Developing Stakeholder Relationships to Support School Programming

The purpose of this guide on developing stakeholder relationships is to assist state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) in engaging and developing meaningful relationships with a variety of stakeholders and community-based partners. This guide discusses the benefits of engaging stakeholders, provides examples of methods of engagement, and suggests various indicators of successful stakeholder relationships.

Why Engage Stakeholders?

As you leverage Title IV, Part A funds to support students, engaging stakeholders in your state allows your SEA and LEAs to develop meaningful relationships with these groups. These stakeholder relationships can offer diverse perspectives and new ways of thinking about an issue or problem, increase community investment and buy-in, and ensure that decisions made by SEAs and LEAs are responsive to community needs, priorities, and interests.

Who Are Your Key Stakeholders?

Begin by identifying key players in your state or in the communities within your state. The types of stakeholders in your state with whom you might engage will vary depending on your goals and needs. Table 1 lists seven stakeholder groups at the state and local levels.

Table 1. Types and Examples of Stakeholders

SCHOOL STAFF ORGANIZATIONS	PARENT AND FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS	DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS	STUDENT AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS
• Teachers' unions • Professional associations	• Parent-teacher organizations or associations • Parent advocacy groups	• School boards • School administration • District administration	• Student clubs, activities, and government • Youth-serving community-based organizations

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT AND EDUCATION SERVICES	NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS SERVING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS
• Local government officials • Local child welfare, juvenile court, or law enforcement agencies • Faith-based organizations	• After-school services • Community health services • Mental health services • Job and career training • STEM education • Drug and violence prevention	• Court-appointed special advocates • Homeless shelters • Food pantries/banks • Juvenile defenders • LGBTQ youth-serving organizations • Children in the welfare system

How Do You Engage Stakeholders?

Next, consider the best approach to engaging stakeholders. Different methods or combinations of methods may be more appropriate for some types of stakeholders than for others. A high-level district official might best be reached through an individual meeting, whereas a range of student and family voices could be heard through a town hall gathering. Set objectives and familiarize yourself with the stakeholder's perspective and connection to the applicable educational context so you know whom to contact, how to reach out to them, and what common interests or goals you share. Regardless of what method you choose, you will want to be prepared to articulate how the stakeholder stands to benefit from this engagement. Please see Table 2 below, to see a list of stakeholder engagement strategies.

Table 2. Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

METHOD	BENEFITS
Meet one-on-one	• Cultivates a personal connection with a key stakeholder(s)
Call a joint meeting	• Engages representatives from one stakeholder group • Allows for closer interaction and relationship building due to small group size
Organize a town hall	• Is open to anyone in the stakeholder group who chooses to attend • Reaches broader populations such as students or parents • Is structured using an agenda to outline topics you would like to cover and a moderator to keep the conversation on topic • Allows for responsiveness to needs, questions, or topics of interest brought up by attendees
Create an advisory board	• Allows for perspectives from a range of stakeholders to be heard • Is collaborative and multidisciplinary • Allows for regular meetings to hear from stakeholders and ask for feedback
Work with an existing school or community committee or advisory board	• Leverages a pre-established community group • Allows for closer interaction with individuals due to smaller group size • Meeting regularly enables you to hear from, and ask for feedback from, representatives from the community

Considerations to Ensure Broad, Diverse Representation

• **Timing of the engagement** — Certain families may have less availability during certain times of the day. Make sure you have allowed adequate time for your invitation to reach people whose hours of work and family responsibilities vary.

• **Venue for the engagement** — Ensure that you have chosen a location for your engagement that is accessible to people across socioeconomic strata and to people with disabilities and that can be accessed through public transportation whenever possible.

• **Vision/audio supports during the engagement** — Verify that participants with visual or hearing impairments can fully participate in the discussion by using microphones, captioning videos, providing written materials in braille, and/or providing American Sign Language interpretation.

• **Language supports during the engagement** — Ensure that families and community stakeholders speaking languages other than English will be able to participate by providing translation services and/or written materials in languages other than English.

Assessing Stakeholder Relationships

Once you have reached out to and built relationships with various stakeholders, you will need to continually assess these relationships to consider their impact and degree of success. For example, you can monitor which stakeholder voices you hear more regularly and identify those who may be missing from the conversation. In addition, you can follow up with stakeholders frequently to assess whether their input was accurately reflected in the decisions that were made. This sort of self-assessment is a critical part of ongoing conversations with stakeholder groups about paths to achieving common goals. Table 3 is derived from a framework from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)[1] and can help you understand and assess the degree of engagement or influence of your stakeholder(s).

Table 3. Public Participation Spectrum

LESS INFLUENCE				MORE INFLUENCE
INFORM	**CONSULT**	**INVOLVE**	**COLLABORATE**	**EMPOWER**
Notifies the stakeholder of the decision, action, or issue at hand.	Asks for input or feedback on the decision, action, or issue at hand.	Continuously asks for and considers feedback from the stakeholder. Ensures that feedback is addressed.	Partners with the stakeholder throughout the entire process. Incorporates the stakeholder's feedback as much as possible.	Puts decision making into the hands of the stakeholders. The stakeholders are equipped to decide and act.

As your work progresses over time, your stakeholder needs may also evolve. Make time to regularly reassess the alignment of your goals and activities to the expertise and perspectives offered by your stakeholders. You may find that a stakeholder has additional resources that have only just become relevant to your work. Conversely, you may also discover a misalignment or divergence of goals between your work and your stakeholder's priorities. Assessing these relationships at routine intervals will help ensure that all parties involved are gaining the most out of a collaboration.

To request additional information on this topic, please visit the **T4PA Center Website**. You can also contact the T4PA Center at **info@t4pacenter.org** or call (833) 404-4845.

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[1] International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Federation. (2014). "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum" [PDF file]. Retrieved from **https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf**.