

Action Brief: Building a Broad Stakeholders Group

Guiding Principles

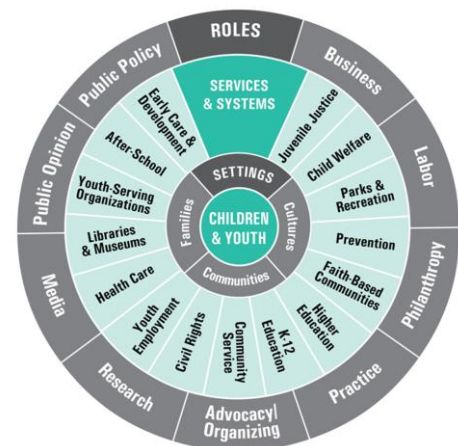
1. Be intentional about who to involve.

Identify a diverse group representing the organizations and public agencies whose support and active participation is required to accomplish your goals. Members of this core group should hold formal or informal positions that allow them to make decisions on behalf of the group they represent; you are looking for people with the capacity, motivation and authority to move resources and mobilize people. While the definition of “diverse” may vary, being intentional about who you involve makes sense whether you are creating a steering committee to oversee a large-scale planning effort, selecting programs to participate in a quality improvement pilot, or inviting 100 people to attend a briefing.

Before you anoint a new group – pause to consider whether there is an existing group that can and should be redeployed. If you can build on an existing coalition, group or structure, do so. If not, be careful to acknowledge what exists and know how to explain your connections to existing groups.

Check your work. All of us operate in silos to some extent. It is not uncommon that an important type of stakeholder (e.g. libraries) is left out just because no one thought about them. The “stakeholders wheel” is an easy way to check your work. Of course, you can decide not to include certain groups (no media) or to concentrate on others. The most important thing to do is to be intentional and transparent. The “stakeholders wheel” can also help those in the room identify themselves, identify key actors who are missing, and discuss the pros and cons of expanding the group.

Stakeholders Wheel



2. Be specific about what you ask the group to get involved in.

It is important that everyone in the room not only understand the ideas but be on board with the goals and the plan. Painting the “big picture” can inspire people to act, but it will be important for everyone you engage – on committees, in conferences, in informational meetings – to have a practical understanding of the real work you hope can be accomplished with their help. Clarifying goals, roles, timelines and deliverables will help members stay engaged.

One easy way to make sure they leave excited is to be sure that you have a clear, compelling statement that sums up the work you plan to accomplish *with their help* over the next two to three years. How you describe the work will influence how they see their roles. What’s your vision? What’s your slogan? Can everyone describe the end goal?

3. Think about how and how much you want people involved.

What do you want them to know? What do you want them to do? Do you need them to be fully informed or just inspired? Do they need to receive specific training or instruction because you expect them to implement assessments or influence other leaders? Do you need them to be involved in developing the plans? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Each time you are convening a group, however, it is useful to think through your answers. It will help you decide when and how often to convene them, how to construct the meetings and how to manage engagement in between meetings.

<i>What are your goals for them?</i>		<i>What do you want them to do with others?</i>
_____	Inspire	_____
_____	Inform	_____
_____	Involve	_____
_____	Instruct	_____
_____	Influence	_____

4. Think about when and how long you need the group to be engaged.

Everyone doesn't have to be engaged at the same time. Timing is everything. Engaging front-line practitioners too early might lead to anxiety if there are questions you aren't fully prepared to answer. Engaging policy makers too late may lead to missed opportunities to get the work linked to existing initiatives and funding streams. Whenever you decide to engage a group, be able to answer three timing questions for them: Why now? When next? How long? If possible, allow more time for the first meeting if you believe it is important to orient the group to the "Big Picture." If this isn't possible, think about when and how you are going to provide this orientation.

Length of meetings and how long the committee or group is active should be determined based upon your work plan and a more detailed projection of the specific tasks that need to be accomplished in order to meet your goals. This kind of plan should be shared upfront or developed with the group. Length of meetings and the nature of the commitment you are asking for should also take into account what members are realistically able to commit. And of course, the actual meeting schedule should be set to accommodate members' work schedules. Remember to consider alternative times to the regular work day if you are involving youth and community members who can't easily get time off for meeting.