and enhance success.

The following are some questions to consider.

- ☐ Who in the organisation is experienced with the organisation's existing workflows? Can they advise on how the initiative's expected new practices will integrate into these? For example, kaimahi using new practices or people receiving new services.
- ☐ What barriers do they identify from this analysis?
- ☐ Which barriers and/or enablers are already identified, by whom?
- ☐ What specific actions, messages, and resources do they think can help overcome identified barriers?
- ☐ How can these responses be integrated into change initiative plans?
- ☐ Are any other enablers identified? How can these be integrated into plans?

Create an implementation plan

An intentional implementation plan is a plan for engaging people in the change process. This plan outlines what will be said and done and by whom, to create a positive environment that supports everyone along the change journey. This differs from a project plan, which outlines the activities and milestones for the entire initiative, although there may be some overlap for important information like key barriers and communications. A [plan template](#) is provided on our website.

Below are some key areas to consider in an implementation plan. Tailor your plan for each relevant group as resources, messages, and other actions may differ, such as for managers compared to kaimahi, tāngata whai ora, or Māori and other communities.

The following maps out a useful structure for your implementation plan.

Activity description	Overview statement about the activity
Vision and goals	Why the activity is important, its benefits, and goals? What success will look like?
Change team	Roles and responsibilities for each member, seek representatives from all relevant groups
People impacted, involved, influencing, and leading	Who are your key people and groups?
Guidance	Based on key decisions from your engagement with people and collaborative decision making
Barriers and enablers	Outline these specific to each group of people
Communications plan*	For each group at each activity stage, what will you say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before, to build awareness and desire - during, to foster their knowledge and ability - after, to sustain change?
Resources plan	For each group at each activity stage, what resources and supports will you provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before, to build awareness and desire - during, to foster their knowledge and ability - after, to sustain change?
Sustainability plan	After the activity, what will you say and do for each group (where relevant)? Remember to consider people, processes, resources, and data.
Accountability	How will you be accountable to people?
Celebrate success	How will you recognise, reward, and celebrate success?
Actions	What is the activity, who will do it when, and milestones?

* If a separate communications plan is not developed.

Provide support for change

Access to supportive relationships and resources can be crucial for successful change. The supports required depend on your change initiative. So, consider how best to develop and deliver appropriate resources at each stage of the change initiative relevant to different people's needs. Some examples include:

- ☐ access to relevant professional development opportunities, for example cultural safety training
- ☐ other supports such as kaimahi coverage, study leave, travel grants, access to tuakana-teina relationships, and other reflective practice opportunities
- ☐ providing educational resources and information for tāngata whai ora and whānau
- ☐ updating team budgets, workplans, and processes
- ☐ new or updated policies and procedures, tools, resources, and consumables for kaimahi and managers.

It may be useful to think about how to:

- ☐ prioritise resourcing so the people who need these the most have access
- ☐ manage resources to get the most impact and value for money
- ☐ ensure resources are available when needed, considering organisation budgets, rosters, and other aspects influencing availability
- ☐ deploy resources for the most impact, before, during, and after the initiative.

Plan to sustain the change

A sustainability plan outlines the actions and messages that will sustain the new practices once your change initiative has progressed. This aims to create conditions that make it easy for people to choose to continue with the new practices and may overlap with actions to support the change described previously.

A sustainability plan builds supportive messages, activities, and resources to promote people's ongoing growth in the new practices and provide a positive workplace environment. It enables people to continue to provide feedback on the change process and so you can continue to be responsive to their needs.

Factors that help to sustain change.

- ☐ Continuing leadership commitment and role modelling.
- ☐ Clear two-way communication on progress, challenges, and regular reviews.
- ☐ Monitoring and evaluation activities.
- ☐ Celebration of success and positive reinforcement.
- ☐ Ongoing involvement of all affected people in sustaining the change.

Evaluation and monitoring results will help to inform this strategy. Some useful questions to ask include the following.

- ☐ Has the initiative achieved its goals? Which ones? How can we celebrate these?
- ☐ What else needs to happen to achieve missed or incomplete goals?
- ☐ What messages, resources, and actions will support organisation leaders, managers, and influencers' ability to reinforce the change in practice and support kaimahi to work in new ways?
- ☐ What other supports will kaimahi need to sustain new practices? Who would best provide these?
- ☐ Are kaimahi, tāngata whai ora and whānau satisfied with the changes? What else needs to happen to improve their satisfaction?

This is an ideal opportunity to evaluate how your chosen change strategies supported the outcomes.

- ☐ What strategies helped the initiative to succeed?
- ☐ What did not go so well, or what would you do differently next time?
- ☐ How will you carry these learnings forward to support future initiatives?

Case study

In response to tāngata whai ora and whānau requests for peer support services, an organisation's board planned to develop a mātau ā-wheako team to deliver the new services, following published [guidance for employing mātau ā-wheako roles](#).

A workforce planning day run by a lived experience facilitator worked with people involved to create a shared vision for the team, talk about what needed to change to enable this to happen, and what the challenges might be.

A key barrier to success could have been a lack of understanding about peer support roles within the organisation. So, a plan was discussed and put in place for specific mitigating strategies. These included developing key communications around why a mātau ā-wheako team would be advantageous for everyone, opportunities for team discussions with managers about how to work with the new team, and organisation-wide information sessions with a network of influential and committed kaimahi who were well-prepared to support others.

Communication plans created ongoing opportunities for feedback from all involved, provided regular progress updates and strong leadership support, and ensured plenty of information about and access to available training sessions.

To ensure sustainability, updated reporting lines and policies promoted ongoing inclusion of the new mātau ā-wheako team in organisation systems and workflows. Regular reviews provided the new team and other kaimahi with regular opportunities to grow their knowledge about each other's roles and discuss how they can work well together.

Concluding comment

Effective change leadership brings people with you on the change journey, informed by and responsive to their needs, knowledge, and expertise. It is not about forcing people into inflexible or unrealistic plans and timeframes.

“Getting change to stick is about permission, not control” (Grant, 2023, p.68).

Using these strategies well might mean frequently reviewing and updating your change initiative and other plans. The initiative may take longer and involve more check-ins and more resources than originally expected. Take your time. The rewards will show in the success of the initiative and people's satisfaction with its outcomes over time.

Resources

Some key change and distributed leadership and implementation science resources are listed below. These have informed the advice provided in this resource.

Changefirst, authors of PCI® (People-Centred Implementation) provide a range of [resources and video tutorials](#).

Clark, et al. (2024). Strategies to implement evidence-informed decision making at the organizational level: A rapid systematic review. *BMC Health Services Research* 24(1), doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10841-3

Grant, B. (2023). *Change management that sticks: A practical people-centred approach for high buy-in and meaningful results*.

Kirchner, et al. (2020). Getting a clinical innovation into practice: An introduction to implementation strategies. *Psychiatry Research* 283, doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.06.042

Metz, et al. (2022). Building trusting relationships to support implementation: A proposed theoretical model. *Frontiers in Health Services* 2, doi.org/10.3389/frhs.2022.894599

Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora. (2023). [Oranga Hinengaro System and Service Framework](#)

Peters, et al. (2022). Trends in guideline implementation: An updated scoping review. *Implementation Science* 17(50), doi.org/10.1186/s13012-022-01223-6

Te Mana Raraunga. (2019). [Principles of Māori Data Sovereignty](#)

Te Pou. (2023). [Co-designing with the Mātau ā-Wheako Workforce for Meaningful Change](#)

Te Pou. (2025). [Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika](#)

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