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## KEY CONSIDERATIONS TO INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR FOR ACTION

- 1 Changing people's behavior isn't easy.** In general, people prefer *not* to change. Overcoming this tendency often requires changing what people know, how they feel, what they care about, their priorities, their skills, their motivations, and a host of other factors. It also requires addressing barriers to action and making specific recommendations for how to overcome those. Researchers studying human behavior remind us that there's not a simple formula for moving people to action. Each situation, target audience, and issue may require a slightly different and tailored approach.
- 2 Know your audience.** Encouraging new behaviors requires that you know what makes your audience tick. You need to know what they know, how they feel, who they trust, what motivates them, and what barriers they find to be the most daunting. The better you know your audience, the more effectively you can engage them through education and outreach, communications, advocacy, and social marketing. Social change is about working to achieve immediate goals and shift societal values to those that support equity and healthier communities. It's impossible to do that without understanding the audiences you hope to influence.
- 3 Knowledge is the gateway to action.** People need to know and care about an issue before they act on it. Although information alone rarely moves people to action, informational materials that are accurate, compelling, and provide specific guidance can lay the groundwork and enhance motivation.
- 4 Communications must be aligned with the audience's existing values and attitudes, while also encouraging the adoption of values and attitudes that support the changed behavior.** Social change materials sometimes talk about "making the world a better place." These broad messages can sound good, but they ignore the fact that many people are focused on what's in it for them. People are unlikely to change their actions if they don't see the relevance to their own lives. Audiences that value individualism may need to see that equity does not impede individual choice or business interests.
- 5 Make action easy.** Community change practitioners should make actions as easy as possible, remove the barriers to action, offer alternative behaviors, and make people feel good after taking the action. If people find taking action easy and effective, they will be more likely to take action in the future.

**6 Seeing is believing.** People are more likely to adopt a behavior if they see other people, especially people they trust, taking the action. The more the changed behavior looks like the social norm or that “everyone’s doing it,” the more likely it will be that individuals conform to the new behavior and become part of the group. And the less people know or care about a subject, the more important it is that they hear from someone they trust or a person who is like them.

**7 Incentives can be a powerful tool to encourage people to adopt a new behavior and they may be useful for actions that are not easy to adopt.** However, you need to use incentives cautiously: When the incentive is no longer available, many people will discontinue the new behavior. Other social strategies, such as education and recognition, can be coupled with incentives to support a change over time.

**8 Keep it simple.** Giving people a long list of options can be overwhelming; it’s called “choice overload.” Instead of multiple choices, give people one or two options. Or, when appropriate, consider a strategy that eliminates the need to make a choice.

**9 Multiple approaches can yield strong results.** Sometimes efforts are more successful when they use multiple approaches to encourage behavior change. In some cases, one intervention is all that’s needed. But at other times, campaigns can be more effective when they use a variety of approaches.