

Activity

Have you ever asked yourself, “why do we do things this way?”

Do you consider your organization “cluttered” with unnecessary rules, policies and procedures? Do you think this clutter contributes to or distracts from safety? If so, the *Digging for Dinosaurs* contest is for you!

This contest is a way to engage staff in questioning their practices in a non-threatening and fun manner by identifying, changing or eliminating unnecessary and poor practices – because small changes can have a big impact.

Staff are encouraged to be curious and to reflect on their work practices, exploring those that bring value to safe care, and those that do not. Staff are encouraged to identify a rule, policy, safety procedure, document, process, or activity which they believe is unnecessary, poorly designed, does not promote safety or reduce potential harm, and is not evidence-based.

A panel reviews the submissions, judges the “dinosaurs” and determines which practices will be changed or eliminated.

EXAMPLES OF DINOSAURS:

- Keeping a patient from eating or drinking anything starting at midnight, when their surgery is not scheduled until after 2:00 p.m.
- Documenting the same findings in more than one place in the patient’s record.
- Having to manually transcribe details of a patient’s visit from one digital report to another.
- Dismissing the same pop-up messages multiple times when documenting in an electronic tool.
- Frequency of head-to-toe assessments.

Why Hold a Dinosaur Contest:

Small changes can have big impact. Ongoing ‘clutter’ and tasks that add little value can be exhausting for staff and patients alike, leading them to wonder “Why am I bothering to do this?”

Adding administrative tasks and needless clutter may result in time focused on tasks that do not add value to the care and safety of patients, residents and clients.¹

For example, on a typical day, even though healthcare staff are expected to follow hundreds of policies and processes, when asked, they are only able to identify two or three. While this does not mean they are not doing what they are supposed to do, it does mean they are exposed to an excess of unnecessary written clutter. Despite good intentions, excessive clutter may detract from their safety work. For every new rule, an old one seldom gets taken out.²

How to Host a Dinosaur Contest:

TIME REQUIRED: Variable

- Create contest rules, submission form and promotional material: 1–4 hours.
- Establish judging criteria and judging panel: 2 hours.
- Applicants complete a submission: up to 15–30 minutes per application.
- Evaluate the applications: 1–4 hours, depending on the number of applications.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE: Unlimited

- One person or a group of people can collaborate to identify dinosaurs.
- An individual or a group of people can complete the submission process.

WHO TO INCLUDE:

- All clinical and nonclinical staff, regardless of their role or position
- Physicians
- Patients/residents/clients and care partners
- Managers and leaders

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Submission form (paper-based or electronic)

Planning your Contest/ How to Get Started:

1. Create and test the submission form.

- a. Suggested questions:
 - i. What dinosaur-like practice are you questioning?
 - ii. How and when did we start doing it this way?
 - iii. How do others feel about the practice?
 - iv. What would be the impact if we changed the way we do it?
 - v. What alternatives can you suggest to the way we do it?
 - vi. What evidence can you find to support or refute the way we currently do it?

2. Promote the contest and provide instructions on how to participate.

Engage with those who do the work and understand how the work actually gets done.

- a. Suggested description to include in your contest promotion:
 - i. Do you feel burdened and discouraged by poorly designed, unnecessary or nonsensical “stuff”? If so, help us Dig for Dinosaurs. Dinosaurs are practices that are preserved by the ritual of doing them over-and-over! Things you do, because “it’s the way we have always done things around here”. They are rules, policies, safety procedures, documents, roles or activities that you believe are unnecessary, do not promote safety or reduce potential harm and are not evidence-based.

- b. To help identify dinosaurs, ask your participants these questions:
 - i. Why are we doing it this way?
 - ii. Does it add value?
 - iii. Does it improve the quality of care?
 - iv. Does it improve satisfaction, productivity, communication, and/or motivation?
 - v. What is the most nonsensical thing you have been asked to do at work?

3. Information and submission forms should be available for at least 2 weeks to give participants time to think about and collaborate on dinosaurs.

Advertise early and widely.

4. Identify leaders, staff members and others to help promote the contest and elicit submissions.

5. Recognizing that patients/residents/clients, see things that healthcare providers don’t.

Encourage staff to include them in the team as they collaborate to identify dinosaurs and complete the submission.

6. Provide contact information of who to reach out to if they have questions or need help with the submission.

7. Establish a judging panel and criteria.

8. Continue to remind staff to submit entry forms.

9. Monitor and maintain a record of submissions.

10. Completed submissions are evaluated by the review panel and one or more dinosaurs are selected as winners.

- a. Dinosaurs can be categorized as:
- i. Just do it: action immediately.
 - ii. Needs further investigation: establish people and processes for investigating. Identify appropriate individuals to explore and evaluate the request and consider whether the suggestion is possible.
 - iii. Not currently possible: due to standards or regulations. For these, a response should be sent acknowledging awareness of the submission along with an explanation of why a fix is not possible at this time. Keep the suggestion on file and revisit periodically.¹

11. Implement change or decommission the practice.

12. Celebrate winning entries and practice changes.

All changes (even small ones) successfully implemented should be announced and celebrated.

13. Encourage ongoing curiosity, exploration, evaluation and practice change.

When adding a new rule, policy or practice, think about others that can be eliminated. Repeat the dinosaur contest annually.

Tips for Success:

- Promote early and often.
- Make the contest fun and participation easy.
- Engagement may take time. Find a variety of opportunities and ways to promote participation.
- Encourage individuals to work together to identify dinosaurs and complete their submissions.
- Managers should offer support and encouragement.
- Celebrate success by highlighting winners in your organization's newsletter and on your intranet and websites.
- Document follow-up action items.
- Form an action committee to address practice concerns generated by the contest.

For more information on championing safer care in your organization, visit

[ExploreSaferCare.ca](https://www.exploresafercare.ca)

Plus, join our [Health Workforce Innovation Challenge](#) to win monetary awards as you simplify or change an aspect of your team's tasks or practices.

Host a Debrief Session After the Contest.

- Debrief with the staff who planned the contest and those who participated.
- Questions to ask about the contest:
 - What did we learn?
 - What went well?
 - Even better if..
- Questions to ask about organizational clutter:
 - Is our organization "cluttered" with rules, policies, procedures and non-sensical "stuff"?
 - Where do we think it comes from?
 - Can safety clutter be dangerous?
 - Are we aware of these dangers?²
- Monitor for a shift in your organization's culture. Do people continue to refer to dinosaurs? Have people increased their curiosity to reflect upon and question current practices?
- Discuss ways to continue to evaluate practices and reduce burden.

References

1. Ashton M. Getting rid of stupid stuff. *N Engl J Med.* 2018; 379(19):1789-1791. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1809698.
2. Dekker S, Conklin T. Do Safety Differently. *Pre Accident Media*; Santa Fe, New Mexico; 2022