

# CUSP Tool: Premortem Tool With How-To Guide

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

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Projects often fail due to many circumstances. CUSP is no exception. Understanding potential barriers and complications to project implementation and success BEFORE the launch of CUSP can mitigate and hopefully prevent failure.

## WHAT IS A PREMORTEM?

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The concept of a project premortem was developed by Gary Klein and published in the Harvard Business Review in September 2007. Klein based the idea of a project premortem on the postmortem on a patient. In a postmortem, an autopsy is conducted to determine a patient's cause of death, but does not help that particular patient. In a project premortem, prior to the project launch, the project team imagines the project has failed and brainstorms all of the reasons that could lead to this failure. The team then develops plans to mitigate these reasons for failure.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL AND HOW-TO GUIDE:

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The purpose of the CUSP Premortem Tool is to help the CUSP coordinator and team in anticipating and mitigating problems during the pre-CUSP period. The how-to guide is to help the CUSP coordinator and team in conducting the premortem during the pre-CUSP period.

## WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?

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- The organization-level CUSP Coordinator should use this tool to facilitate the discussion with the CUSP champions, unit manager, and CUSP team.

## WHEN SHOULD THIS TOOL BE USED?

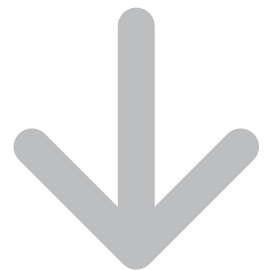
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- The CUSP Premortem Tool should be used during pre-CUSP: after all CUSP team members, including the executive, are trained in CUSP, and after debriefing of Culture survey results.
  - You may wish to conduct the premortem during the pre-meeting with the CUSP executive and team or in a separate meeting after the premeeting.
- See the CUSP Checklist To Independence for more insight on the tasks of pre-CUSP

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL:

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- Follow the directions in the order that they are written. Instruct the team to be honest and open.



# BE PREPARED WITH:

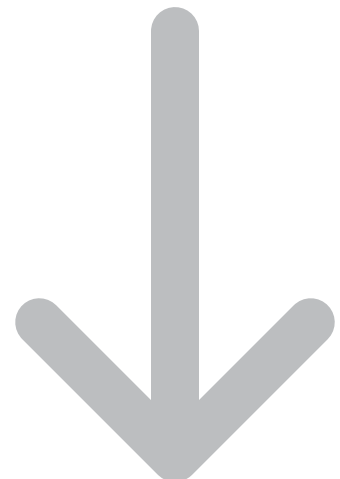
- CUSP Premortem Unit Input Sheet (copies for everyone plus some extra)
- Pens/pencils
- Flipchart/Easel/Markers (or a whiteboard, or some way to jot down the input so everyone can see)
- Small circle stickers and/or sharpie markers (optional)

Bring the materials listed to the meeting of CUSP Team members during pre-CUSP as outlined above.

## STEP 1

### DESCRIBE THE PREMORTEM AND HAND OUT THE INPUT SHEET

- Explain the idea of a premortem and their instructions.
  - You may use the description of a premortem on the first page of this tool.
  - Encourage everyone to be honest and open.
  - Hand out CUSP Premortem Unit Input Sheet (which can be found with this How-To Guide, or you may blank pieces of paper) and pens to each person on the CUSP team.
  - Dictate the following:
    - “Imagine that we are 2 years into the future and despite all of the team’s efforts, CUSP has failed on this unit. Things have gone completely wrong on a number of fronts. What could have caused this?”
    - “Spend the next 10 minutes writing down all the reasons you believe this failure occurred. Please work independently and write down anything that comes to mind.”



## STEP 2

### DEBRIEF ALL THE RESPONSES

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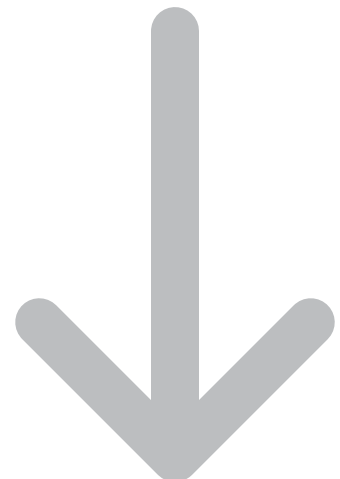
- After the 10 minutes, go around the room asking everyone to share one reason that has not already been mentioned. Repeat until all reasons are mentioned.
- Note the reasons on a board or easel in the room for all to see.
- Once all reasons are mentioned, briefly read through the reasons listed on the board.

## STEP 3

### PRIORITIZE THE TOP 3-4 CONCERNS

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- There are several ways of quickly—and equitably—getting input on priorities. It is very important that everyone on the team has a voice in prioritizing, so the method used should be very democratic and not allow the most vocal to select the priorities. A common method is:
  - Voting non-verbally: tell each team member that they have 2 minutes and 4 votes, and ask each of them—working independently—to select their top 5 concerns. Once they have completed this, identify the concerns with the most votes and list them on a separate piece of paper/board. Options for voting:
    - They may be given 4 stickers to use and place next to the ideas
    - They may mark a small dot with their own pens/markers next to the ideas (be sure to tell them they may only mark 4 dots!)



## STEP 4

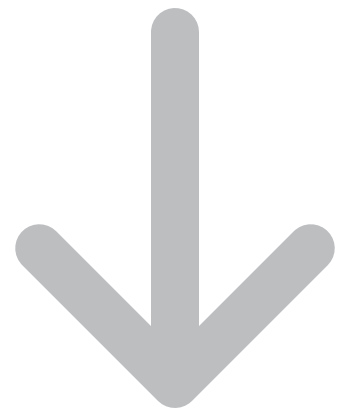
### BRAINSTORM INTERVENTIONS

- For each of the 3-4 top-priority concerns, brainstorm interventions that could be done during CUSP implementation to mitigate the concern. Again, it is very important that everyone on the team has a voice in prioritizing, so the method used should be very democratic and not allow the most vocal—or a vocal minority-- to have unbalanced input. It's possible, with good facilitation to simply facilitate a group discussion and generate ideas. Another common method to ensure everyone feels their voice is heard is:
  - Non-verbal idea generation (affinity exercise): give everyone a handful of “sticky notes” and instruct them to write their ideas for interventions to mitigate each of the concerns. It is important to instruct them to place one idea per sticky note, though they should be encouraged to work for 10 minutes independently and silently to come up with as many ideas as they'd like. Instruct them to place the sticky notes for each concern on the board by that concern, so that you will have ideas (sticky notes) for each concern. After 10 minutes, read (or ask another team member to read) the ideas and “affinitize” them, or place similar ideas for each concern together. Facilitate a discussion around which specific interventions should be prioritized and utilized.
- Compile the list of specific interventions (not all the brainstormed interventions; just the ones the group selected) on the CUSP Premortem Results (which can be found with this How-To Guide, or you may create your own template table) next to each concern and who will be responsible.

## STEP 5

### FOLLOW UP

- Explain that the CUSP Team will be responsible for working on these interventions and that the team should review the Premortem Results List at CUSP meetings.
- In addition, the CUSP Team should periodically review the entire concern list to determine if any of those concerns should be addressed.



# UNIT INPUT SHEET

We are using a CUSP Premortem prior to launching CUSP on this unit, in order to brainstorm—then address—potential barriers or complications of implementing CUSP on this unit. This tool helps us imagine the project has failed and brainstorm all of the reasons that could lead to this failure. The team will then develop plans to mitigate these reasons for failure.

Today: Imagine that we are 2 years into the future and despite all of the team's efforts; CUSP has failed on this unit. Things have gone completely wrong on a number of fronts. What could have caused this? Please spend the next 10 minutes writing down all the reasons you believe this failure occurred. Please work independently and write down anything that comes to mind." Use more than one sheet if needed.

REASONS FOR FAILURE "WHAT COULD HAVE CAUSED THIS?"	LEVEL OF CONCERN 1 = LOWEST CONCERN 5 = HIGHEST CONCERN	ACTION STEPS TO PREVENT FAILURE "WHAT CAN I DO DIFFERENTLY?"

# CUSP PREMORTEM RESULTS

Date of Premortem:

Unit:

CUSP Coordinator:

Participants in Premortem:



TOP CONCERNS	INTERVENTION(S)	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		