

Forces of Change Assessment

The Forces of Change Assessment is designed to help MAPP participants answer the following questions: “What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?” and “What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?”

During this phase, participants engage in brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying forces such as trends, factors, or events that are or will be influencing the health and quality of life of the community and the local public health system. The forces identified through this process, together with the results of the other three MAPP Assessments, will serve as the foundation for the next MAPP phase, Identifying Strategic Issues.

Recommended Participants and Roles

Core Support Team or Subcommittee — designs and prepares for the Forces of Change brainstorming process and compiles and records the results of the session.

MAPP Committee — conducts the brainstorming process. Additional participation from key leaders in the community may be recruited but should not be necessary if committee membership is sufficiently diverse.

A Step-by-Step Overview of the Forces of Change Assessment

1. Prepare for the Forces of Change Assessment by identifying a facilitator and location and designing the session. Give each MAPP Committee member a copy of the Brainstorming Worksheet to use in preparation for the discussion.

2. Conduct a brainstorming session with the MAPP Committee and other participants. Develop a comprehensive list of forces of change by asking participants to focus on events, trends, and factors that come easily to mind. Then simplify and categorize the list.

3. Identify possible impacts — potential threats and opportunities — for each force. Add new forces to the list as they become apparent. During the Forces of Change Assessment, participants answer the following questions: “What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?” and “What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?”

The Forces of Change Assessment should result in a comprehensive, focused list that identifies key forces and describes their impact. Responding to the questions above requires a balanced approach. On one hand, it is necessary to think broadly when identifying events, factors, and trends that represent major forces. Local, regional, national and global concerns should be considered. On the other hand, it is necessary to focus on specific issues that affect the local public health system as well as the health and quality of life of the community. Identifying and addressing forces of change — often called “environmental scanning” — is important to the success of the process. It ensures that the process is relevant and timely, builds upon opportunities and responds to potential threats.

The identification of forces illuminates some of the “givens” under which the public health system operates or will need to operate. If these forces are not fully considered, the strategies developed later in the MAPP process may be less effective. The process of conducting a Forces of Change Assessment also has strong benefits for the working relationships of public health system

partners. This phase promotes thinking about the “big picture.” These activities often bring partners together on common ground and encourage them to think about how to collaboratively address changes.

What Are Forces of Change?

While it may not seem obvious at first, the broader contextual environment is constantly affecting communities and local public health systems. State and federal legislation, rapid technological advances, changes in the organization of health care services, shifts in economic and employment forces, and changing family structures and gender roles are all examples of Forces of Change. They are important because they affect — either directly or indirectly — the health and quality of life in the community and the effectiveness of the local public health system.

Forces are a broad all-encompassing category that includes trends, events, and factors. · Trends are patterns over time, such as migration in and out of a community or a growing disillusionment with government. Factors are discrete elements, such as a community’s large ethnic population, an urban setting or the jurisdiction’s proximity to a major waterway. · Events are one -time occurrences, such as a hospital closure, a natural disaster or the passage of new legislation.

Traditional strategic planning approaches often divide forces into four common categories: political, economic, social, and technological. Other strategic planning experts have added environmental, scientific, legal, and ethical categories to the list. Some forces may have a direct or indirect relationship to social determinants of health. It may be useful to consider these relationships when brainstorming issues.

How to Conduct the Forces of Change Assessment

The forces of Change Assessment assists MAPP users in developing a broad list of forces that are later “funneled” into a more focused list of truly relevant issues. The following three steps don’t always follow a linear format; it may be necessary to work back and forth between the steps to develop a list and then whittle it down.

Step 1 — Prepare for the Forces of Change Assessment

Unlike the other three MAPP Assessments, this assessment does not require the oversight of a subcommittee. In most cases, the Core Support Team can manage the logistics of the Forces of Change brainstorming session. It is strongly recommended that the full MAPP Committee participate in the brainstorming session so that a diversity of perspectives is represented. If the MAPP Committee does not reflect sufficiently diverse perspectives, additional participants should be recruited. Individuals from different levels in an organization (front line staff, middle managers, executives) will have different perceptions of issues. Likewise, individuals from disciplines outside of public health can lend important perspectives on emerging forces that affect the health of the community (i.e., a farmer may be aware of impending farm legislation that could affect the community). To prepare for the brainstorming session, provide each member of the MAPP Committee with a copy of the Brainstorming Worksheet. Ask them to review the worksheet and begin thinking about the major forces that affect public health or the community. If possible, members should complete the worksheet and bring it to the brainstorming session. During Step 1, Core Support Team members should:

- determine who will facilitate the brainstorming session and how it will be run,
- review all of the steps and determine the best methods to employ as well as key questions to be asked; and

- identify a meeting place that offers plenty of empty wall-space (for posting the ideas generated) and space for the committee to break into subgroups.

Step 2 — Convene a Brainstorming Session to Identify Forces of Change

Next, convene the MAPP Committee and hold a brainstorming session to identify Forces of Change. (This session should be scheduled to last a minimum of two hours.) Through facilitated and structured brainstorming discussions, committee members should share ideas from their individual Brainstorming Worksheets, identify new forces, and develop a comprehensive list. This is meant to be an intuitive “quick and dirty” process that focuses on events, trends, and factors that come easily to mind. It is at this point that partners are likely to discover the common ground that facilitates team building. Depending on the size of the group and the amount of time scheduled for the brainstorming session, this step can be completed using either a large group brainstorming process or iterative, small group processes. Review local newspaper clippings, national demographics, or recent events to stimulate the brainstorming process. Use questions from the Brainstorming Worksheet to spur discussion.

Once a comprehensive list of forces has been developed, the MAPP Committee should review and fully discuss each item on the list. During the discussion, like forces should be consolidated and organized into logical groups. To develop an organized list, combine forces that are similar or linked (i.e., increasing managed care enrollment and market-based health care system). Other items on the list may need to be deleted, added, or further refined. If there are a small number of forces for specific categories, evaluate why this is the case. It may indicate weak participation from certain segments of the community (e.g., if the business community was not engaged in the process, there may be certain types of forces that were not identified). If the time allotted for the brainstorming activity does not allow for completion of this step, the committee may designate staff or a small, ad hoc subcommittee to take the first pass at refining the list.

Whether the refinement process occurs at the first meeting or a subsequent session, it is an important activity. Record the information in the first column on the Forces of Change – Threats and Opportunities Worksheet. There are a variety of ways — such as those described below — to conduct brainstorming sessions. Regardless of the method employed, participants should adhere to the following “golden rule:” Never criticize an idea. Participants will feel free to let their imaginations wander and to contribute if they don't worry about what others will think of their ideas. It is often the case that an idea that initially seems useless or silly subsequently turns out to have value or even trigger another important idea. Some brainstorming techniques include:

- **Round Robin Method (or Nominal Group Technique):** Participants write down all of the forces of change that come to mind (or responses to a specific question). The facilitator or group leader then generates a “master” list of forces by calling on each member in a round-robin fashion. Each member is asked to briefly state one item on his or her list until all ideas have been presented. The group leader records these items on a flip chart, using the members’ own words. This step may be time consuming in large groups but may be shortened by limiting each member to a specific number of ideas. Only after all ideas are presented does the group discuss them. After discussion, the group organizes, clarifies and simplifies the material. Items should be combined or grouped logically.
- **A Customization of the Snow Card Technique:** Participants write down all of the forces of change that come to mind on small pieces of paper, such as index cards or adhesive notepaper. If desired, the facilitator can ask participants to write down ideas for several identified questions or categories. Participants then post their ideas on the wall (the facilitator can do this, if anonymity is important). The facilitator or a small group of individuals then moves the ideas around, trying to categorize like ideas together. Through

Step 3 — Identify Potential Threats and Opportunities for Each Force of Change

This step should begin with the committee's review of the identified forces, as documented in the first column of the Forces of Change — Threats and Opportunities Worksheet and may occur during the first brainstorming session or a subsequent session. Committee members should evaluate each force, and for each, identify associated threats and opportunities for the community and the local public health system. In some cases, a force might only be identified with a threat, while in other instances, it may be perceived as both a threat and an opportunity.

Using similar brainstorming techniques, identify the threats posed and opportunities created by each force. The final list is recorded in the remaining columns of the Threats and Opportunities Worksheet. Once this activity has been completed, the forces of change list should be tabled until it is time to conduct the Identifying Strategic Issues phase of the MAPP process. Participants will then review each of the issues identified in the other MAPP assessments in light of the forces of change, and will discuss the associated threats and opportunities. This activity will ensure that the strategic issues are relevant to the changing environment. It will also ensure that the action plans developed are responsive to potential threats and opportunities. The process of identifying forces of change should not end after the initial brainstorming session(s); other forces may later become apparent and should be added to the list as they arise.

The Forces of Change phase is intended to be an ongoing process. The MAPP Committee should revisit the list of forces periodically to ensure that it is up to date and that its contents are kept in the forefront of the Committee's mind.

Forces of Change Brainstorming Worksheet

The following two-page worksheet is designed for MAPP Committee members to use in preparing for the Forces of Change brainstorming session.

What are Forces of Change?

Forces are a broad, all-encompassing category that includes trends, events and factors.

Trends are patterns over time, such as migration in and out of a community or a growing disillusionment with government.

Factors are discrete elements, such as a community's large ethnic population, an urban setting, or a jurisdiction's proximity to a major waterway.

Events are one-time occurrences, such as a hospital closure, a natural disaster or the passage of new legislation.

What Kind of Areas or Categories are Included?

Be sure to consider any and all types of forces, including:

- social
- economic
- political
- technological
- environmental
- scientific
- legal
- ethical

How to Identify Forces of Change

Think about forces of change — outside of your control— that affect the local public health system or community.

1. What has occurred recently that may affect our local public health system or community?
2. What may occur in the future?
3. Are there any trends occurring that will have an impact? Describe the trends.
4. What forces are occurring locally? Regionally? Nationally? Globally?
5. What characteristics of our jurisdiction or state may pose an opportunity or threat?
6. What may occur or has occurred that may pose a barrier to achieving the shared vision?

Also, consider whether or not forces identified were unearthed in previous discussions.

7. Was the MAPP process spurred by a specific event such as changes in funding or new trends in public health service delivery?
8. Did discussions during the Local Public Health System Assessment reveal changes in organizational activities that were the result of external trends?
9. Did brainstorming discussions during the Visioning or Community Themes and Strengths phases touch upon changes and trends occurring in the community?

Using this information, list all brainstormed forces, including factors, events, and trends. Continue onto another page if needed. Bring the completed worksheet to the brainstorming session.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Threats and Opportunities Worksheet

List the major categories identified during the Forces of Change brainstorming session in the Forces column. Then for each force, identify the threats and opportunities for the public health system or community created by each. Continue onto another page if needed.

Forces (Trend, Events, Factors)	Threats Posed	Opportunities Created