



Levers of Behavior Change



PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES



ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

There are many ways of understanding the motivations and barriers to behavior change. Rare's Center for Behavior & the Environment has a behavior change framework that is comprised of six behavioral levers. Each lever represents a category of intervention strategies based on evidence-based principles and case studies from behavioral and social science. The levers are discrete and able to be pulled in different combinations for different effects.

For decades, the traditional environmental toolkit has consisted of these common levers to change behavior: information, rules and regulations, and material incentives.

These levers can be effective. But information does not necessarily lead to action, incentives can backfire or send the wrong message, and rules can be difficult to enforce. Research from behavioral science tells us about other powerful insights that could drive behavior change and enhance these common tools. For example, people make decisions based on their emotions, what other people are doing and expecting them to do, and how we structure the context for decision-making.

By expanding the toolkit with additional levers, we can design solutions that reflect people's full range of behavioral motivations and barriers. This means incorporating emotional appeals, social influences, and choice architecture more into our solutions.

Read about each of the levers as well as principles and strategies for applying them. The principles (in bold) serve to categorize the strategies (in bullets) and identify what needs to change in order for behavior to change. The strategies presented are options for designing solutions that address each behavioral principle. The strategies are not a checklist of requirements for behavior change, but instead provide flexibility for what will meet your goals. Draw upon the research you've conducted about your target audience and behavior to select which levers and strategies are most appropriate and effective for your given context.

Learn more at behavior.rare.org.



INFORMATION

Providing information about what the target behavior is, why it matters, and how to do it

Provide step-by-step instructions

- Offer training on the target behavior
- Provide materials that give instructions on how to do the target behavior

Build awareness and understanding

- Provide informational forums, meetings, or materials that describe the target behavior and its importance
- Communicate about the target behavior in a clear, concrete, and unambiguous way
- Give feedback on performing the target behavior



RULES & REGULATIONS

Enacting rules that promote or restrict a behavior

Mandate behavior

- Enact mandates that require or encourage the target behavior

Prohibit behavior

- Enact prohibitions that limit or forbid the problem behavior



MATERIAL INCENTIVES

Increasing or decreasing real or perceived costs, time, or effort for doing a behavior

Make it easy or the alternative hard

- Make the target behavior more convenient and accessible to do (e.g., remove barriers, provide substitutes)
- Make the undesired behavior more difficult to do (e.g., create friction points, barriers)

Give rewards or penalties

- Incentivize or reinforce the target behavior
- Penalize or fine for cases of the problem behavior



EMOTIONAL APPEALS

Using emotional messages to drive behavior

Leverage emotions in specific contexts

- Pride: Use to motivate people to show others what they have done when they have achieved a goal or done the right thing
- Joy: Use to motivate people to talk to others or reinforce their behavior when they have achieved a goal or gained resources
- Hope: Use to motivate people to start a behavior when they can achieve a desired outcome while facing a threat
- Fear: Use to motivate people to avoid risks when they experience uncertainty or an immediate threat
- Anger: Use to motivate people to confront others when they witness injustice or experience threats to personal autonomy
- Interest: Use to motivate people to seek information when something is novel and complex
- Prospect of shame: Use to motivate people to avoid an action when others might find out about socially-undesirable actions

Personalize the message

- Put a human face on campaigns and focus on a single story over abstract statistics
- Tailor messages to make them personally relevant, relatable, and appealing



SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Leveraging the behavior, beliefs, and expectations of others

Make engaging or not engaging in the target behavior observable

- Publicly broadcast who has and has not engaged in the target behavior
- Provide a way for people to show they are doing the target behavior

Make the target behavior the perceived norm

- Highlight possibility of social sanctions for doing the problem behavior
- Share that people are currently doing the target behavior
- Create conversation around shared beliefs and expectations
- Promote cases of success with the target behavior
- Leverage credible and trusted messengers doing the target behavior
- Facilitate peer or community exchanges where others can observe and gain support for the target behavior

Eliminate excuses for not engaging in the target behavior

- Encourage public commitments or pledges to drive the target behavior
- Provide visible indicators that signal support for the target behavior (e.g., hats, badges)



CHOICE ARCHITECTURE

Changing the context in which choices are made

Direct attention

- Make the target behavior the default option
- Draw attention to the target behavior by making it salient

Simplify messages and decisions

- Streamline complex decisions to focus on key information or actions
- Provide shortcuts for a target behavior with many steps or options

Use timely moments and prompts

- Target moments of transition and habit formation
- Provide prompts and reminders about the target behavior

Facilitate planning and goal setting

- Provide support in making a plan to achieve the target behavior
- Use commitments to bind or limit future decisions



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