

# ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS



The purpose of the Engage Stakeholder Concept Guide is to highlight key concepts that will support engaging stakeholders at various points in the Planning and Evaluation Framework (PEF).

Meaningfully engaging stakeholders is pivotal for the success of your program. The perspectives of your stakeholders are shaped by their expertise, knowledge, and experience. Engaging your stakeholders and understanding their perspectives may help with program buy-in and reduce the risk of decisions being challenged, delayed or overruled. It can also help generate new ideas, and identify potential risks throughout your program.

The Ontario Public Health Standards identify engagement as one of the four principles that underpin the Foundational and Program Standards. The four principles (Need, Impact, Capacity and Partnership, Collaboration & Engagement) guide the assessment, planning, delivery, management and evaluation of public health programs and services (Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, 2017).

There are opportunities to engage and understand stakeholders' perspectives throughout all phases and stages of the Planning and Evaluation Framework (PEF). The table below (Table 1.) provides examples how stakeholder may contribute to your program during PLAN, IMPLEMENT, and EVALUATE.

Stakeholders may be engaged at different times, in different ways and to varying extents throughout the program. Also, it may not always be feasible to engage stakeholders at every point in the program. Nonetheless, it is important to start thinking about who your stakeholders are, their perspectives and their involvement before proceeding with any component of the Framework.

## TOOLS

- *Stakeholder Analysis*
- *New Data Collection Plan*

The Ontario Public Health Standards identifies stakeholder perspectives as a type of evidence that can inform decision-making.

Table 1. How Stakeholder Can Contribute in PLAN, IMPLEMENT and EVALUATE

<b>PLAN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify other key stakeholders</li> <li>• Help describe the public health need</li> <li>• Suggest potential strategies to address the identified public health need</li> <li>• Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the programming decision</li> </ul>
<b>IMPLEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input on the program logic model and/or program description</li> <li>• Provide resources for the implementation of a program activity</li> <li>• Support the development and monitoring of key indicators</li> <li>• Provide feedback on the program by highlighting areas for improvement and areas that are successful</li> </ul>
<b>EVALUATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the evaluation purpose and help with the development of key evaluation questions to focus your evaluation</li> <li>• Provide feedback on the appropriateness of data collection tools</li> <li>• Help with the interpretation of the evaluation data collected</li> <li>• Identify appropriate communication channels to share findings with relevant audiences</li> </ul>

## Step 1: Identify stakeholders

A stakeholder is an individual, group or organization, who has a vested interest in the public health need or program being considered. The stakeholder may positively or negatively affect or be affected by the program being developed, modified or stopped. Stakeholders can be described as internal or external. Internal stakeholders are part of MLHU; whereas, external stakeholders are individuals, groups or organizations outside of the Health Unit. Table 1 provides a few examples of internal and external stakeholders.

Members of your priority population(s) and/or target population(s) are key external stakeholders who need to be identified and considered, as the outcome of your program may affect them.

Table 2: Examples of internal and external stakeholders

<b>External Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Priority Population(s)</li><li>• Target Population(s)</li><li>• People with lived experience</li><li>• MLHU Clients</li><li>• Individuals residing in the MLHU catchment area</li><li>• Community agencies or groups the Health Unit directly works or consults with in the design and/or delivery of programs and services</li><li>• Media outlets (e.g. Radio stations, Television and Newspaper)</li></ul>
<b>Internal Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other MLHU teams</li><li>• MLHU Employees</li><li>• Students</li><li>• Board of Health members</li><li>• MLHU Volunteers (e.g. Community Emergency Response Volunteers)</li></ul>

Adapted from: Northwestern Health Unit, 2012

At the start of the any planning and evaluation activities, bring together a group of relevant staff members to brainstorm a list of internal and external stakeholders. As relevant stakeholders are identified, discuss and document the group's current understanding of each stakeholders' perspective on the identified public health need/program. Consider using the **Stakeholder Analysis Tool** to document this discussion. Identifying stakeholders is an iterative process. As your program progresses, your list of stakeholders may change, with new stakeholders emerging.

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#### Guiding Questions

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- Who can help describe the identified public health need?
- Who are your priority population(s) and/or target population(s)?
- Who will be affected, directly and indirectly, by the outcome of this program?
- Are there specific groups or organizations that oppose or support the identified public health need/ program?
- Who can influence the decisions? Who makes the decisions?

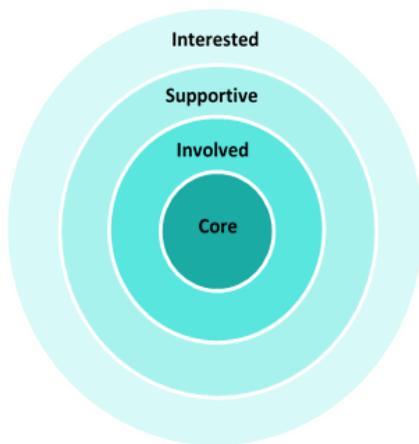
## Step 2: Prioritize your stakeholders

Depending on the identified public health need/program, you may have identified an extensive list of stakeholders. It may not be feasible or necessary to have the same level of engagement with all identified stakeholders. Defining each stakeholder's role in the program will help you prioritize the stakeholders for engagement. There are four stakeholder role categories: Core, Involved, Supportive, and Interested (Tamarack Institute, 2017).

Note: This step is particularly applicable when external stakeholders are part of a program.

Consider prioritizing stakeholders who support and who oppose the identified public health need/program. This will help achieve a balance in perspectives, and identify potential risks and/or challenges throughout the program.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Wheel



Core Stakeholders are part of your core program team. They are actively involved in the development of ideas to address the public health need, or development/modification of a public health program.

Involved Stakeholders are frequently consulted on specific aspects of the program where they are given the opportunity to provide more in-depth feedback. These stakeholders are not involved on an ongoing basis.

Supportive Stakeholders offer some form of support and input throughout the program.

Interested Stakeholders prefer to be kept informed of the program. These stakeholders are updated throughout the program, but are not directly involved in the work.

Adapted from: Tamarack Institute, 2017.

## Step 3: Decide on the level of engagement

As you prioritize your stakeholders, consider how much each stakeholder needs to be engaged. There are four levels of engagement, Inform, Consult, Collaborate and Empower (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011). Typically, stakeholders near the centre of the

It is important that the core program team establishes a process to review and update the **Stakeholder Analysis Tool** regularly, as your stakeholders' perspectives and roles may change throughout the program.

Stakeholder Wheel will need more frequent and extensive engagement. Table 3 provides a description of the four levels of engagement and examples of engagement strategies.

Note: The strategies listed in Table 3 are applicable when determining the level of engagement with external stakeholders.

*Table 3: Levels of Engagement and potential strategies for engagement*

Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Empower
Provide balanced, objective and accurate information to assist stakeholders to understand the public health need, or public health program	Obtain stakeholder input on specific aspects (e.g. program priorities, strategies), usually at pre-identified points of the program.	Partner with stakeholders in various aspects of the planning and decision making process (e.g. identify & decide on a strategy/intervention, developing a program)	To place final decision-making in the hands of the stakeholder. Stakeholders are enabled/equipped to actively contribute to the achievement of outcomes.
Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact Sheets</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>	Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus Group</li> <li>• Survey</li> <li>• Key informant interviews</li> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Photo voice</li> </ul>	Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Key informant interviews</li> <li>• Community Asset Mapping</li> </ul>	Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member on the Core program team</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011 and International Association for Public Participation Canada, 2015.

## Step 4: Develop your engagement plan

Based your current knowledge of each stakeholder’s perspective, identify any information gaps with your core program team. This will help you develop a clear purpose for your engagement. Since engagement can be resource intensive, consider if secondary data sources (e.g. policy statements, grey literature) can be used to address and fill in the information gaps.

Prior to engaging your stakeholders, it is important to have a clear purpose and plan established. This will help ensure the right stakeholders are engaged to meet your information needs. With your core program team determine what you hope to achieve with the engagement. For

“Poorly thought through engagement can create mistrust, waste stakeholders’ time and lead to ‘engagement fatigue’ – a reluctance to participate in future consultations.”

– Department of Education & Early Childhood Development

example, your program indicators suggest that the reach of your program is declining, as members of the priority population and/or target population are not utilizing the program. Using this information, you may decide to consult members of the priority population and/or target population to identify and understand the barriers to accessing the program.

Once a clear purpose has been established, select an engagement strategy that will help meet your information needs. Refer to Table 2 for some examples of engagement strategies for the different levels of engagement. There is no one right stakeholder engagement strategy. Based on your context, your information needs and the resources available, you may need to select multiple strategies. When an engagement strategy has been selected, it is important to check in with relevant stakeholders to ensure the strategy is appropriate. For example, you may decide to conduct an electronic survey with your priority population to understand the identified public health need. Checking-in with a few members of your priority population, may reveal a survey may not be the most appropriate strategy because the population may have low literacy levels and limited computer access.

Use the **New Data Collection Tool** to plan your engagement. This tool will allow you to document the engagement purpose, key questions you hope to answer, data collection and analysis plan, and associated timelines.

If your priority population(s) is prioritized for engagement, ensure enough time is allocated to build relationships and trust. This will help you select and plan a meaningful engagement strategy, while establishing cultural safety.

Review the RAC policy to determine if a RAC consultation is required. Ethics and privacy concerns need to be addressed prior to starting the engagement.

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### Guiding Questions

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- What is the purpose of engaging the selected stakeholder(s)?
- Is the engagement strategy appropriate for the selected stakeholder(s)?
- Will the engagement strategy give you the information you need?
  - Do you have the adequate resources and time?
- How will the information gathered from the engagement be used?

## Step 5: Apply findings

Once you have gathered all the needed stakeholder information, synthesize and interpret it by using a team-based approach. Consider how you will share this information with the various stakeholder groups and how you will obtain additional feedback (if necessary). This will help build trust and enable them to correct or clarify their responses.

Use the information gathered to identify potential opportunities or challenges for to your program going forward. Update your **Stakeholder Analysis Tool** with the information gathered and refer to this tool throughout the program to determine if further engagement is required.

## References

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