



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TOOLS *for* ACTION

CO-DESIGNED BY THE WESTERN AND PACIFIC CHILD WELFARE IMPLEMENTATION CENTER AND THE LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES.

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# Table of Contents

## Introduction

Author's Note	
Purpose of the Toolkit	
How to Use the Toolkit	

## Section 1: Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit Overview

Context: Lessons Learned and Future Direction	1
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## Section 2: The Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Defining Stakeholder Engagement	9
Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement	9
Levels of Stakeholder Engagement	11
Purpose and Background	12
Guiding Principles of Stakeholder Engagement	13
Guiding Principles Checklist – A Self-Reflection Tool	14
Stakeholder Engagement Framework: Phases and Key Activities	16

## Section 3: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies and Tools

### Phase 1: Plan and Design

Defining Results	17
Creating an Effective Work Plan	18
Stakeholder Engagement Work Plan Template	20
Creating Conditions for Success	21
Conducting A Stakeholder Analysis	22
Who Has a Stake? Worksheet	24
Goals and Methods of Engagement Matrix	26

### Phase 2: Internal Engagement and Capacity Building

Overview of Guiding Bodies	27
A Model for Effective Guiding Bodies	28
Child Welfare Guiding Body Case Examples	29
Convening a Guiding Body	30
Creating a Guiding Body Charter	31
Setting the Stage for Success: Effective Management for Guiding Bodies	33

## Table of Contents, CONTINUED

### **Phase 3: Listen and Engage**

Preparing for Successful Engagement .....	34
Tips for Effective Meeting Design .....	34
Facilitating Meetings for Mutual Learning .....	35
Planning for Meeting Follow Up .....	36
Meeting Preparation & Follow-Up Checklist .....	37

### **Phase 4: Synthesize and Strategize**

Synthesizing Stakeholder Input .....	39
Engaging Stakeholders in Strategy Co-Design .....	40
Characteristics of Effective Strategies .....	42
Identifying Strategic Options .....	43
Role of Guiding Bodies .....	43

### **Phase 5: Reflect and Affirm**

Why Stakeholders Should Review Proposed Strategies .....	44
Leading Reflective Discussions .....	44
Guiding a Strategy Review Discussion with Stakeholders .....	45
Role of Guiding Bodies .....	45

### **Phase 6: Finalize Strategy**

Articulating the Strategy .....	46
Engaging Stakeholders in Action Plan Design .....	46
Tips for Successful Action Planning .....	47
Role of Guiding Bodies.....	47

### **Phase 7: Adopt and Launch**

Communicating Strategies to Stakeholders .....	48
Implementation of Strategies .....	48
Role of Guiding Bodies .....	50

### **Phase 8: Evaluate and Improve**

Inclusive Evaluation:	
Working Effectively with Stakeholders as Partners in Evaluation .....	51
Tips for Engaging Stakeholders as Partners in Evaluation .....	52
Role of Guiding Bodies .....	53
References .....	54

## Author's Note

This toolkit was developed for use by Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in implementing the stakeholder engagement objectives in their strategic plan, however the concepts and materials can be adapted to other child welfare systems and organizations working to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for engaging and sustaining the input of internal and external stakeholders.

The practices and ideas have been adapted from stakeholder engagement literature and the lived experience of stakeholders, staff, facilitators and technical assistance providers working together over several years in the ongoing Stakeholder Engagement Process at DCFS. The Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center Consultation Team who participated in documenting the ideas in this toolkit include Arthur Argomaniz, Chrissie Castro, Kara Coleman, Judy Langford, Jean McIntosh, Rigoberto Rodriguez, Elizabeth Sunwoo and Laura Valles.

This document is available on the Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center (WPIC) website [www.wpicenter.org](http://www.wpicenter.org) and of the Center for the Study of Social Policy [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).

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## Purpose of the Toolkit

This Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit is designed to support the consistent integration of stakeholder engagement principles into the department's policies, strategies and day-to-day operations. It includes an overview of the department's Stakeholder Engagement Framework, as well as recommended planning, management and implementation strategies.

## How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to serve as a planning tool for DCFS staff and its partners who are leading or supporting stakeholder engagement efforts. It was developed for the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services as it undertook an effort to strengthen stakeholder engagement in many aspects of its work. The development of a strategic plan was the first implementation of the ideas included here.

Because each stakeholder engagement effort has a unique purpose and is influenced by several factors, the tools described in this toolkit can be adapted to different situations and purposes and flexibly implemented, depending upon the nature and phase of the stakeholder engagement effort. Users can also determine the sequence and combination of activities that best fit their needs based on the scale, scope and timing of engagement activities.

While each stakeholder engagement effort will require a tailored approach based on scope, scale, and desired results, the expectation is that DCFS should maintain consistency with the stakeholder engagement guiding principles (found on page 13).

Practice within the department – as well as in other very large organizations and agencies – indicates that starting with commonly understood principles that in turn generate common language and common processes across multiple divisions, regions and offices is the most likely process to result in agency-wide change that is recognized at every level throughout the organization.

# Context: Lessons Learned and Future Direction

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## Introduction

In 2009, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) set out to develop and implement a new Strategy Management Model for child welfare that helps improve organizational effectiveness, and outcomes for children and families. The LA Systems Change Project, funded through the Children's Bureau's Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center (WPIC), focused on three interrelated levers for systems change:

- 1. Strategic Directions:** The articulation of clear goals, strategies and results-based action plans that are required to achieve DCFS' mission and vision;
- 2. Stakeholder Engagement:** The direct involvement of both staff and constituents, i.e., families and youth, in providing ongoing input and support that assists the department in the successful fulfillment of its mission; and
- 3. Data-driven Decision Making:** The coordinated collection, analysis and dissemination of key outcome measures that illustrate what is working well and what needs to be improved at each operating level of the department.

This section of the toolkit provides a summary of key strategies that have been implemented by DCFS to increase its stakeholder engagement capacity, including emergent best practices, key lessons, and implications for continuing work.

## Stakeholder Engagement – An Overview

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is not just an end in itself, nice to have, or a good way to manage crises. It is an essential and mutually beneficial strategic function that results in better-informed and more effective policies, projects, programs and services.

*For stakeholders*, the benefits of engagement include the opportunity to contribute to policy and program development, have their issues heard and participate in the decision-making process.

*For DCFS*, the benefits of stakeholder engagement include: 1) improved communication between DCFS and other individuals, groups and organizations that work with the department; 2) access to critical information on the past experiences of the community and families, and others involved in the system; and 3) the ability to consider the implications of policy initiatives or proposals to inform strategy development. Together, these benefits are intended to lead to better organizational outcomes, strengthened relationships and trust, and a more positive view of DCFS. Experience has also shown that the earlier stakeholders are engaged, the more likely benefits will be realized.

## Who is a Stakeholder?

**A stakeholder** is any individual or group who has a vested interest in the outcome of an organization's actions.

**Internal stakeholders** are people who are already committed to serving an organization as staff, volunteers, executive leadership, and board members.

**A key stakeholder** is any stakeholder who is significantly affected by an organization’s actions and/or has considerable influence on those actions. For example, specific individuals, groups and organizations may play a pivotal role in helping your planning effort succeed or fail because they have access to needed information and other important resources.

**External stakeholders** are people who are impacted by an organization’s work as service recipients, community members, partners from the public and private sectors, funders, advocacy/interest groups, and others. For DCFS, external stakeholder groups include:

- *Primary Clients:* Children and youth who are currently or formerly involved in the system, and their families, caregivers, kinship caregivers, and other resource families.
- *Systems Partners:* Other systems and/or service delivery agencies and organizations that impact the clients such as the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Social Services (DPSS), schools, etc.
- *Community Partners:* Contracted and non-contracted community based organizations, faith-based groups, associations, etc. that can contribute to creating a community of support for the primary client.

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### **DCFS Goals and Objectives**

Within the new Strategy Management Model instituted by DCFS, stakeholder engagement is intended to be an ongoing process of maximizing the involvement of internal and/or external stakeholders to help craft, implement, and adapt strategies to achieve targeted outcomes. Primary objectives include:

- a. Identifying and engaging the relevant mix of stakeholders (*including youth, families, and community partners*), and creating the structures necessary to carry out specific functions and tasks that are critical to goal attainment and require stakeholder engagement;
- b. Providing effective coordination, communication, facilitation, and other supportive conditions to achieve maximally effective engagement; and
- c. Fostering a continuous learning environment to help internal and external stakeholders understand, contribute, implement, and adapt strategies to achieve important system-wide outcomes.

### **Key Strategies Implemented to Date**

Since its adoption of a new Strategy Management Model, DCFS’ scope of stakeholder engagement implementation has been focused on four areas that have both department-wide and external reach.

The areas include: **1)** the robust engagement of internal and external stakeholders through the strategic planning process; **2)** the continued development and formation of new Regional Community Alliances (RCAs); **3)** the design and activation of the DCFS Director’s Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC); and **4)** the implementation of a Data-driven Decision Making Process.

### **Integration of Stakeholder Engagement within Strategic Planning**

In 2010, DCFS initiated a broad-scale strategic planning process that resulted in the engagement of more than 3,000 internal and external stakeholders through a series of community-based forums that were designed to help clarify its vision and mission. Over 7,500 employees and external partners were also given the opportunity to provide input via surveys that helped to identify priority child welfare initiatives and strategies. Guided by the department’s Strategic Plan Steering Committee, which was comprised of a cross-section of organizational leaders and supported by WPIC consultants, the feedback provided by forum and survey participants was synthesized to help inform the formulation of major organizational objectives. This inclusive approach to strategic planning was carried out with the intention of articulating a common set of values and goals across the department that were directly informed by families, caregivers, community stakeholders, and staff.

The organizational and staff capacities that were built during the initial strategic planning community outreach process helped to further solidify DCFS' commitment to formalizing and sustaining engagement best practices. As evidence, the new DCFS Strategic Plan contains specific objectives that explicitly strengthen stakeholder participation. DCFS leadership solicited volunteer teams of staff to lead implementation of the objectives, which are referred to as "Strategic Plan Objective Teams." These teams consist of representatives from all levels of the department, and have been charged with working collaboratively to support the development of the Director's Council and Regional Community Alliances.

“As a result of the community outreach that was conducted in support of strategic planning, DCFS staff witnessed the value of stakeholder engagement on a broad scale firsthand and have come to better understand the importance of investing in new infrastructures like the RCAs and Director's Council, which are designed to support ongoing collaboration. –MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF ”

**Supporting the Development of Regional Community Alliances**

Through its documented and approved Strategic Plan Objectives, DCFS is now committed to forming Regional Community Alliances (RCA) in each of its regional offices. RCAs are meant to create a more unified approach to community engagement by providing a consistent forum for the exchange of input and feedback among community stakeholders and department staff. Each RCA is expected to meet regularly to work toward better outcomes for families and youth, and in the process, build long-term relationships that are mutually supportive and strengthen the communities that DCFS serves.

“The distinctiveness of the RCA is that the discussions flow from an alliance of both internal and external stakeholders at the regional level, that includes line staff, so to better assess strengths, discuss challenges and develop workable solutions that fit the uniqueness of each office. ”

–COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III

“The RCAs and the Director's Advisory Council will create an immediate feedback loop between key, vested stakeholders and County child welfare leaders. Sometimes, in child welfare, with need to attend to safety above all, we risk becoming too dogmatic. The innovation and energy from our partners can ensure that we stay current with best practice concepts and purposefully implement them into the child welfare service array. ”

–COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III

**Creation of the Director's Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC)**

As the new DCFS Strategic Plan was being completed in 2012, Director Philip Browning expressed the need to create a new vehicle that would allow him to communicate directly with youth and families that were currently or formerly involved in the child welfare system. The decision to convene youth and families who could advise the Director about how to improve child welfare practices, strategies, operations, and policies based on their own experiences led to the formation of a new Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC).

Launched in September 2013, CWAC members include twelve (12) constituents that represent foster parents, birth parents, and former foster youth who were nominated to participate by DCFS staff and local community allies. Currently, the Council is meeting on a bi-monthly basis while the group develops its charter and will hold monthly discussion sessions following charter completion.



“Both the RCAs and Director’s Advisory Council provide a new avenue for the discussion of barriers and the development of lasting solutions so to providing the highest quality of child protection and services to families.”

—DENISE LALANDE, WATERIDGE OFFICE, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR I

### Implementation of Data-driven Decision Making:

DCFS staff that spearheaded the strategic planning stakeholder engagement process were responsible for implementing DCFS’ Data-driven Decision Making (DDDM) Process the following year. Building on the stakeholder engagement capacities they had acquired through the strategic planning process, they applied stakeholder engagement principles and strategies to the implementation of DDDM. A previous effort at implementing DDDM, which transpired 8 years prior, had been unsuccessful due to lack of internal DCFS buy-in and ownership, including the lack of a safe environment for learning.

For these reasons, DDDM design and implementation was grounded in a shared commitment to ensuring that a broad base of stakeholders were working together to achieve priority goals and results related to strengthening the department’s data collection, analysis and action infrastructure. Most importantly, the engagement process took the requisite time to build trust, build champions for the work, and to develop a set of guiding principles, which most prominently featured a commitment to fostering a continuous learning environment. DCFS DDDM support staff attributes the success of implementation to their ability to effectively engage stakeholders, and for stakeholders’ taking ownership and leadership of implementation.

### Key features of the DDDM Stakeholder Engagement Strategy include:

- The formation of the Data Partnership Workgroup and the DDDM Co-Design Team, which involved a combination of executive, management, supervisory, and line staff in the collaborative crafting of protocols and systems for monitoring priority Safety, Permanency and Well-Being outcomes, assessing the department’s performance based on data findings, identifying areas for needed improvements, and implementing practice, policy and programmatic changes as a result.
- The institution of DDDM business processes that established regular data meetings, called “Stat” meetings at the department, bureau, and regional offices that includes a Case or Emergency Response (ER) Referral Review Process. These meetings are designed to facilitate group discussions about the stories behind DCFS outcomes data and practice implications that foster ongoing mutual learning across all levels of the organization.
- The engagement of leaders in every regional office, referred to as “Data Champions,” who were recipients of monthly capacity building trainings equipping them with the knowledge and skills to serve as regional office DDDM resources and experts.

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### Building Stakeholder Engagement Capacity

Throughout the LA Systems Change Project, DCFS has utilized a variety of technical assistance resources to assist in strengthening organizational operations and performance according to the goals set forth by the initiative. While DCFS values stakeholder engagement, it did not necessarily have the technical skill or knowledge base to carry it out effectively. To enhance its capacity to develop, implement, and improve stakeholder engagement practices, the department has worked closely with the Western and Pacific Implementation Center (WPIC) Consultation Team in the following ways:

**Development of a DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework and Toolkit:** During the 2010 strategic planning process, the department’s Office of Strategy

Management (*now the Office of Data and Analytics*) partnered with WPIC team members to initiate development of the Los Angeles DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework. The purpose of the framework is to articulate guiding principles, effective practices and core capacities related to engaging internal and external stakeholders.

Refinement of the Stakeholder Engagement Framework continued with the Strategic Plan Objective Teams, who led efforts to implement the Director’s CWAC and Regional Community Alliances. Core framework components include a set of guiding principles, a process model for managing engagement, and core capacities for developing and sustaining effective guiding bodies. (*See Section 2: The Stakeholder Engagement Framework*)

In addition, a companion DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit was created to support the consistent integration of stakeholder engagement principles into the department's policies, strategies and day-to-day operations. It includes an overview of the DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework as well as recommended planning, management and implementation strategies that are intended to serve as planning tools for department staff and partners who are leading or supporting stakeholder engagement efforts. (See Section 3: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies and Tools)

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“ The Stakeholder Engagement Framework provides a unified, standardized approach with philosophical underpinnings. It helps you understand how to begin the work of engagement and also reminds you what not to forget. That's crucial because it's not always easy to know what to begin first, how to get started, or how to explain to others – including internal and external partners – why certain steps are important. –MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF



DCFS has worked with the community and various stakeholders for years, but the coordination and outreach was limited to the skills of the individual. The Stakeholder Engagement Framework has helped DCFS to have a more coordinated effort at community outreach and stakeholder engagement. –COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III

**Provision of Training and Coaching for Strategic Plan Objective Team Members:**

The WPIC Consultation Team assisted with the launch of the DCFS Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC) and Regional Community Alliances (RCAs), objectives contained within the strategic plan to engage families and youth to inform department leaders and administrators. Because both bodies are still in the early stages of implementation, capacity building efforts have focused on coaching and training of Strategic Plan Objective Teams that are charged with overseeing their development and operations.

Stakeholder engagement trainings have been conducted for the Objective Teams on: a) the DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework, in order to promote understanding of key concepts, guiding principles, and its applicability to implementing Strategic Plan Objectives; b) Effective Meeting Design and Facilitation, which included the introduction of tools to develop requisite meeting facilitation and work planning skills; and c) Effective Guiding Bodies, where participants learned about best practices for forming a guiding body and learned how to conduct a basic stakeholder analysis.



The stakeholder engagement trainings were extremely helpful and building our skills at reaching out to and engaging our community partners. The training provided a framework and examples that could immediately be utilized by the participants. Together with the consultations, they have also helped build skills in areas that many did not have experience or expertise. –COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III



**Other significant capacity building activities that were carried out in support of the Regional Community Alliances include:**

- The creation of a governance framework and set of minimum standards that establish guidelines for quality operations and phases of implementation—from inception to full operation. Because the progress of RCA development and stakeholder engagement varies across regional offices depending upon each area’s unique environmental context, the new guidelines will aid alliances in maintaining greater uniformity across the department with respect to their goals, structure, and stakeholder engagement practices.
- The identification of **Stakeholder Engagement Champions**, who were identified by Regional Administrators for each DCFS Office based on their staff responsibilities and commitment to furthering the stakeholder engagement goals. These champions are responsible for helping to implement the Regional Community Alliance Plan in the offices they represent.

“ All of the Stakeholder Engagement Champions are very passionate about involving the community in the department’s decision-making processes, so it’s not like an assignment for them. They really have a desire to bring people to the table because they know that the partnerships that are created as a result will really help to inform our mission and goals, and ultimately help to improve outcomes for children and families. It also opens the door for our partners to be a resource, not only in terms of helping to craft policies but also through offering resources, services and supportive activities. –MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF ”

**Key Lessons Learned**

**Establishing Guiding Principles and Documenting Recommended Practices:** The Los Angeles DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework lays out basic beliefs, goals, and practices that specify how its staff and partners will work together to increase and support stakeholder engagement. In addition to establishing stakeholder engagement as a core business practice, the framework helps to ensure that a consistent approach to stakeholder engagement is being utilized across the department. It also facilitates effective communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders that promotes improved planning and service delivery.

“ Sustainable success depends upon adopting [stakeholder engagement] principles as a department-wide practice to strengthen community partnerships and support continuous learning. –MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF ”

**Embracing Collaboration and Shared Decision-Making:** The stakeholder engagement activities carried out as part of DCFS’ Strategy Management Model were designed to involve staff at all levels, family and youth constituents, and community partners in the design and implementation of department goals and initiatives. The intent is to ensure that the right mix of stakeholders are engaged, including: a) those who have the formal authority to make

decisions; b) those who are directly impacted by proposed plans; and c) content experts who have the technical expertise needed to successfully implement chosen strategies. Through the establishment of guiding bodies such as the Director’s Child Welfare Advisory Council and Regional Community Alliances, the department has invested in the development of new infrastructures that provide formal mechanisms for joint planning and collaborative decision-making among diverse internal and external stakeholders.

**Utilizing Technical Assistance to Help Drive Stakeholder Engagement Efforts:** Having access to a consultant team that could provide content expertise, both with regard to design and implementation, while also helping to facilitate concrete skill building, has been critical to the success of DCFS’ stakeholder engagement strategies. By partnering with the WPIC Team, the department was able to draw on various research and literature bases, such as Implementation Science and organizational change case studies, in charting a clear path to achieve desired outcomes. These sources of expertise were also helpful in integrating emergent lessons learned into ongoing planning. Additionally, the consultation team was instrumental in supporting meeting planning and facilitation, the creation of stakeholder engagement tools and templates to guide work planning discussions, and the modeling of best practices through one-on-one and group coaching.

“We would definitely benefit from ongoing assistance with the implementation of our strategic plan goals, including further training, support, and follow up on community building within each area. –EDWARD FITHYAN, ASSISTANT REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR, BELVEDERE OFFICE

**Investing in Knowledge and Capacity Building:** The department’s commitment to learning from other successful stakeholder engagement practices to support the development of an agency-wide framework and minimum standards for community advisory bodies helped to create supportive conditions for implementation. WPIC conducted a scan of national child welfare stakeholder engagement best practices, which supported the department in the design and implementation of their own stakeholder engagement approach. (See page 29 for an abbreviated list of national best practice models). The development and facilitation of related skill-building trainings was also instrumental to the promotion of a continuous learning environment, where stakeholders could contribute to the formation and adaptation of stakeholder engagement strategies.

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### Implications for Growing and Sustaining DCFS Stakeholder Engagement

The Stakeholder Engagement Process at DCFS illustrates the importance of developing the infrastructure to successfully implement broad-scale system change. A strong foundation for strengthening stakeholder engagement efforts has been laid with the creation of a guiding framework and establishment of both the CWAC and Regional Community Alliances. Yet, responsibility for overseeing the ongoing support and growth of these

efforts has not yet been formally linked to a DCFS Unit or Division. Without consistent leadership and identification of continuing resources to support this work, the capacity building and implementation progress achieved to date is at great risk of stalling. As a first step, establishing dedicated staffing at the Bureau level could provide much needed support for the continued coordination of ongoing communication and convenings.

“The importance of having strong and consistent Executive endorsement of stakeholder engagement cannot be overstated. Delivering the message from the top to the implementers – including Deputy Directors and staff in regional offices – that it is valued and important is a key to building more support and resources. –MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF

“When we talk about resourcing stakeholder engagement, there also needs to be a commitment to understanding and addressing how that relates to actual tasks. If we have a set expectation that guidelines will be followed, there is a workload associated with implementing them. With people working at or near capacity, the need for additional resources and the prioritization of tasks has to be addressed.”

–COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III

- Because various types of stakeholder engagement are occurring at multiple levels of the department, bureaus, and regional offices, the question of how to establish more consistent and better-coordinated communications about intended engagement goals and preferred strategies remains an important but open issue.
- Building on the example provided by DDDM, additional opportunities exist to formally embed stakeholder engagement more broadly across multiple DCFS Strategic Plan Objectives as an essential planning and strategy development practice.
- The alignment of the Stakeholder Engagement Framework with the department’s Core Practice Model can provide a critical avenue for exploring how best practices for engaging clients are supported through parallel organizational policies and management structures.
- Developing an internal train-the-trainer module will help to promote the continued institutionalization of the Stakeholder Engagement Framework within DCFS, as will soliciting input from line operations about how to translate key concepts and guiding principles into concrete policies and structural changes.
- The creation of a new internal coach/consultant post that could provide ongoing support around the implementation of stakeholder engagement practices would greatly enhance the quality of strategy development as well as alignment across department initiatives.

**Conclusion**

Although the robust stakeholder engagement process as envisioned by DCFS has not yet been completely implemented and permanently established as part of the department’s ongoing culture, it has established the roots and budding infrastructure to build to a comprehensive and in-depth process. The widespread ownership of stakeholder engagement, the success of the initial efforts, and the formal acknowledgement of its importance has initiated the kind of change within the department that will be able to evolve over time. The experiences from this beginning phase will contribute to new lessons, learning and capacity, which DCFS aspires will result in improved organizational effectiveness, and thereby achieve more positive outcomes for children and families.



Just by having the Stakeholder Engagement Framework in writing, it provides a level of authority that the principles and proven processes it outlines are expectation of the department...as is carrying out engagement in a strengths-based way. It's something we can agree to and train to.



—COREY HANEMOTO, CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATOR III



Participation in the stakeholder engagement training helped to reinforce the value of including stakeholders in our DCFS planning process. As a result of the training, the stakeholder engagement principles are currently being used as a framework to actively involve our key community partners in the co-creation of best practice strategies to improve the lives of children and families.



—MARILYNNE GARRISON, DIVISION CHIEF, COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT DIVISION

# The Stakeholder Engagement Framework

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## Defining Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a critical business practice within child welfare, both as it looks to its internal and external stakeholders. It is critical that child welfare agencies ensure that their internal stakeholders have clearly defined input mechanisms and understanding of the organization's strategies and goals. Conversely, it is imperative that youth, families, caregivers, and external partners have a clear understanding of the child welfare organization's mission, strategies and objectives, and have mechanisms to provide feedback to the department in how best to achieve their mission.

**The Altria consulting group, often called upon by organizations to improve its engagement of stakeholders defines it this way:**

Successful engagement differs from opinion research, message delivery, and lobbying because it requires a commitment to actively engage with stakeholders, listen to them, build a respectful relationship with them, and then respond to their concerns in a mutually beneficial way.

It is based on an organization's willingness to consider changing what it aims to achieve and how it operates (i.e. staffing, training, policies, communications, and organizational structure) as a result of learning that which arises from stakeholder engagement. <sup>1</sup>

In other words, it is both an activity organized initially by an agency that has decided it needs stakeholder engagement and over time, it can be an ongoing relationship of continuous learning and regular influence on decision making among all the stakeholders involved in the agency. The WPIC perspective on stakeholder engagement presumes that the ultimate goal of undertaking a stakeholder engagement process is to create and sustain an agency environment that utilizes and benefits from the highest level of stakeholder engagement.

## The Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is not an end in itself, nice to have, or just a good way to manage crises when they come along. It may start as an activity to help solve a problem but as the continuous loop of engagement develops and matures over time, stakeholder engagement becomes an essential and mutually beneficial strategic function that results in better-informed staff and constituents as well as more effective policies, projects, programs and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Planning Overview, (2003) Business for Social Responsibility for use by Altria Group, Inc.

## Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement: Table 1

<b>Benefits for DCFS</b>	<b>Benefits for Stakeholders</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved communication between DCFS and other individuals, groups and organizations that work with the department.</li><li>• Access to critical information on the experiences of community and families, and others involved in the system.</li><li>• Ability to consider the implications of policy initiatives or proposals to inform strategy development.</li><li>• Ensuring services are delivered in collaboration with stakeholders and demonstrate outcomes to address community needs.</li><li>• Improved relationships and a wider network of support for families.</li><li>• Greater cooperation, collaboration and mutual support among internal and external stakeholders.</li><li>• Improved risk management practices – allowing risks and implications to be identified and considered earlier.</li><li>• Streamlined policy and program development processes.</li><li>• Enhanced community confidence in DCFS.</li><li>• Enhanced capacity to promote innovation and sustain programs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greater opportunities to contribute directly to policy and program improvements.</li><li>• Ability to have their issues heard.</li><li>• Opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.</li><li>• More open and transparent lines of communication.</li><li>• Increased accountability of DCFS to honor their commitments.</li><li>• Early identification of connections between stakeholder interests and DCFS work, encouraging collaborative and comprehensive solutions to address complex goals and challenges.</li><li>• Increased understanding of department goals, service delivery standards and parameters.</li><li>• Ability to positively improve conditions for children and families in their communities.</li></ul>

Together, the benefits for DCFS and stakeholders are intended to lead to better organizational outcomes for the children and families it serves, strengthened relationships and trust both internally and externally, and a more positive view of the agency from its staff and the public. Experience in many venues across multiple jurisdictions has also shown that the earlier stakeholders are engaged, the more likely the above benefits will be realized.

## Levels of Stakeholder Engagement

All stakeholder engagement processes are not the same. They have different purposes, scopes of responsibility and reach, and levels of engagement that are expected from the stakeholders involved. The different levels of engagement are important in understanding the current level of stakeholder engagement in the agency's work and the characteristics of the level a new process is designed to reach. For some limited purposes, a less intensive and participatory level of engagement may be sufficient to achieve the organizational goals.

### Levels of Stakeholder Engagement in Action

This table describes four levels of stakeholder participation: *Inform, Consult, Involve & Collaborate/Empower*. Planners can use it to determine the existing stakeholder engagement situation within the agency, what level of engagement the new process is intended to achieve and how different levels of engagement might be appropriate for different purposes. It can be used:

- as a discussion guide for initial conversations about a new proposed stakeholder engagement process to help clarify the purpose and scope of the process;
- as part of training for staff and facilitators working to implement the process; or
- as a discussion guide for guiding bodies and individual stakeholders to understand the process and their roles in it.

LEVELS of STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	MAY BE APPROPRIATE WHEN:	IS NOT APPROPRIATE WHEN:
<p><b>INFORM:</b> This is essentially one-way 'communication'. Announcements, press releases, position statements, and prepared statements are all methods and tools for this level. Stakeholders receive information without an expectation of two-way dialogue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no avenue for alternative forms of action (e.g. legal boundaries)</li> <li>• You are reporting decisions or a course of action that doesn't affect others.</li> <li>• It is used at the start of a process, with the promise of more opportunity to participate later.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People want more active involvement.</li> <li>• You are seeking to honor community interests and engage in discussion.</li> <li>• There are alternatives available for broader stakeholder participation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONSULT:</b> Proposals and options are presented to stakeholders, who provide feedback that is incorporated in planning. This is most commonly done through focus groups, individual interviews or surveys. The goal is to benefit from stakeholders' greater knowledge of local conditions and opinions. Decision making, power and control remains completely with the agency leadership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You want to improve an existing service and need consumer feedback.</li> <li>• You have clear plans for a project, and there appear to be a limited range of options for change.</li> <li>• Local community interests can understand and relate to these options.</li> <li>• You are able to use feedback to choose between or modify options.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback is not going to be integrated into the final decisions.</li> <li>• You are seeking to empower community interests and engage discussion among a large range of stakeholders.</li> <li>• There are not clear options already developed and you are seeking a range of ideas before developing options.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INVOLVE:</b> Stakeholders are authentically engaged in generating options and carrying out actions that emerge from their input, but their participation falls short of sharing formal decision-making authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to tap into stakeholder skills and experience in order to carry out plans.</li> <li>• Stakeholders have a strong desire to participate in the proposed work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have little room for implementing broader input and participation.</li> <li>• You don't have the resources or skills to carry out the proposal with stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<p><b>COLLABORATE/EMPOWER:</b> Deciding and acting together with stakeholders based upon shared goals. It is a longer, more complex process, which requires more preparation and support for stakeholder involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important that stakeholders 'own' the development and implementation processes.</li> <li>• The various interests involved all get some extra benefit from acting together.</li> <li>• There is commitment to the time and effort needed to develop a partnership.</li> <li>• There is enough time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time is very limited.</li> <li>• The commitment to partnership is only superficial (e.g. One party holds all the power/resources and uses this to impose its own solutions.)</li> <li>• Participants want to be part of making decisions, but do not share a long-term stake in carrying out solutions.</li> </ul>



## Purpose and Background: THE DCFS Stakeholder Engagement Framework

A framework provides an underlying set of ideas, principles, agreements or guidelines that provides a 'roadmap' and supportive structure for achieving a specific goal.

The Stakeholder Engagement Framework represents Los Angeles DCFS's ongoing commitment to work effectively with its stakeholders, learn from past stakeholder engagement experiences and continue to improve performance. In 2012, the Executive Leadership Team identified the need for a more strategic and systematic approach to stakeholder engagement and management across the department. They sought the creation of a framework that could be consistently implemented throughout the department, including each of the regional offices; and support recommended actions that enhance stakeholder engagement strategies, systems and processes.

This decision was made after a challenging period, beginning in 2009, when the department was the subject of intense media and public scrutiny after the *Los Angeles Times* published a series of investigative articles that examined fatalities among children who had passed through its child welfare system. Additionally, the engagement of over 3,000 internal and external stakeholders via DCFS' Strategic Planning feedback forums that were held throughout Los Angeles County in 2010 further reinforced the importance of engaging those most affected by the child welfare system in order to improve practice.

The Stakeholder Engagement Framework was developed as a result of the 2010 Strategic Planning effort, and lays out basic beliefs, goals, and practices that specify how DCFS staff and partners will work together to increase and support stakeholder engagement. Specifically, the framework:

- Defines the key principles and components of an effective stakeholder engagement process as a basis for ongoing planning and service delivery;
- Presents proven strategies for facilitating effective communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders; and
- Formally establishes stakeholder engagement as a core business practice.

Core framework components include a set of guiding principles and a process model for managing engagement that outlines key phases and activities. A model for developing and sustaining effective stakeholder engagement in the work groups and teams charged with elements of the process ("guiding bodies") are described in detail in Phase 2 of implementation.

## Guiding Principles of Stakeholder Engagement

The following eight (8) guiding principles articulate formal standards and expectations for how DCFS will work with stakeholders to accomplish agreed upon goals. This particular list of principles was developed over several months of work with staff at the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. The discussions in multiple groups debated the meaning, intent and possible actions implied by the principles before a final list was synthesized for the whole department. Within the DCFS stakeholder engagement activities, these principles are meant to guide all aspects of the stakeholder engagement process. These principles should be used to ensure there are a consistent set of values and beliefs throughout the department as it engages stakeholders, inform decision-making and planning for new activities, and provide guidance for assessing how well current or past engagement efforts align with the stated principles.

### 1. Inlusiveness & Representation:

Encourage broad involvement and seek representation from diverse stakeholder groups. Inclusiveness also requires understanding how to create an environment, both physically and emotionally, that makes it possible for stakeholders to fully participate and engage in planning, decision making, and implementation activities.

### 2. Reciprocity & Partnership:

Create relationships with stakeholders that are based on mutual learning, understanding, and desire to identify solutions that benefit both the agency and the stakeholder. Stakeholders must be treated with the deepest respect and consideration.

### 3. Clear & Transparent Communication:

Provide access to clear, pertinent information about goals and agendas, roles, and strategies that are being proposed or impacted. Establish clear, transparent information and feedback processes. Transparency involves being candid and willing to acknowledge mistakes, misunderstandings and what is not known.

### 4. Accountability & Follow Up:

Be timely and clear about follow up, including how and when it will occur as well as who is responsible. Share relevant data, information, and feedback with stakeholders, including how information will be used in any reports, policies or strategies. Ensure that feedback is shared and used not only consistently, but also constructively.

### 5. Integrity:

Honor agreements and commitments to action, which build trust. Create an environment where mutual respect is fostered and it is clearly communicated (verbally and non-verbally) that the stakeholder's opinions matter.

### 6. Mutual Learning:

Create a relationship and environment with stakeholders where everyone can cooperatively share and learn from each other's experiences, expertise and information. Engaging with stakeholders doesn't mean that the sponsoring agency's role is to "teach" them something. It means that we are here to discover and create solutions together, which requires an attitude of openness and humility.

### 7. Flexibility & Adaptability:

Create plans and situations that are flexible. Stakeholders might identify urgent needs that must be addressed that may not be part of the original agenda. This urgency cannot be ignored.

### 8. Respect & Relationship Centered:

For the framework and process to be successful, building strong collaborative relationships with stakeholders whose contributions are valued and respected must be at the center of the work.

## EXERCISE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES SELF-REFLECTION CHECKLIST

This checklist can be used a tool for self-reflection, discussion and planning tool to examine the alignment between existing practices and the agreed upon guiding principles for stakeholder engagement.



### Guiding Principles Checklist – A Self-Reflection Tool

This checklist is a self-reflection, discussion and planning tool for examining current stakeholder engagement practices against the backdrop of the principles developed by Los Angeles DCFS. It should be adapted to reflect the principles developed through a stakeholder engagement initiation for any other agency or organization before being used.

This type of instrument is designed to be used by individuals as a way to understand the implications of the principles and to analyze the difference between the current situation and the changed environment that is envisioned by the stakeholder engagement process. It can also be used as a prompt for small group discussions among members of a team. The discussion that follows can help the team gain a common understanding of the meanings of the principles and point the way toward the aspects of the principles that will need work in the next stages of the process.

Project leaders may also find it helpful to compare their responses with those of other stakeholders, such as fellow staff and constituent groups, to see where their impressions are similar or different. These differences should be analyzed and discussed across the stakeholder groups as a way to more fully understand the different perspectives represented across the spectrum of stakeholders.

As a self reflection instrument, this tool is not intended to be used as an evaluation tool or analyzed quantitatively other than to clarify differences in perception or areas where work needs to be done to pull the stakeholder engagement process into alignment with the agreed upon principles.

**RESPONSE KEY:**    1 = Never            2 = Occasionally/Sometimes            3 = Often            4 = Almost Always

#### PRINCIPLE 1: INCLUSIVENESS & REPRESENTATION

*Recognize, understand and involve stakeholders early and throughout the process.*

RATING

Identifying and facilitating the participation of stakeholders whose interests, aspirations ..... 1 2 3 4  
and concerns are affected by the agency's work is a priority.

Engagement practices help to ensure that the different agendas of different ..... 1 2 3 4  
communities and stakeholders are represented.

There are systems in place to ensure that underrepresented, hard to reach, and ..... 1 2 3 4  
marginalized groups are engaged in equitable and culturally appropriate ways.

#### PRINCIPLE 2: RECIPROCITY AND PARTNERSHIP

*Mutually beneficial and co-ownership of shared goals/strategies is fostered.*

Collaboration and co-ownership of the engagement process is promoted. .... 1 2 3 4

Departmental representatives and key decision makers are accessible to stakeholders. .... 1 2 3 4

Active listening is demonstrated by responding to the ideas and issues voiced by all ..... 1 2 3 4  
stakeholders with clear sensitivity.

Stakeholder outreach strategies ensure that the right people are engaged; ..... 1 2 3 4

Participants are fully representative of their group and have the appropriate  
skill set/knowledge base for the task at hand.

**PRINCIPLE 3: CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION**

*Information about the engagement process is shared through a clearly defined process, providing agreed upon information and feedback opportunities.* RATING

Decision-making processes are negotiated with stakeholders and defined from the beginning. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The boundaries of the engagement process, including the commitment of resources and the level of influence expected from the various parties involved in the process is clearly communicated to stakeholders. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The intended outcomes and progress of the project are regularly articulated to stakeholders through appropriate vehicles and opportunities. . . . . 1 2 3 4

**PRINCIPLE 4: ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW UP**

*Follow up and feedback processes are clear and agreed upon information is shared openly.*

The process and provisions for two-way feedback are established with the group from the beginning. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The decisions and outcomes of meetings with stakeholders are well documented and shared openly. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Appropriate information about department results and performance is reported through an agreed upon process. . . . . 1 2 3 4

**PRINCIPLE 5: INTEGRITY**

*Stakeholder engagement processes build the department's credibility and stakeholder trust and confidence in its actions.*

Agreements and the ground rules for engagement processes are consistently honored. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Decisions that are outside the scope of the engagement process are made clear from the beginning. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Responsibility is taken for departmental promises and actions. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The proclaimed values of departmental policies and codes of conduct are consistent with practice on the ground. . . . . 1 2 3 4

**PRINCIPLE 6: MUTUAL LEARNING**

*Stakeholders openly share and learn from each other's experiences, expertise and information.*

Engagement processes are conducted in a manner that encourages mutual learning vs. one-way communication or information sharing. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Stakeholder knowledge, perspectives, and experiences are highly valued as a resource. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The knowledge and perspectives of stakeholders is consistently integrated into the department's planning and decision-making activities. . . . . 1 2 3 4

**PRINCIPLE 7: FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY**

*The engagement of stakeholders is carried out in a flexible, appropriate manner that encourages participation.*

Systems are in place to solicit and utilize stakeholder feedback during planning processes. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Planning processes are flexible enough to be modified based on stakeholder feedback. . . . . 1 2 3 4

**PRINCIPLE 8: RESPECT AND RELATIONSHIP-CENTERED**

*Open and effective engagement involves both listening and talking (two-way communication).*

Engagement is conducted in a manner that fosters mutual respect and trust. . . . . 1 2 3 4

The diversity and culture of stakeholders is acknowledged, supported and respected. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Honest working relationships are built through the provision of accurate and timely information. . . . . 1 2 3 4

Realistic expectations are set and agreed to early in the process. . . . . 1 2 3 4

# Stakeholder Engagement Framework: Phases and Key Activities

## Stakeholder Engagement Process Model

This model illustrates eight phases of a comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Process – from its inception to completion and evaluation. Within each of the phases of engagement, recommended activities ensure consistency with the Stakeholder Engagement Framework – whether the activities are specific to agency-wide plans, a regional office, a support program, or a targeted geographic area. The order of these process steps may vary according to a

project’s purpose, status and timeline but the principles that guide the work remain the same and the practices in each step should reinforce the principles.

The phases and key activities included here are based on lessons learned from stakeholder engagement processes used by the Los Angeles DCFS with assistance from the Western and Pacific Implementation Center and a review of established best practices for child welfare systems.



# The Stakeholder Engagement Process

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Undertaking a new stakeholder engagement process is usually the result of a need to solve a problem, institute a new program or intervention, or improve services and practices. If stakeholder engagement is a new process to the organization, involving stakeholders at even a basic level takes on a life of its own. Engagement itself may be the outcome that's most important, with the assumption that the engagement will begin to help the organization solve problems and improve practices. In this case, the work of stakeholder engagement takes center stage.

A more complex and extensive engagement process may include internal and external feedback, input, decision making about outcomes, engagement in solving problems or implementing new strategies and then evaluating the results as the goal, with the assumption that stakeholders have to be involved in every aspect of improvement to the organization's work. In this case, the initial process of engaging internal and external stakeholders is the starting point for a more extensive engagement process that moves forward into selecting, implementing, and evaluating interventions or programs.

The process described in this toolkit assumes that the ultimate goal of stakeholder engagement is the development of a sustainable structure and process intended to engage internal and external stakeholders on an ongoing basis with all aspects of the department's work. The steps in the process can be adapted for a less comprehensive strategy that may focus on a single group of stakeholders, on a single problem or issue that need resolution or a process needed for a time limited project.

## PHASE 1: PLAN & DESIGN

### ALIGN YOUR PURPOSE AND PROCESS

The Plan and Design Phase strategically defines concrete objectives for the stakeholder engagement activity, creates a preliminary workplan, and determines the most effective methods for engaging the right mix of stakeholders for the intended purpose of the activity. When guided by a well-defined purpose and sound plan of action, all stakeholders are more likely to invest their time, input, and energy toward contributing to the desired outcomes. Specifically defined results also facilitate effective collaboration and knowledge sharing, which lead to better results and outcomes. Conversely, a poorly conceived engagement effort can undermine the potential to successfully achieve project goals, create mistrust, waste stakeholders' time, and lead to 'engagement fatigue' – a reluctance to participate in future activities.

### Defining Results

Defining the desired results, or the reason for why a stakeholder engagement process should take place, is the single most important stage of the process. A strong set of results should be highly focused while a poorly defined set of results is often vague regarding the intent of the project, and open to different interpretations.

## Questions to help define results:

- What do you want to achieve overall at the end of this process (i.e. anticipated results)?
- What changes and/or tangible products do you want to create as a result of this stakeholder engagement process?
- How will those changes and/or products benefit the operation of the agency?  
How will they benefit those being served by the agency?  
How will they benefit those who are partnering with the agency?

## Creating an Effective Work Plan

Because there is no 'one size fits all' model for stakeholder engagement, effective planning is critical to achieving success. A sound stakeholder engagement work plan should be tailored to the particular needs of the project, stakeholders and the situation. This entails identifying 'what is needed', 'who' will do the work, and 'how' will it be accomplished.

An effective stakeholder engagement work plan should be based on:

**Desired Results and Products:** Identify what is to be accomplished as a result of the stakeholder engagement process. Tangible products of an engagement process can include strategies, recommendations, plans, reports or meetings. These products are steps along the way toward improved outcomes for the identified issue or problem that created the need for new stakeholder engagement in the first place. The desired results are the ultimate outcome intended for the whole effort.

**Timeline:** Consider how long implementation will take, keeping in mind that planning and outreach often require more time than anticipated. Review key dates and actions, including when decisions need to be made during the planning and engagement process. Time should also be allocated for implementing, documenting, and evaluating activities as well as sharing the results to inform future work.

**Required Resources:** Adequate staffing and funding to support effective stakeholder engagement is essential. An effort that has insufficient staff time to manage the steps in the process, create and sustain the relationships necessary to make it work is not likely to be successful.

## Purposes for Engaging Stakeholders

- Informing decision making by those who will be impacted
- Encouraging a wider circle of collaboration and partnership
- Increasing networking and sharing of strategies, best practices, etc.
- Enhancing understanding of stakeholder needs and wants
- Encouraging buy-in and shared ownership of policies/projects
- Establishing more open communication channels
- Improving working relationships, gaining trust or changing perceptions for the better
- Ensuring early identification of potential issues/pitfalls
- Affirming that relevant issues are being addressed
- Providing a forum for problem solving and resolution of conflicts

**Outreach and Engagement Methods:** Many different methods can be used to engage stakeholders at different stages of the work. Think through how different participation methods will achieve the desired outcomes (For example, how will this meeting help achieve our overall outcomes? Would a survey that could reach more people be better for this purpose at this time in the process?).

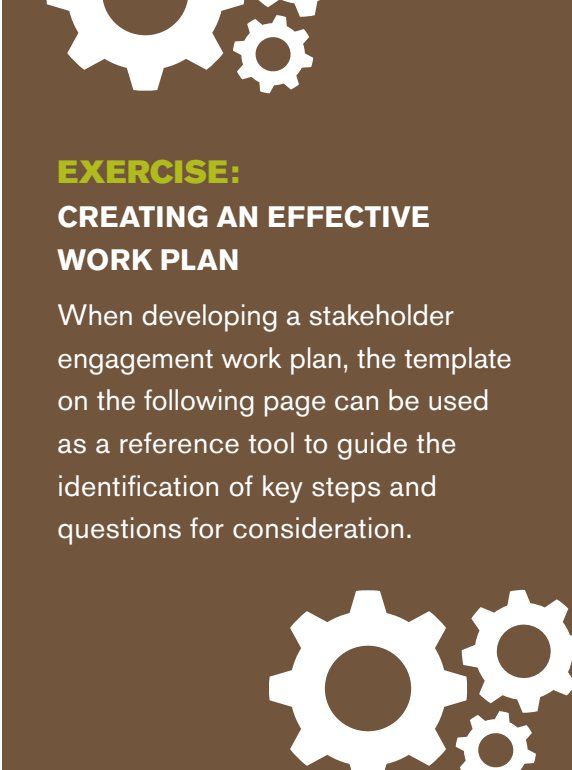
**Logistics:** Stakeholder engagement requires ensuring that scheduling, the choice of venue, and information-sharing strategies are suitable and user-friendly to the group. Take into consideration how logistical arrangements might positively or negatively affect the engagement process and desired outcomes.

**Communications:** Communication is important throughout the engagement process. It is needed at the outset to get people interested, during the process so they are kept abreast of what is happening, at the end and as follow-up, to ensure that participants are aware of what difference the process has made. Consider how you will communicate with potential stakeholders regarding goals, plans, and results.

**Documentation:** Keeping track of what happens as the process unfolds is essential to ensure that everyone stays on the same page, recalls the reasoning behind decisions that have been made, and allows newcomers to the process to get up to speed with a consistent report of prior meetings and discussions.

**Follow Up:** From the start of planning, it is important to consider how the results of your engagement effort will be used and disseminated (For example, how will stakeholder input feed into decision-making systems? How will the final outcomes be reported back to the participants? Will strategies include the distribution of reports and/or convening meetings?).

**Success Measures:** How will you know whether the activities that stakeholders have been involved in planning have been a success? The original results and purpose should identify the criteria for success.

A decorative graphic on a dark brown background. At the top, two white gears are partially visible, overlapping the edge. At the bottom, three white gears of different sizes are arranged in a cluster, also overlapping the edge. The text is centered in the middle of the graphic.

**EXERCISE:**  
**CREATING AN EFFECTIVE  
WORK PLAN**

When developing a stakeholder engagement work plan, the template on the following page can be used as a reference tool to guide the identification of key steps and questions for consideration.



## Stakeholder Engagement Work Plan Template

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan Template highlights the issues and key questions that require consideration when preparing to engage with stakeholders.

<b>PURPOSE</b>	Engagement Results	<p>What is the problem intended to be solved? Why is stakeholder engagement vital to the solution?</p> <p>What are the desired results, tangible products, and criteria for success for the process?</p> <p>How will those changes/products benefit the department and/or others?</p> <p>How do they relate to Strategic Plan Objectives?</p>
<b>WHO</b>	Stakeholders	<p>Who are the stakeholders that should be included in the effort? What is known about these groups such as key characteristics, behavior, values, cultures, needs?</p>
<b>HOW</b>	Stakeholders Roles	<p>What roles will stakeholders play? How will they contribute to the achievement of defined goals?</p>
	Outreach	<p>Have the relevant stakeholders been identified? Has an outreach plan been developed? Who will execute the outreach?</p>
	Proposed Method of Engagement	<p>How will stakeholders be engaged? (e.g. attend workshops, provide training at forums, contribute feedback to online tools, etc.) Why would this method work best for this group of stakeholders at this point in the process?</p>
	Timing	<p>What is the schedule and timeline for this effort?</p>
	Resources	<p>What resources will you need to conduct the engagement process? (e.g. staffing, funding)</p>
	Responsibility	<p>Who is responsible for ensuring successful engagement of stakeholders?</p>
	Key Messages to Communicate	<p>What are the key messages you want to convey and communicate to stakeholders?</p>
<b>OTHER CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Risks and Opportunities	<p>What risks and opportunities are involved in undertaking this stakeholder engagement effort?</p> <p>What benefit will stakeholders get? What is the cost or potential risk for their participation?</p>
	Success Measures	<p>What evidence or indicators will be used to measure stakeholder engagement? Of the success of the project or initiative?</p>

## Creating Conditions *for* Success

During the Plan and Design phase, creating conditions for success within your own agency or organization requires taking action from the beginning to promote shared ownership and support of the engagement effort among key stakeholders.

### Assessing the Environment .....

Before embarking upon a formal stakeholder engagement process, you will want to consider the following questions:

- How interested and committed are key decision makers to engaging identified stakeholders? What is their desired level of involvement in the process?
- How will the stakeholder engagement process [fit into decision-making systems (e.g. timing, required documents, etc.)]?
- Which other activities -- past or planned -- have addressed the same issues, and/or involved the same participants? This is required to avoid duplication of effort and creates opportunities for information sharing.
- Are there any legal or policy parameters that might impact stakeholder participation?
- What are the existing relationships between key stakeholders? Are there alliances or a history of antagonism between stakeholders that have been identified?
- What is the diversity of participants and how might the different kinds of diversity represented influence the need for varied engagement methods? Consider diversity across a broad range of perspectives, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, gender, geography, etc.
- What is the level of experience among identified stakeholder groups in participating and providing input into agency activities?

### How to Win Support for the Plans .....

- Co-design the plan with a guiding body (see section on Guiding Bodies on page 27)
- Seek the input of internal and external decision makers early and often to help shape your plans. Make sure they fully understand project goals and identify what's in it for them.
- Manage expectations to ensure that they are realistic and achievable.
- Be proactive when identifying potential issues of concern and ways to address them.
- Be clear about who is responsible for which elements of your strategy and exactly what it is that you are asking others to do.
- Once key stakeholders have been engaged, identify 'champions' to support your effort. Champions are stakeholders who have the interest, expertise, resources, or influence to be effective advocates for proposed results and strategies. They fully understand the benefits and value of the stakeholder engagement effort.

### How to Engage and Support Champions .....

- Appeal to their passion, common vision, and values along with their sense of what's at stake in achieving stated goals.
- Co-design with them on planning to increase their commitment, excitement and understanding of the benefits to be gained.
- Provide them with helpful talking points regarding the rationale for proposed strategies and anticipated benefits to help ensure clear, consistent messaging about project goals and stakeholder engagement plans.

## Conducting a Stakeholder Analysis

Who should be involved in an engagement process depends on the purpose of the activity and the results that the process is expected to achieve. For example, if the process is intended to develop and implement changes in practice with a specific group of clients, it's critical to engage staff and client stakeholders who work with or belong to that specific group. Once the intended results are clear, then deciding who should be involved in the process of getting there is easier. Stakeholder analysis helps to identify and assess the importance of key people, groups of people, and institutions that may influence the success of your activity or project. When preparing to engage stakeholders, the ability to understand their opinions, expectations, and contributions is critical to developing effective strategies for gaining their support and commitment to future action. A Stakeholder Analysis:

“ Stakeholder Analysis is critical to the success of every project. It is your guide for engaging the right people in the right way, which builds the support needed to succeed. ”

- Improves the chances for the success by identifying the interests of relevant stakeholders and the appropriate type of participation for different stakeholders.
- Ensures that engagement efforts promote a range of diverse participants and perspectives (e.g. cultural, geographic, gender, economic, etc.) vs. relying on the 'usual suspects'. It opens the door for engaging groups that may be marginalized or overlooked to contribute.
- Helps the engagement processes avoid being blindsided by concerns or conflicts that might not be considered without this analysis.

### STEP 1: IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The right mix of stakeholders, including the appropriate balance of internal and external individuals, groups and/or organizations, should be selected for the specific result the engagement work expects to achieve: the problem to be solved, the decision to be made, the specific actions that are envisioned as a result of the engagement process.

#### **Choose a Mix of Stakeholders Who:**

- Are closest to being impacted by the identified issue.
- Have authority to make decisions or provide resources to achieve desired results.
- Have the technical expertise needed to achieve desired results.

#### **Promote Stakeholder Diversity by:**

- Including participants and perspectives that represent the full spectrum of stakeholders in terms of culture/ethnicity, geographic location, gender, economic status, individual roles, etc.
- Reaching out to those who may not have been involved in this issue to date, but who possess key information and experience important to the outcome, including hard to reach or marginalized groups that may require some additional strategizing and outreach.

#### **Learn from Past Efforts:**

- Seek out previous stakeholder engagement champions in your agency or technical assistance providers who can help identify key stakeholders for this effort.

## Potential Stakeholders Identified for the Work with LA DCFS:

### Internal Agency Stakeholders

- Executive Leadership
- Mid-level Managers
- Case Workers
- Program Staff
- Support Staff

### County System Leadership

- Board of Supervisors, and Children's Deputies
- Commission for Children, Youth and Families
- County Health and Human Services Departments, including Mental Health and Probation
- Courts with jurisdiction over DCFS clients

### Community Groups & Leaders

- Community based organizations
- Community leaders
- Faith-based organizations
- Law Enforcement
- School Districts
- Community Service Groups
- Business Leaders

### Contributors & Partners

- Donors
- Collaborating Organizations
- Consultants
- Child Welfare Training and Technical Assistance Networks
- University Partners

### Clients

- Current system-involved children, youth and families
- Formerly involved children, youth and families

### Policy Groups

- Policy Makers – local, state and federal
- Advocacy Organizations
- Government Agencies

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## STEP 2: ASSESS STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS & POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Now that you have identified who your key stakeholders are, go deeper to determine what motivates them and what they may contribute.

**Stakeholder Interests:** Do all the stakeholders want to be involved and, if so, how much?  
Or would they prefer to be informed about the project and its process?

**Stakeholder Contributions:** How critical is the stakeholders' involvement to achieving success?  
Does the stakeholder have important experience, expertise and/or resources to offer?  
Do the stakeholders have formal or informal influence that can affect the project?

Use this information to gauge each individual's involvement as you develop an engagement plan.

## EXERCISE: WHO HAS A STAKE? WORKSHEET



This worksheet can be used to help you identify and familiarize yourself with stakeholders as a first step toward developing an engagement plan. It includes space for identifying key stakeholders along with their affiliation, interests, benefits, motivations, and potential contributions to your work.

<b>WORKSHEET: Who Has a Stake?</b>	<b>Stakeholder Name, Group or Organization</b>	<b>Internal or External Stakeholder?</b>	<b>Based on your experience and available data, what's in it for them? (What are their goals, benefits, motivations, concerns and conflicts)</b>	<b>Potential role/ contribution to your goals</b>
<b>DECISION-MAKERS</b> Who has direct authority over decisions involving the goals/ issues being addressed?				
<b>MOST AFFECTED</b> Who are the people and/or groups that might be most affected by your stated goals				
<b>TECHNICAL EXPERTS</b> Who has been involved in this type of work in the past that can provide relevant expertise and experience?				
<b>INFLUENCERS</b> Who could use their influence to help or hinder the engagement process?				
<b>NEW PARTICIPANTS</b> Who has not been involved in this work to date, but should be included? (Includes hard-to-reach groups.)				
<b>RESOURCES</b> Who can provide requisite resources and assistance?				

### STEP 3: LEVELS OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The third and final step of the stakeholder analysis includes identification of appropriate levels of stakeholder engagement for your project and outreach methods for key stakeholders, based on their interests and likely contributions.

There are four distinct levels of stakeholder engagement to choose from when determining what role(s) may be most appropriate for key stakeholders: **Inform, Consult, Involve, and Collaborate/Empower**. Use **Levels of Stakeholder Engagement in Action** as a guide for determining which of the four levels may be most appropriate for your project/initiative.

The **Goals and Methods of Engagement Matrix** (on the next page) helps define specific methods for engaging key stakeholders. It provides details about how each Level of Engagement corresponds to distinct engagement goals, your commitments to stakeholders, and potential methods of engagement.

## Goals and Methods of Engagement Matrix

	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate/ Empower</b>
<b>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT GOALS</b>	To provide balanced, objective, accurate and consistent information to assist stakeholders to understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain feedback from stakeholders about goals, strategy alternatives, analysis, and/or outcomes.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and needs are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with stakeholders on decision making regarding the development of goals, the identification of preferred solutions, and shared implementation.  To ensure that stakeholders are equipped to actively contribute to the achievement of outcomes in collaboration with others.
<b>COMMITMENT TO STAKEHOLDERS</b>	Participants will be regularly informed about goals, plans, and outcomes.	Leadership will keep stakeholders informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how stakeholder input influenced the outcome.	Leadership will work with stakeholders to ensure that expressed needs and concerns are directly reflected in the goals and alternative solutions that are developed and that evidence on how stakeholder input influenced the outcome is provided.	Leadership will seek and incorporate stakeholder recommendations when formulating solutions to the maximum extent possible.  Leadership will implement joint decisions with sufficient support for ongoing stakeholder roles.
<b>POTENTIAL METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Open houses</li> <li>• Newsletters, bulletins, circulars</li> <li>• Websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Internal and/or public meetings</li> <li>• Web-based meeting and information exchange tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberative polling</li> <li>• Solicitation of recommendations and proposals</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Provision of data</li> <li>• Web-based meeting and information exchange tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guiding or advisory bodies</li> <li>• Work groups</li> <li>• Joint planning and shared projects</li> <li>• Standing or ad-hoc committees</li> <li>• Facilitated consensus building and decision-making forums</li> <li>• Training and capacity building to support joint action</li> </ul>

Source: adapted from the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum* [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org) (2007)

## PHASE 2: INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING

### DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE GUIDING BODY

Internal engagement and capacity building, including organizing a “guiding body” for the stakeholder engagement effort is the essential next step. Guiding bodies are the teams, committees, councils or work groups who are responsible for leading or supporting stakeholder engagement efforts. Getting this group off on the right foot requires engaging the right stakeholders to be part of the guiding body, defining the group’s core functions, assessing readiness for success and building capacity if necessary, creating a charter for working together, establishing best practices for carrying out work plans and developing a communications plan to reach out to other stakeholders who will be involved.

### Overview of Guiding Bodies

**Purpose:** A guiding body is a group of stakeholders (internal or external) charged with a specific purpose to support the stakeholder engagement process. These working groups are essential to providing opportunities for stakeholders themselves to have the authority and support to make thoughtful decisions on many levels, from decisions about accessing a specific resource to changing an agency wide policy. This group can also become the champions for engaging other stakeholders as the process moves forward and as decisions about strategies are implemented.

Examples of common guiding body functions include: leading the development of project planning and implementation efforts, the provision of advice and feedback regarding the pursuit of agency goals and strategies, participation in an evaluation or research process, and/or

the piloting and implementation of new initiatives. These smaller groups can be important bell-weather when the process is designed to include many more stakeholders in larger events such as “town hall” type meetings or an extended series of meetings with many participants. The guiding body itself should guide the decisions about what type of engagement will work best for different groups of stakeholders and different purposes for engagement.

**Structure:** Depending on their purpose, guiding bodies may be created in the form of a work group, taskforce, steering committee, or advisory council. The structure of a guiding body can also vary over time, as a planning process evolves. The establishment of a formal guiding body with set membership may not be necessary for a project that is limited with respect to time and scope.

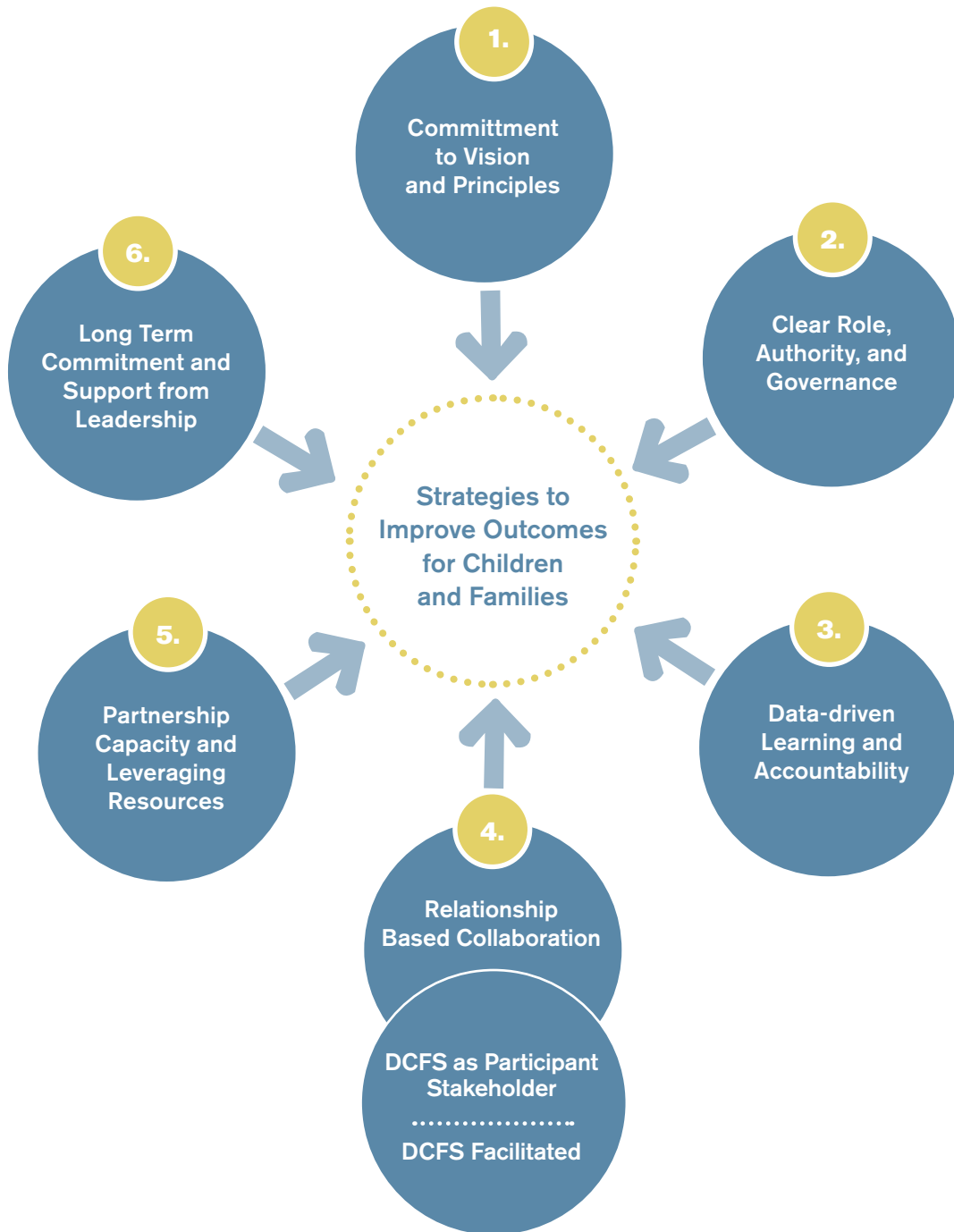
SOME COMMON TYPES of GUIDING BODY STRUCTURE	SITUATIONS WHERE THIS CAN BE USED
<b>Work Group</b>	To create implementation plans, to execute specific tasks, or to brainstorm creative recommendations.
<b>Advisory Body</b>	To advise leadership on policies and practices, to convene key stakeholders to come up with solutions, to develop leadership of key staff, clients and/or community members.
<b>Taskforce</b>	To explore a specific issue or to implement a specific area of work.
<b>Steering Committee</b>	To help make decisions on key issues, to provide oversight over staff, or to convene key allies in pushing key changes.
<b>Implementation Team</b>	Oversees implementation of a program or initiative. May be time limited pending the implementation plan, though implementation can take a number of years to complete.



## A Model *for* Effective Guiding Bodies

Guiding bodies are referenced in several stages of the Stakeholder Engagement Process as a vehicle to engage stakeholders in the planning process. These groups are simply teams or committees charged with effectively providing input through the process. Regardless of the specific assignment of any one of the “guiding bodies”, similar characteristics need to be in place for the group to be effective in carrying out their mission.

This model incorporates best practices based on national advisory and guiding body models as well as successful strategies that were utilized to support DCFS’ Strategic Planning and Data-driven Decision Making Processes.



## Child Welfare Guiding Body Case Examples

### **Pima, Arizona Systems of Care Community Council**

This guiding body includes parents, foster parents, and local organizations that work with child welfare department staff and executives to provide input on improving practices and policies. The Council conducts an annual evaluation as the basis for making recommendations about services gaps, funding, policies, etc. To support their active participation in leading Council efforts, parent participants received leadership development training. It is also worth noting that the director of the Pima, Arizona child welfare agency was initially reluctant to engage parents in this leadership role, but has since found it to be one of the best ways to advocate for creating a better system of care.

### **Wisconsin Secretary's Council on Child Welfare**

This Council was created to advise the Secretary of State on policy, budget and program issues that impact the safety, permanence and well-being of Wisconsin's children and families. Priority focus areas include: 1) Child Welfare Funding, 2) Prevention and 3) Racial Disproportionately. The council is led by members who represent diverse stakeholders that impact children and families, including philanthropic groups. One of the Council's main strategies is to create advocates for child welfare and well-being in local communities. The council's goal is to leverage community support to create more funding and resources for the public departments that serve families.

### **Los Angeles DCFS Data-driven Decision Making Data Partnership**

Those responsible for leading and co-designing the Data-driven Decision Making Process engaged many levels of staff in the formation of a guiding body known as the Data Partnership. Participants includes representatives of Executive, management, supervisory, and line staff who share responsibility for ensuring performance data is systematically collected, analyzed, and used to improve DCFS' priority safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.

### **Los Angeles DCFS Strategic Planning Objective Teams**

For each objective included in the DCFS Strategic Plan, staff members from all levels of the department volunteered to serve on Objective Teams that were charged with creating implementation plans. Operating as work groups, each Objective Team was given the authority to make recommendations to the Executive Team about operational structures, staffing, and funding, that would be needed to achieve stated outcomes and goals.

## Convening a Guiding Body

The key to an effective guiding body is 1) choosing a structure appropriate for your project and goals and 2) being clear about the guiding body's purpose and the role of its stakeholders. For instance, will the guiding body play a short-term or permanent role? Is it gathering information and providing input for a very specific or narrow purpose? Or will it play a leadership and decision-making role as part of a larger and more complex initiative?

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## Getting Started: Assessing Readiness & Meeting Capacity Building Needs

When establishing a new guiding body, it is important to consider if the designated members have the requisite knowledge base, skills and experience to accomplish the identified goals. If capacity building is needed, then a determination must be made about how best to provide training and coaching as an additional support.

### Key questions to assess readiness and need for capacity building:

- Has the guiding body defined a clear purpose, timeframe, and member roles? Are the desired outcomes for this guiding body clear?
  - Are the stakeholders engaged representative of the larger stakeholder group you are intending to impact? What is their interest? What kind of participation will work for them? (See Stakeholder Analysis in Phase 1)
  - What skills will the stakeholders in this guiding body need to adequately carry out their roles, and achieve the identified purpose?
    - ✦ What is the best approach to build the capacity of the guiding body to participate in decision making and collaborative planning?
    - ✦ What skills might the conveners/facilitators for this group need to set this guiding body up for success?
    - ✦ What internal and external resources does the host agency have available to train, coach and support members of the guiding body to reach the right level of skills, competencies and qualities in a timely way?
    - ✦ What adjustments need to be made to the workplan and timeframe to accommodate capacity building?
    - ✦ What needs to be in place ongoing to ensure effective functioning of the group?
  - What resources (staffing, space, funding, data, etc.) are necessary for this guiding body to be successful?
  - Do other guiding bodies have similar goals, functions, etc. and, if so, can they provide guidance or support for your effort? Are there opportunities for collaboration or information exchange?
- .....



### In Practice:

Staff who participate in the DCFS Data Partnership engage consultants and content experts to train them on the use of data to improve child welfare practice. They also identified internal Data Champions to assist with implementing Data-driven Decision Making in Regional offices.

## Creating a Guiding Body Charter

A charter is a written document that defines the purpose of the guiding body, how it will work, and what the expected outcomes are. It is a “roadmap” that members create at the beginning of the guiding body’s formation to ensure that all involved are clear about where the group is heading and member roles/responsibilities.

Charters should be drawn up when the body is formed. This helps members create shared understanding and expectations from the start, which is essential to ‘getting off on the right foot’.

While the precise format of charters varies from situation to situation, and from group to group, the value of the charter comes from thinking through and agreeing on various elements. To be effective, the charter should be developed in a group session to encourage collective input and buy-in. The facilitation of the development of the charter should be careful to create an open process, not driven by agency leadership, to set the stage for inclusive discussion and decision making about what the charter should contain. The agency leadership’s role is to provide background on the context and expectation from the agency’s perspective and to underscore the commitment of leadership to accepting and abiding by the charter that is developed.

### An effective charter contains key elements:

**Purpose and Context:** Why was the guiding body formed? What challenge or problem is it trying to solve? How do guiding body goals fit in with the broader objectives of the organization?

**Desired End Result and Deliverables:** What is the desired outcome of guiding body activities? What key performance indicators will be used to measure the intended success?

**Parameters of Authority:** It is important to specify which decisions the body has the authority to make, and which decisions will be referred to agency leadership or another group for decisions, using the recommendations developed from this body.

**Decision-Making Processes:** When making decisions and recommendations, it is important to determine how members will make decisions, and how they will resolve any conflicts or disagreements.

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## Common Decision-Making Processes

One or a combination of the approaches described below are typically utilized by guiding bodies.

**Consultation:** Formal management or leaders of the group ask for and receive input from the larger group before making the final decision.

**Delegation:** A designated individual or sub-committee makes the decision and reports back to the larger group.

**Participatory:** All group members take part in the development and approval of proposed actions after hearing and sharing various points of view.

**Simple Majority Voting:** Everyone in the group has an equal vote in the decision-making process and a majority is needed to approve proposals.

**Super Majority Voting:** In order to move forward, 2/3 of the group must agree to approve a proposal.

**Consensus:** All participants must agree and support the decision.

**Modified Consensus:** Participants utilize gradients of agreement to achieve modified consensus.

**Member Composition and Roles:**

Based on the guiding body’s mission and objectives, determine who is needed on the team to make sure its goals can be accomplished. Specify who will be responsible for specific duties and activities.

**Operations:**

Determine how the team will operate on a day-to-day basis. This can be as detailed or as minimal as the situation warrants. It may be comprehensive and detailed for a long-duration team, or limited to a few bullet points in a team that is expected to have a short life.

**Resources:**

Outline the resources the guiding body will need to accomplish its goals. This includes budgets, time, equipment, meeting space, and people.

**Duration and Time Commitment:**

Seek to build clarity upfront about the duration of the guiding team. For example, is it an ad hoc group meant to dissolve once it has achieved a specific task? Or is it a standing group that will be charged with tackling a host of issues over a long period of time? Also consider the estimated amount of time that guiding body members will need to dedicate on a weekly or monthly basis.

**Reporting:**

Determine whether a formal reporting structure is needed. Specify who will develop the report, how content will be developed, and how frequent reporting is needed. Be sure to include accomplishments, challenges and requests for policy, program or resource support.

**Links:**

What other groups, departments, or organizational initiatives may have overlap with the guiding body’s purpose? How will they be engaged?

## Setting the Stage for Success: Effective Management *for* Guiding Bodies

In a review of guiding bodies across the country and within Los Angeles DCFS, the following practices have been identified as critical to ensuring their effectiveness:

1. Hold regularly scheduled meetings with key leaders who have the authority to encourage participation, provide requisite resources, and ensure that agreed upon goals and tasks are accomplished.
2. Respect and honor the experiences of the stakeholders who are included in the guiding body, especially system-involved youth and families whose experiences have been proven to be very beneficial to improving practices, systems, and policies that affect them. Create an environment that enables all stakeholders, especially system-involved youth and families, to speak their truth without provoking additional traumas requires thoughtful consideration and excellent facilitation skills.
3. Provide leadership training and coaching that helps all stakeholders translate their personal experiences and perspectives into constructive recommendations for improving practices, systems and policies vs. advocating for personal agendas.
4. Eliminate barriers to participation, including: location, language access (multiple languages; avoid using acronyms and jargon), childcare, food to facilitate greater participation and consistency. Paying attention to the logistics that make it possible for these stakeholders to fully participate is critical.

## PHASE 3: LISTEN AND ENGAGE

### ENCOURAGE OPEN EXCHANGE AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Successfully engaging identified stakeholders in a respectful process allows for mutual trust and understanding to grow. This is the foundation for mutual learning, problem solving and ongoing partnership. This section describes considerations for planning and conducting successful stakeholder meetings, tips for respectful engagement, and guidance for effective follow-up communication. The content of this section is drawn both from experience with the stakeholder engagement process with the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services as well as the experience of facilitators and technical assistance providers provided through the Western and Pacific Implementation Center.

### Preparing for Successful Engagement

The way any stakeholder meeting or other kind of engagement, in any jurisdiction is conducted directly impacts participants' view of the sponsoring agency and of the whole stakeholder engagement process. If the meeting or conference call is disorganized, dominated by individuals, or agenda items unclear, the stakeholder's experience and opinion will likely be negative.

In contrast, effective meetings and calls are structured to maximize everyone's time and expertise while also fostering mutually respectful exchange. Similar guidance about mutually respectful language and consideration for the time and effort stakeholders are expected to contribute goes for surveys or other methods of reaching out for input from stakeholders.

### Suggestions for preparing for a stakeholder engagement meeting or conference call:

- **Create a thoughtful agenda that gives realistic timeframes for discussion and action items.** (see below for meeting tips)
- **Create a checklist of meeting preparations and follow-up.** (see page for 37 for Meeting Preparation and Follow-Up)
- **Allow maximum opportunities for participation, which includes careful preparation for the facilitation of the meeting or call.** (see below for meeting tips)
- **Offer and receive feedback with tact and finesse.**
- **Prepare for conflict or disagreement with some possible responses or solutions.**
- **Convey respect** This may be different and specific to particular stakeholders. For example, if trying to engage external stakeholders, respectful behavior would include not using department acronyms and jargon or creating opportunities for everyone to shake hands and get to know people personally before the meeting begins.
- **Create a welcoming and accessible environment** Choose a location and time accessible to the stakeholders you are targeting. Is it an environment where stakeholders will feel comfortable? For example, if you are attempting to engage foster parents, it might be better to meet at a community center versus a DCFS office. Likewise, the timing for conference calls needs to consider the needs and schedules of the people involved.

### Tips for Effective Meeting Design

Consider these key elements for effective meeting design when designing an agenda:

**Results:** What do you want to accomplish?  
What will have happened by the end of the meeting?

**Relationships:** How do the participants relate to the facilitator, to the agency, to each other, and to the result? How can you foster trust among the group?

**Process:** How can the design of the meeting help you to achieve your desired results?

**Resources:** What are the participants bringing with them that will help get the results you want? E.g., their time, their commitment, their passion, their talent, who they know, who they can influence, access to others, etc.

## Facilitating Meetings *for* Mutual Learning

(Source: Kaner, S. et al. (2007) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.)

To conduct meetings that foster collaboration and mutual learning, it is vital to train and support staff in becoming meeting facilitators who manage meetings where participants feel valued and heard, results are accomplished and precious time and resources are not wasted. The facilitator's role is key to the success of the meeting.

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### Role of a Facilitator

- Encourages full participation by all participants
- Does not try to push a personal agenda onto the group and tries to maintain objectivity
- Promotes mutual understanding and learning (common language, points of reference, context, etc.)
- Fosters inclusive solutions
- Teaches the group new thinking skills
- Understands the collective wisdom of the group is more powerful than one person's position
- Makes sure the group reaches clear results from the meeting including supporting the group to determine action items and timelines
- Is responsible for preparation and follow-up

### Facilitative Listening Skills Employed During In-person Meetings or Conference Calls

**Paraphrasing:** Clarify what a participant said by using your own words to restate the main points.

**Drawing People Out:** This technique is used with paraphrasing to get more clarification. Ask, "What do you mean by that?"

**Stacking:** Keep a speaking order list, which helps everyone participate by creating "turns" for people to speak. This allows facilitators to monitor how many times one person speaks if they are dominating and pause to cue people who are not as vocal.

**Tracking:** The facilitator pauses to identify and categorize the different thoughts put forth to make clear that there are multiple issues being discussed. Allows all of the ideas that shared to be seen and heard, even when they are not all discussed.

**Encouraging:** Is the art of creating an open space for people to participate fully, especially when you wnotice people are disengaging. You can say, "*Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet.*"

**Balancing:** The first few people who share their opinions often dictate the direction of conversations in meetings, but balancing asks for other views because the silence of others does not imply consent.

**Making Space:** Includes keeping an eye out for facial expressions and/or body language that indicate someone wants to speak but doesn't. It sends the signal that all ideas and opinions are welcome.

**Intentional Silence:** Inviting a pause that lasts a few seconds to allow people time to figure out their thoughts and focus on a response.

**Listening for Common Ground:** A technique that helps with clearly identifying where the group has agreement and clearly identifying areas of polarization.



## Planning *for* Meeting Follow-Up

### Key Considerations for gathering stakeholder feedback and learning from their experiences:

The questions listed below can be used to create a strategy for meeting follow up to ensure that commitments are honored and that communication/feedback loops remain open:

- What were the action items that came out of the meeting?  
How would you follow up with stakeholders to show that the action items were completed?
- How will you implement the helpful feedback/input that you received?  
How will you communicate that you used the feedback/input back to your stakeholders?
- What is the time period that you want to communicate back to stakeholders within?  
Is there any follow-up communication that needs to happen after that date?
- What aspects of the meeting preparation and proceedings can be improved upon?

## EXERCISE: PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

When developing plans for a meeting, facilitators can use this checklist as a reference tool to ensure all the elements are in place.



### Meeting Preparation & Follow-Up Checklist

Facilitator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall Meeting Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Prep Checklist:** Use this checklist before the meeting or conference call

#### To Do Before the Meeting:

- Co-design an agenda with meeting participants; or prepare an agenda and get feedback
- Meet with key stakeholders (internal and/or external)
- Create and send an invitation to participants
- Calendar a date to send a reminder invitation
- Identify any possible points of tension for the group and ways to move the group forward
- Design a short evaluation survey to be completed after the meeting or call \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Logistics for an In-Person Meeting:

- Location for the meeting: \_\_\_\_\_
- How do you want the tables and chairs set up?
- Will food be provided?
- Audio/Visual Equipment needed: projector, screen, etc.
- Transportation or access to meeting location
- Parking for participants
- Décor/ambience

#### Materials:

- Flip charts
- Markers
- Tape
- Name tags
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials/Handouts:**

These materials would be sent ahead of time via email for a conference call.

- Handout: \_\_\_\_\_ Copies: \_\_\_\_\_
- Handout: \_\_\_\_\_ Copies: \_\_\_\_\_
- Handout: \_\_\_\_\_ Copies: \_\_\_\_\_
- Handout: \_\_\_\_\_ Copies: \_\_\_\_\_
- Handout: \_\_\_\_\_ Copies: \_\_\_\_\_

**Follow Up Checklist:**

Use this checklist before the meeting or conference call

**Loose Ends:**

- Have all evaluation forms been submitted?
- How will the notes be distributed to all the participants?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Commitments:**

- What action items were identified in the meeting that needs follow-up?
- Who committed to those action items?
- What is the mechanism to make sure those action items are completed?
- Who committed to facilitate the next meeting?
- Does any follow up with external stakeholders need to happen?  
How will this be communicated to them and by when?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

# PHASE 4: SYNTHESIZE AND STRATEGIZE

ANALYZE INPUT AND CREATE STRATEGIES

## Synthesizing Stakeholder Input

Synthesis involves pulling together information from a range of sources in order to answer a question and/or propose recommended actions. Effective synthesis is critical because it is the basis for effective strategy development, and for communicating back to stakeholders what was gathered. An accurate synthesis will demonstrate to stakeholders that they were heard, and that the leadership is taking the information they shared seriously. This is an integral part of creating an ongoing atmosphere of trust and relationships that can be sustained over time. Involving stakeholders in shaping their input into planning and strategy development processes provides a valuable mutual learning opportunity. It also fosters shared accountability for achieving intended outcomes. The synthesis is not done in a group but by one or two staff, consultants, or members of a guiding body, and then shared back with the guiding body for revision and further input.

This stage of the process is also an opportunity to utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods for documenting and analyzing the information provided through the stakeholder engagement process. Using more formal methods whenever possible provides evidence that can be used to explain decisions and actions that are taken as a result of stakeholder engagement.

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### Important considerations for this stage of the process

**Presentation of User-Friendly Data:** When preparing to engage stakeholders in the interpretation and analysis of their input, it is important to present information in a clear, user friendly way. When appropriate, charts, graphs, and other visualizations should be used to increase the ability of stakeholders to understand relationships among the data. The more stakeholders understand the data, the more they can contribute and make recommendations to achieve desired results.

**Set Aside Appropriate Resources:** Though engaging stakeholders themselves in analyzing the input from the process strengthens the legitimacy of the planning and strategy development process, it is not without cost. Preparation for engaging stakeholders in discussions, developing communication tools, completing preliminary data analysis, and conducting meetings takes time that should be included in workload and resources estimates. These meetings can also be quite intense, requiring skilled facilitation. Depending on how much information there is to present, it may be preferable to split a complex analysis session across two days—for example, a day to review findings, and a second day to firm up recommendations.

**Choose the Right Participants:** Part of the art of conducting participatory analysis of stakeholder input is deciding *who will be at the table*. Rather than seeking to re-engage every stakeholder who contributed his/her thoughts and opinions during your outreach efforts, it may be preferable to work with a smaller, representative sub-committee or work group. Including stakeholders who are in action or decision-making positions is not only critical to devising actions, but also informing others about findings and results.

**Reasonable Expectations:** Participatory analysis helps to increase stakeholder understanding about what conclusions could realistically be drawn from their input and other available data, which aids in the establishment of reasonable shared expectations about the feasibility of proposed strategies. Including stakeholders in the analysis phase also reinforces how important their perspective is vital to understanding the data and developing strong recommendations.

**Stakeholder Support:** Including stakeholders in synthesis and analysis processes further demonstrates that their perspective is vital to understanding the data. It also helps to foster increased stakeholder support for resulting interpretations and findings.

## Key Questions for Synthesizing Stakeholder Input

- Are quantitative and formal qualitative evaluation methods appropriate to be used to provide an accurate picture of the answers to key questions that emerge at the end of the stakeholder engagement activity? What are the major categories of themes that emerged through the input process?
- How can this feedback provide background or new directions for planning major organizational strategies?
- How does the input provided by stakeholders apply to major planning or strategy questions for the project?
- Does it present data that affirms proposed actions, or does it bring them into question?
- What are the points of agreement among stakeholders? Where is there divergence?
- Where are there information gaps?
- Where does this information lead you as you think about the next phase of work?
- How will the synthesis be shared with stakeholders?

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## Engaging Stakeholders in Strategy Co-Design

Once the stakeholder input on the issue or problem that was identified in the beginning has been gathered and synthesized, the next step is devising or choosing strategies that actually solve the problem or move the issue forward. This step requires continued stakeholder engagement, with the same respectful relationships, as the process moves into the stage of choosing action steps. This may be the point where conflicts among stakeholder groups start to arise, when possible organizational actions may have differential impact on different groups

of stakeholders. Regardless of whether strategies pertain to a whole organization, a department, or a specific project, the purpose of **strategy development** is to articulate a clear vision and direction for accomplishing stated goals. It entails both a plan to achieve the vision and, more importantly, a vehicle to create coordinated action for executing the agreed upon plan. The most effective strategy will be developed through a co-design process that engages multiple stakeholders from the beginning.

**What is a strategy?** A strategy is like an umbrella. It is a general statement that guides and covers a set of activities that answer the question of how you do something in simple, clear language.

## What is Co-Design?

Co-design is the process by which staff collaborates with stakeholders to create a solution, tool or system that addresses the interests and/or needs pertinent to the desired results of the engagement process. When stakeholders who have a vested interest in the work are engaged as co-designers in the strategy development process, experience from other jurisdictions shows that significantly more effective strategies emerge along with a much stronger shared commitment to supporting successful implementation.

When engaging stakeholders in deciding on a course of action to address a particular issue, the co-design process should operate with the following characteristics:

**Representative** of the full range of stakeholders who are affected by the organization's actions in the arena designated for stakeholder engagement. All views should be represented. While it may be easier to engage with the most sympathetic, organized, vocal or powerful stakeholders, not all internal or external stakeholders have the same view of an issue. Winning the support of one or two 'big' stakeholders does not necessarily indicate that meaningful engagement has been achieved. Therefore, including less visible and dominant voices can help to produce more accurate and appropriate approaches to addressing issues of concern. (See Phase 1 on conducting a stakeholder analysis to consider whether you are being inclusive of multiple stakeholders and viewpoints.)

**Responsive** by providing information, analysis, and proposals that respond directly to stakeholder expectations and interests already identified through initial outreach and analysis in prior phases. A balance is always necessary between prioritizing pre-determined organizational objectives and being stakeholder-driven and focused.

**Informative** by ensuring that appropriate background information is shared with stakeholders, including the historical or analytical basis behind certain decisions and the current research and practice data about proposed changes in practice or policy. This allows stakeholders to better understand an organization's culture, motivations, and why it may respond in a particular way to an issue.

**Realistic** about the 'negotiation' process with stakeholders, where there may be an inevitable trade off of expectations, needs and objectives during strategy development. It is important that both the organization and its stakeholders recognize that everything they originally set out to achieve may not be accomplished. For all participants in a strategy co-design process, establishing clarity from the start about the intentions and expectations of the 'negotiation' (i.e. what is on the table for discussion and what is not) can help to minimize conflict, focus decision making, and also build trust.

**Aligned** with the sponsoring organization's established goals, objectives and current activities. For example, all DCFS initiatives and processes are intended to support the achievement of specific Strategic Plan Objectives. One area of current focus is the use of data-driven learning as part of the department-wide Data-driven Decision Making Process. Participants in strategy co-design need to take current organizational priorities into account – including the measurement of outcomes and impacts.

**Fair** in that stakeholders are afforded sufficient opportunity to voice their interests and recommendations, and that decision making is carried out in a transparent and timely manner.

## Characteristics of Effective Strategies

Strategies that emerge from a stakeholder engagement process must always be aligned with the organizational goals and intended results of the engagement that were clearly articulated from the beginning. The choices and decisions about strategies will be a joint effort between organizational leaders and stakeholders. The process assumes that the organizational leadership will provide the best available information about the current services, policies or programs of the agency under review and the best available research and practice information about potential changes under consideration. The Stakeholder Engagement Process in this phase of identifying possible effective strategies requires a new level of stakeholder buy-in and commitment.

### An effective strategy to achieve the organizational goals that incorporate stakeholder input should:

#### **Give overall direction**

A strategy, such as enhancing experience and skill among staff or increasing resources and opportunities for staff development, should articulate a clear path to achieving targeted outcomes that includes securing requisite buy-in and resources.

#### **Advance the mission**

Taken together, the emerging strategies are likely to make a difference in the problem to be solved. For example, if the goal is to reduce the number of young children entering foster care, the strategies need to include multiple changes in different aspects of the organization's work. This can't be achieved without changes in prevention, reporting, investigation, assessment, and service provision.

#### **Fit resources and opportunities**

A good strategy takes advantage of current resources and assets, such as people's willingness to act, new supportive policies and programs, or a tradition of self-help and community pride. It also embraces new opportunities such as an emerging public concern regarding an issue.

#### **Minimize resistance and barriers**

When initiatives set out to accomplish new and/or far-reaching objectives, resistance (even opposition) often occurs. However, well-thought out strategies tend to attract allies and deter opponents – particularly when a broad base of stakeholders are involved in their development.

#### **Reach those affected**

To address the issue or problem, strategies must connect the intervention with those who it should benefit. For example, if the goal of an initiative is to reduce neglect referrals, who are the groups that your strategy should reach? How does it ensure that enough people will be engaged and/or supported to change the outcome?

## Identifying Strategic Options

The following three steps outline stages of strategy co-design and associated questions that should guide a team or other guiding body into the selection of strategies that will be most likely to succeed.

### STEP #1 ANALYZING YOUR CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

- Who are your *targets of change*? Consider the people who experience this issue. Also think about whose action or inaction contributes to the issue.
- Who are your *agents of change*? This includes everyone who is in a position to help contribute to the solution.
- What relationship do you see between the issue and the actions of the organization? Have any changes in organization behavior or action impacted the issue, positively or negatively? Or, is the cause an external force?

### STEP #2 IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC OPTIONS

- What potential strategies will reach those who are affected by the issue? What short- or long-term effect will they have?
- Are there promising practices that have been used to address this issue, either internally or by other child welfare jurisdictions?
- What resources and assets exist that can be used to help achieve your goals? How can they best be used?
- What obstacles or resistance exist that could make it difficult to achieve your goals? How can you minimize or get around them?

### STEP #3 EVALUATING AND SELECTING STRATEGIC OPTIONS

- Based on the identified strategic options, which are the top priorities?
- Which strategic options are the most feasible based on your environmental analysis?
- Which strategic options will help to increase support for your effort and promote sustainability?
- Which options are most strongly aligned with DCFS' mission, vision and values?
- Do you need more information before you decide upon a strategy?



## Role of Guiding Bodies

To support the Synthesize and Strategize Phase, guiding bodies can assist with:

- Identification and engagement of stakeholders to serve on sub-committees that will help shape and lead related activities.
- Coordination of meetings for participatory analysis of stakeholder input and strategy development.
- Initial review and prioritization of stakeholder input that will be brought into the analysis in partnership with stakeholders.
- Conducting the environmental analysis, and identifying and evaluating strategic options.
- Vetting resulting findings and proposed strategies to ensure alignment with organizational objectives and priorities as well as current knowledge about evidence-based best practices.
- Developing communications tools to aid in the dissemination of information about the proposed strategies for various audiences.



## PHASE 5: REFLECT AND AFFIRM

### COMMUNICATE AND REVIEW PROPOSED STRATEGIES

Once initial stakeholder input has been gathered and analyzed during the development of proposed strategies, those who participated in the engagement process can provide valuable feedback regarding resulting findings and decisions. By creating space for reflection and continued discussion all participants can take part in an honest assessment that allows everyone to clearly understand what is happening and why and to engage in supporting the implementation of the selected strategies.

In contrast, the failure to communicate and discuss results of the Stakeholder Engagement Process can prompt more questions and feelings of uncertainty around whether agreements or requests are being honored. It can also lessen the motivation of stakeholders to contribute further when called upon.

### Why Stakeholders Should Review Proposed Strategies

- Creates opportunities for stakeholders to provide more detailed feedback regarding common themes, targeted outcomes, and potential action steps, which increases the likelihood that findings and recommendations will bring about the desired results.
- Demonstrates that stakeholder participation is valued and respected.
- Helps to identify which findings and recommendations are the most relevant and meaningful to stakeholders.
- Keeps stakeholders informed of strategy status, which helps to encourage and sustain their continued support of planning and implementation processes.
- Promotes transparency as well as an increased sense of collaboration and trust.
- Provides a sense of accomplishment, contribution, and productivity.
- Curbs “Stakeholder Engagement Fatigue”, which occurs when feedback is routinely ignored or not shared back with stakeholders.

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### Leading Reflective Discussions

Here are some suggestions for planning and leading reflective discussions that affirm stakeholder contributions and encourage thoughtful feedback about proposed strategies:

#### Preparing to Engage Stakeholders

**Establish clarity about the how decisions will be made, including roles, expectations and boundaries.** Project leaders must decide whether the decisions about the strategies to achieve the goal will require consensus across the group, majority rule, or just feedback from the group. No one decision-making model is optimum for every decision or group. Whatever model is selected needs to be explicit, so that all stakeholders understand what is expected of them.

**Identify how issues will be handled in advance.** How will information be shared? Who decides the level of information to be shared? How will decisions be made concerning who is invited to participate in the presentation and review of proposed strategies?

#### Facilitating Robust Reflection

**Create an annotated agenda, and ensure all facilitators and presenters are prepared.** It’s important to create a detailed agenda that includes anticipated timing, key messages, process design and persons responsible for each section. In addition, all facilitators and presenters need to be adequately prepared to carry out their role on the agenda. A preparatory conversation with all presenters and facilitators will help ensure that everyone is on the same page.

**Manage participation.** Facilitators should ensure that everyone follows the rules that the group establishes for decision making and strategy discussion. Don't let one or two people dominate the discussions. Consensus and understanding across the group will only emerge when everyone's opinion is solicited and listened to. One way to achieve this is to set an expectation that participants manage their own "airtime" to encourage full participation.

**Define the decision-making criteria.** If participants in a strategy review process get stuck, take some time to identify the criteria by which the ideal solution will be selected. This discussion will reveal how people are evaluating potential solutions and bring structure to the discussion.

**Provide an opportunity to check in on stakeholders' assumptions and any resistance that may arise,** or to ask for support in understanding an issue, to encourage action, and/or to deal with resistance.

**Be attentive to cultural differences about discussing conflicts and making decisions.** It is obviously important to build trust and relationships so people feel comfortable letting others know how they feel about a decision, if they are not being listened to, or if other emerged during the course of a discussion.

**Make sure supports for people who are not fluent in English are inclusive and don't reinforce exclusion.** All informational materials should be made available in the languages needed.

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### Laying the Groundwork for Follow Up

**Review and agree to next steps.** Make sure that everyone leaves the discussion with a consistent understanding of the decisions, actions, persons responsible for carrying out actions and timeframe.



### Guiding a Strategy Review Discussion with Stakeholders

- Present the information in a clear and compelling way.
- Ensure stakeholders understand what you are presenting; including allowing ample time for clarifying questions.
- Consider asking the following questions:
 

<p><b>Clarifications:</b> Do you have any questions about the strategy, including its purpose, specific recommendations, or intended outcomes? What needs to be clarified?</p> <p><b>Affirmations:</b> What do you like about the proposed strategy?</p> <p><b>Modifications:</b> What additions or changes would you recommend?</p>	<p>• Consider building in time for small group reflection, so that stakeholders can process the information being shared with them.</p> <p><b>What's Missing:</b> What other factors or issues need to be considered before the strategy is finalized?</p> <p><b>Next Steps:</b> What should the follow up process look like? Who should be involved? How extensive should the process be? How should information about progress and outcomes be shared?</p>
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### Role of Guiding Bodies

During the Reflect and Affirm phase, guiding bodies continue to play the role of both maintaining engagement and in implementing the action plan that results from the engagement process. The guiding body can play an important role in:

- Developing guidelines and plans for communicating and reviewing proposed strategies with many stakeholders.
- Facilitating review processes, including in-person meetings or the use of data collection tools such as surveys.
- Overseeing resulting decision making, including the integration of additional stakeholder feedback as part of continued strategy development.

## PHASE 6: FINALIZE STRATEGY

### FORMALIZE STRATEGIES AND PLAN OF ACTION

Once a proposed strategy has been vetted with stakeholders, the next step is to integrate their feedback into a formal, written strategy for next steps and continue to seek input to develop an agreed upon plan of action.

### Articulating the Strategy

When documenting the chosen strategy for the next phase of work in an action plan, the description begins to lay out more than just what the strategy is. As importantly, it begins to message why it is important to both the sponsoring agency and its stakeholders and what changes it represents.

The following questions can be used to capture key elements of context and process that will be important to explain the Plan of Action, in addition to the description of the strategy itself:

- What was the stakeholder reaction to the initial feedback? Based on this most recent opportunity for feedback, which actions will be formalized? What will be modified? Include the key evidence, feedback, and major assumptions that informed your choice.
- What short- and long-term results can we anticipate? How will we measure success?
- How will the next steps be integrated with other complementary strands of the organization's work? For example, how can our actions and/or anticipated results be leveraged by others to support their goals?

Then the next step is finalizing the strategy through creating an action plan, with input and conversation from stakeholders once again.

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### Engaging Stakeholders in Action Plan Design

The Guiding Body can play a key role in discussing, vetting and creating an action plan for successful implementation as well as the role of engaging stakeholders fully in providing pertinent information and experience related to the issue or problem the stakeholder engagement is designed to solve. The full engagement of key stakeholders in this phase is again important to the eventual success of the plan of action that emerges from the engagement.

#### A workable action plan clearly describes:

- What is the result we hope to achieve? What strategy implementation are we working toward?
- What actions need to occur to achieve the result?
- Who will carry out the actions?  
Who should be on the Implementation Team?
- By when will the actions take place, and for what period of time?
- What resources (i.e., money, staff, leadership) are needed to carry out these actions?
- What communication mechanisms need to be in place? Who should know what?
- How will you know if you have achieved your results? How frequently will you assess whether your strategies are achieving your intended results?

The plan of action should be complete, clear, and reflect current internal and external circumstances. However, keep in mind that an action plan is always a work in progress. It is not something you can write, place in your file drawers, and forget about. As your organization or initiative changes and grows, you will want to regularly revisit and adapt your action plan to fit the changing needs of your stakeholders. As you make these needed changes, it is critical that you continue to engage stakeholders along the way. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Community Toolbox, Chapter 8, Section 5: Developing an Action Plan, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/develop-action-plans/main>



## Tips for Successful Action Planning

### **Be Prepared to Manage Conflict:**

If the Stakeholder Engagement Process is effective in attracting diverse views, conflict among members may result as action planning moves forward. Facilitators can recognize differences, perhaps noting the diverse experiences that give rise to divergent views. To resolve conflicts, leaders can help members find common ground by reminding them of their shared goals.

### **Use Brainstorming Rules:**

Facilitators must avoid making judgments about ideas and suggestions. Brainstorming rules apply. All ideas must be heard and noted without criticism.

### **Be Efficient:**

It is helpful to have a structured agenda and to build consensus at the beginning of the meeting about what will be accomplished and in what time frame.

### **Communicate Products of Planning:**

Structure every planning session to produce a product, such as a list of issues or ideas. Show off the product at the end of planning meetings, distributing copies of the planning products to all members and bring the lists back to subsequent meetings.

### **Provide Support and Encouragement:**

Good planning takes time and effort, so it is important to acknowledge the contributions of all participants – especially key leaders. Seek opportunities to provide positive feedback and recognize accomplishments along the way.



## Role of Guiding Bodies

During the Finalize Strategy Phase, guiding bodies can play an important role in:

- Reviewing proposed strategies for completeness, accuracy, and alignment with group or organizational goals.
- Establishing decision-making protocols and structures, including subcommittees and/or advisory teams.
- Exploring potential opportunities for collaboration across other initiatives within the sponsoring agency.
- Developing and implementing communications strategies designed to keep stakeholders informed about strategy choices and action plan development.

## PHASE 7: ADOPT AND LAUNCH

### IMPLEMENT AND DOCUMENT STRATEGY

#### Communicating Strategies to Stakeholders

Once agreed upon strategies for implementing stakeholder input have been formally established, they should be communicated broadly to other staff, stakeholders, and organizations ways that engage them in working collaboratively to support implementation. This communication process should include:

- A clear and compelling description of the strategy to be implemented, including exactly what changes are expected from each person involved from clients and customers, front line staff, supervisors, and leadership.
- A comprehensive description of how stakeholder input was gathered and incorporated into strategy decisions and action plans.
- Opportunities for everyone impacted by the change or new strategy to process the information, ask questions and be heard.
- A strategy for keeping stakeholders and partners informed about progress about both what and how well you have done (Are we doing what we said we would do? Are we doing it well? Is what we are doing advancing the mission?).
- Information provided in written form for individuals and in consistent presentations for groups.

#### Implementation of Strategies

Adapted from *A Road Map to Implementing Evidence-Based Programs*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

#### STEP #1 PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

**Establishing an Implementation Team** is critical at this stage. The Implementation Team is comprised of a core set of individuals charged with providing guidance through full implementation of the initiative or program. (The Implementation Team may or may not be the same body as the guiding body, but the guiding body needs to work hand in hand with the Implementation Team.) This section will reference “Implementation Team,” though any designated body can be deemed responsible for implementation. The role of the Implementation Team is to help ensure engagement of the stakeholders, enhance readiness for implementation, ensure fidelity to chosen goals and strategies, monitor outcomes, align systems, and address barriers to implementation. An organization can choose to develop the Implementation Team during earlier Phases of Stakeholder Engagement and planning; however, the participants may change as you identify new support needs during the development of strategies and action plans.

**Identify and engage an individual or group of individuals to “champion” or promote your initiative and strategies.** Look for people within the organization and the community who are influential, respected, and committed to your goals. These individuals must have the ability to identify or anticipate challenges that may arise, propose solutions, and serve as dedicated advocate for the work. They might serve as active participants in the Implementation Team and/or be involved in directly supporting the active rollout of plans.

**Recognize and address issues regarding readiness.** Understanding that change occurs in stages, with individuals adapting in different ways over varying periods of time, is integral to leading successful implementation efforts. Assessing your organizational capacity for change, including financial resources, organizational commitment, and community buy-in, throughout the implementation process is the key to creating a supportive environment.

## STEP #2 PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

During the initial implementation stage, individuals begin to put into practice the strategy that has been planned with stakeholders and partners. Challenges can arise as participants begin to incorporate new practices into their everyday routine. For those who are expected to perform new skills and engage in new processes, achieving comfort and mastery will take time. Key considerations include:

**Management of the change process.** One role for the Implementation Team will be to guide and manage the change process, and help mitigate fear and resistance. As the team works to remove barriers, it can address issues that surface and help maintain the momentum of the initiative. The Implementation Team can help to set realistic goals and expectations regarding implementation progress, timelines, and the collection and use of the right data at the right time.

**The use of technical assistance, training, and coaching.** Ongoing support for those charged with implementing new strategies can help to ensure success. Recommendations include providing opportunities for relevant training and peer learning, where individuals can receive guidance from others who are experienced in leading or supporting similar initiatives. Coaching may also be employed to manage expectations, provide constructive feedback, enhance skills development, and assist with minimizing resistance.

## STEP #3 FULL IMPLEMENTATION: Promoting Fidelity & Continued Improvement

Full implementation occurs when the processes and procedures that support a strategy are solidly in place. The priority then becomes maintaining and improving the initiative through excellent monitoring and purposeful improvement.

During this stage, modifications may be considered to help produce better outcomes. For example, if fidelity is high but outcomes are not as expected, this may require an adjustment to strategies and actions plans to better fit the specific needs of those who are supposed to benefit.

All adaptations should be carried out carefully and systematically with the support of the Implementation Team and continued input from stakeholders, with attention to both process and outcome evaluations. Process evaluation determines if strategies have been implemented as originally envisioned. Outcome evaluation refers to reviewing results to determine if strategies are working as intended.

## STEP #4 SUSTAINABILITY: MAINTAINING AND BUILDING ON YOUR SUCCESS

Once full implementation has been achieved, sustaining change requires continual adaptation to ever-shifting community dynamics, funding streams, and organizational priorities. Support among organizational leadership, staff, and external stakeholders also need to be nurtured and maintained through active communication and feedback loops with the Implementation Team and other guiding bodies involved. At this stage, using data to assess the effectiveness and quality of the work being carried out is integral to developing sustainable strategies.

### Other actions needed to sustain success include:

1. Ensuring the availability of continued funding and staff support.
2. Maintaining fidelity to overarching goals and core strategy components.
3. Developing and implementing plans for quality improvement, including the regular review of process and outcome measures to promote ongoing improvement.
4. Establishing data systems that inform decision making regarding the implementation of the strategies.
5. Developing new partnerships that provide needed resources while maintaining existing relationships.
6. Sharing positive results with internal staff and external stakeholders to increase buy-in and support.



### Role of Guiding Bodies

Stakeholders involved throughout the engagement process are crucial to the Adopt and Launch Phase. Their leadership can help by:

- Leading implementation and creating a space for peer learning and exchange during the process.
- Explaining the strategies in detail to multiple stakeholders.
- Communicating how decisions were made about strategy options.
- Supporting implementation by monitoring progress.
- Reviewing progress regularly to make adjustments as needed.

# PHASE 8: EVALUATE & IMPROVE

REVIEW LESSONS LEARNED AND REFINE STRATEGY

An effective, well thought out evaluation process at the end of the stakeholder engagement activity helps everyone to better understand the success and impact of the stakeholder engagement effort and how it could be improved. It provides objective information to identify what worked well and what did not, and points the way toward effective changes that will sustain the relationships and ongoing work. There are sure to be valuable learning points from the development and implementation of the process that should be captured and documented for the use of future stakeholder efforts.

When conducting an evaluation, the ideal strategy is engaging key stakeholders in establishing a clear understanding of goals and expectations for the evaluation, determining key priorities, identifying measurable results, and selecting appropriate data collection methods will help to ensure that the results of the evaluation are both meaningful and useful. This section of the toolkit provides an overview of:

- Guidance for effectively including stakeholders as partners in evaluation strategies.
- Roles for the guiding body of the process in evaluating their work as well as the outcomes for the entire process.

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## Inclusive Evaluation: Working Effectively with Stakeholders as Partners in Evaluation

### Why Involve Stakeholders in Evaluation?

By soliciting the opinions, interests, concerns and priorities of stakeholders early in the evaluation process, the results are more likely to address stakeholders' specific information needs and be useful for a range of purposes, among them to improve program effectiveness and to affect policy decisions. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders in evaluation processes provides opportunities to question assumptions, explore competing explanations, and develop consensus around what the evaluation should address. Thus, their input can strengthen your evaluation design. Taking differing views into account will also increase the credibility of both the evaluation process and resulting findings.

Finally, recommendations that result from an evaluation in which stakeholders have been involved are more likely to be accepted by a broader constituency and implemented more fully and with less resistance. Stakeholders can provide valuable assistance with building support and acquiring community resources that are needed to not only carry out the evaluation, but also act on the results. Just as importantly, they are more likely to gain a new understanding and appreciation for your goals and organization as a result of their participation in evaluation efforts.

### Evaluation Planning Questions

#### Identifying Your Core Stakeholders

Involving a range of stakeholder perspectives in planning an evaluation makes it more likely that the evaluation process will be thoroughly vetted and thoughtfully crafted, and that the evaluation questions are the right questions to be asking.

- Which stakeholders are most important to include in the evaluation planning process? Why?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that the interests of these key stakeholders are incorporated into the evaluation process?
- Should you actively include them as core members of the evaluation team, or provide opportunities for periodic review and feedback, or something in between?



## What Input and Feedback Do You Want from Stakeholders?

In addition to clarifying the specific information needs and interests of stakeholder groups, it is important to consider what you want to learn from stakeholders.

- What questions do you need to answer to ensure that your initiative succeeds and/or continues to grow?
- Are you interested in their views on the benefits of services, recommendations for improvements, or clarification of their needs?
- Are there major decisions coming up that would affect the service or initiative (such as the kind or amount of resources you can provide)? If so, what information can stakeholders provide to help you make these decisions?



## Tips for Engaging Stakeholders as Partners in Evaluation

- Involve stakeholders early enough to ensure that their contributions to the evaluation process will be meaningful.
- Focus on a few key stakeholders. Research has found that deep involvement of core stakeholders is better than the marginal involvement of many.
- Offer stakeholders options for their participation in the evaluation and providing feedback.
- Invite stakeholders to help identify and engage others who should be involved to ensure balanced participation.
- Do not assume that people in leadership or decision-making roles are automatically the most important stakeholders.
- Work with stakeholders to prioritize evaluation questions and develop realistic expectations about what can be answered or addressed.
- Take care not to exclude any stakeholders because of gender, ethnicity, or language.

## • Working with Stakeholders to Support Evaluation •

### **Identifying Outcomes and Measures:**

When creating an evaluation framework for identifying outcomes and measures, be sure to ask stakeholders input on additional measures that might help assess a particular outcome. At the core of any data infrastructure are the indicators and questions that provide information necessary for assessing progress. However, organizations often assume that stakeholders are uninterested or unable to understand the complexities involved with data analysis. This

assumption limits an organization's ability to build stakeholders capacity to engage in identifying problem areas, and creating strategies to course correct or solve problems.

### **Identifying Data Sources:**

Facts and information are gathered in many forms, including numeric statistics, short answer questions, surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Thus, providing diverse stakeholders with a comprehensive list of available data sources and indicators will allow them to decide which are most

relevant to their interests and/or suggested alternate sources. It is also important to be explicit about what information is not currently collected or not available due to confidentiality agreements.

### **Communicating Findings and Results:**

Data reports on findings, analysis, and results should be written in a format that is easily understood by broad and diverse stakeholder audiences. It is also helpful to define key terms and acronyms.



## Role of Guiding Bodies

**During the Evaluate and Improve Phase, guiding bodies can play an important leadership role in:**

- Co-designing an evaluation plan in partnership with key stakeholders, including the identification of priority questions and development of data collection strategies.
- Providing helpful feedback as evaluation respondents who have been directly involved in planning and implementation effort, particularly as it relates to assessing work processes.
- Analyzing evaluation findings and formulating recommendations for future action.
- Advocating for policy and practice improvements based on evaluation findings and implications among key decision makers. Includes convening and facilitating briefing sessions, data review forums, and follow up planning sessions with key stakeholders.
- Leading implementation and creating opportunities for peer learning and exchange.

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