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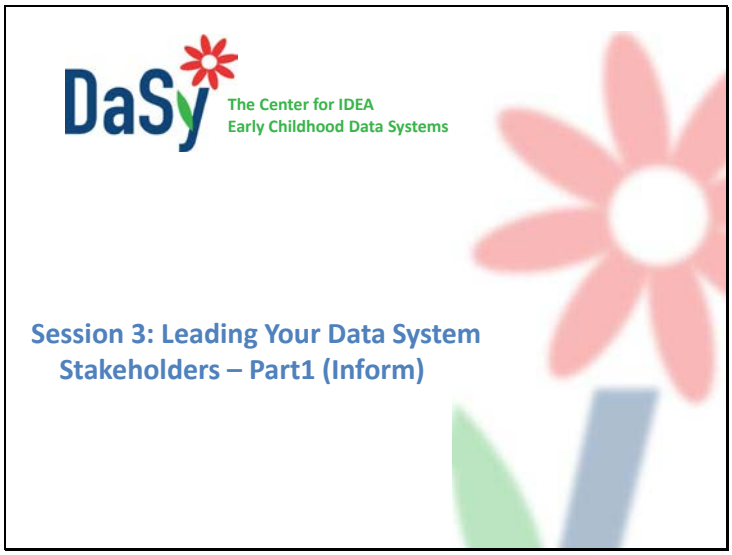

Welcome to Leading Your Data System Stakeholders – Part 1. This presentation focuses on considerations for leading stakeholders in the Inform Stage of the stakeholder engagement process. Stakeholders are those individuals affected by and/or responsible for the work you lead. This information helps prepare you to lead a stakeholder process, whether you follow a formal process or an informal process to gather stakeholder input over time.

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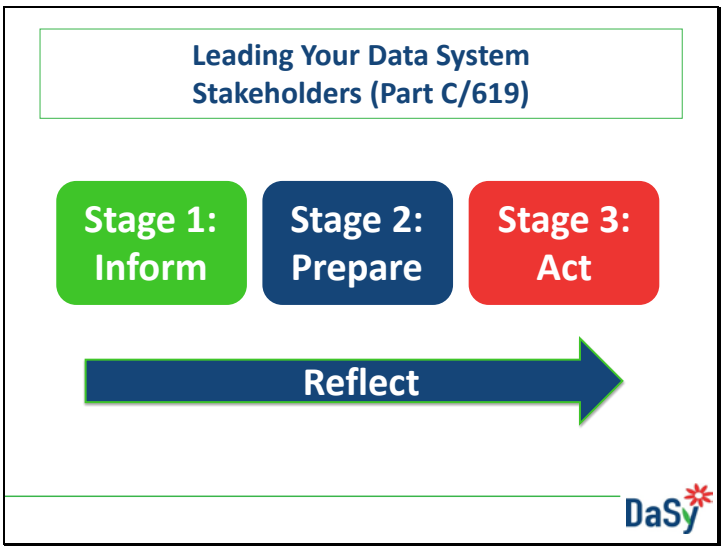

All Part C and 619 programs have data systems that allow them to provide federally required data. With any existing data system, enhancements are needed, and there may be new data requirements. In either of these situations, you might work with stakeholders to support decision making. In addition, although less frequent, eventually older data systems need to be replaced. Whether you are developing a new system, enhancing an existing system, or changing data collection, each undertaking benefits greatly from stakeholder input.

Asking for input from stakeholders on a range of issues is common practice within Part C and 619 state agencies. Getting input on data system decisions follows the same principles and practices that Part C and 619 leaders use with other stakeholder engagement efforts. Let's move forward to discuss how to engage stakeholders in data system conversations.

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Although much of the decision making regarding data systems development or enhancement benefit from stakeholder involvement, not all of this work requires a formal stakeholder group to be convened and used. There may be times when a small group of stakeholders may be able to provide the necessary input or others when less formal mechanisms (i.e. data user feedback functions within a data system) provide you with the information you need. As part of the leadership behind data systems enhancements, decide what kind of input is needed and the best, most efficient and effective way to get that input. Let's explore ways you can plan for, gather, and use stakeholder input to support work around your data system.

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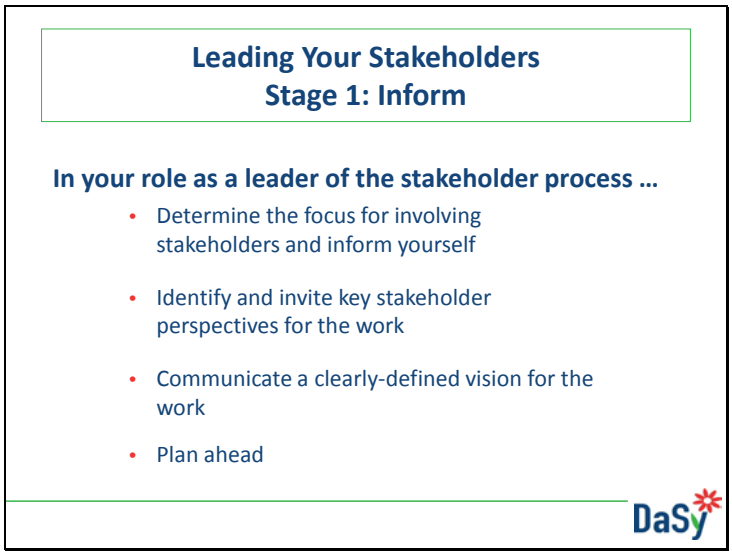

As a leader of stakeholders, it is important for you to be informed, as well as to inform others. This includes determining the focus of the work and stakeholder involvement. Your knowledge of the work at hand, the benefits of gathering a variety of perspectives, and a general process for stakeholder engagement provide a solid foundation for you in your role. Your own confidence and competence leads to informed conversations with your stakeholders.

Overall, during this first stage of the engagement process, Inform, your job is to identify the right people to serve as stakeholders, as well as generate buy-in and enthusiasm for the specific work. Stakeholders may serve for a long-term process or a more specific, goal-oriented task.

Your role includes articulating a clearly defined vision for the work and the importance of high-quality data systems for answering critical questions and accomplishing the work of the Part C or 619 program.

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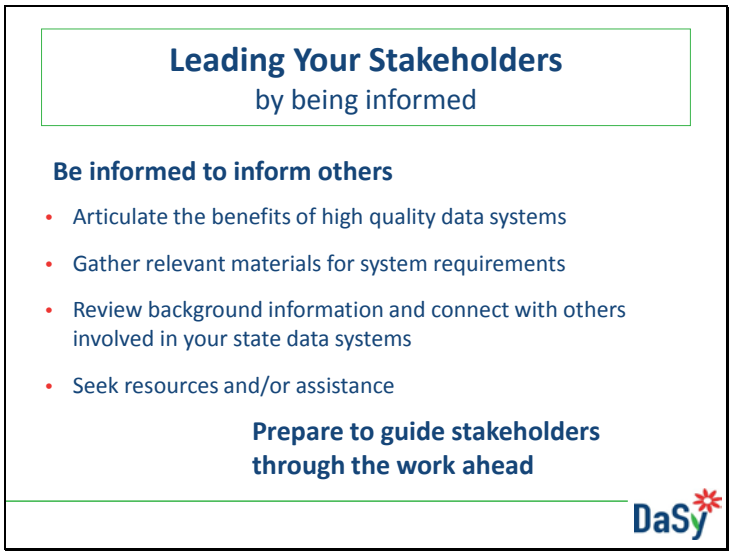

The first step in the Inform stage is to ready yourself for the work involved in leading your stakeholders. It is important for you to think about and articulate the benefits of a high-quality data system and how stakeholder input provides needed information toward that goal. Begin by gathering material and reviewing background information that helps you connect with others who might be doing similar work in your state. Consult with others to be sure you have the necessary details. Bring in people who have the intimate knowledge you need about the data system to help you lead the stakeholder effort. The goal is to be prepared to discuss the importance of stakeholders in the work and to answer their questions.

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A critical initial task of the Inform stage is identifying which stakeholders to involve. Your own knowledge of the data system work, a commitment to the benefits of multiple perspectives, and an understanding of the general process for stakeholder engagement provide a solid foundation for identifying stakeholders. As you identify those who should be involved, consider stakeholders from a variety of agencies, roles, and perspectives needed to inform the work. Also, consider diversity in language, culture, and perspective when selecting stakeholders.

Overall, during this first stage of the engagement process, your primary job is to identify the right people to serve as stakeholders and to generate their buy-in and enthusiasm for the work. Stakeholders may serve for a long-term process or for a more specific, short term task.

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A key aspect of leading your stakeholders is communicating the vision for the work ahead. For stakeholders to be informed, they need to understand the goal and indicators of success. With this information, stakeholders can actively participate in the work based on a better understanding of their roles in achieving the vision and the purpose of their input.

Informing stakeholders may be a formal presentation or sharing written materials for review before a meeting. Informal communication may simply be ensuring that an individual knows why information is being gathered and its use. This may be communicated via email or in the instructions for a simple survey or client input mechanism.

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During the Inform stage think about what it would look like to be successful and create a plan to get there. There will be challenges along the way so identify what those might be early and brainstorm how those challenges could be resolved. For each part of the plan, be very specific about who is responsible so that stakeholders recognize their individual roles in the effort. Most importantly, engage stakeholders early and often.

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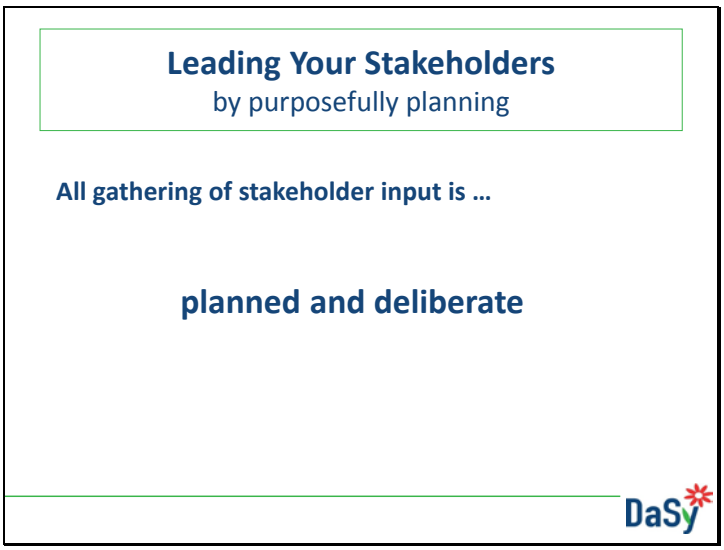

A written plan is good practice more formal processes. It is especially useful in times when stakeholders are engaged in long-term data systems projects to keep both you as the leader, and stakeholders as participants, focused on the work.

Less formal processes require less formal plans. Planning for more informal processes can be as simple as knowing what kinds of information you need from stakeholders and thinking through who might best provide that input. Not every stakeholder process needs a formal planning process, but it is critical that all gathering of stakeholder input be planned and deliberate. There will be opportune, unplanned times when stakeholder input is available, but generally it is unwise to take a haphazard approach to engaging stakeholders.

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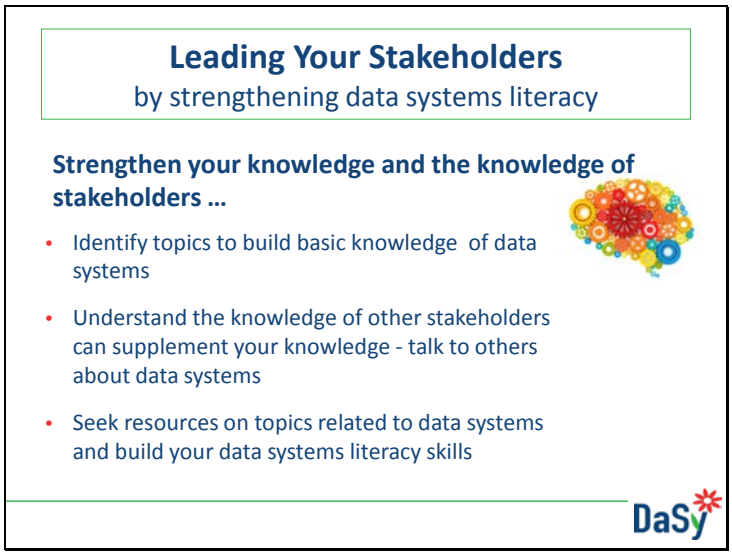

Data system conversations can be filled with unfamiliar technical terms. To effectively lead your stakeholders, strengthen your own knowledge of data systems. A basic knowledge helps you articulate the vision and intended outcomes of formal and informal stakeholder engagement processes without requiring you to know everything about data systems development. Stakeholders bring their own data systems literacy skills to the process, especially your IT stakeholders. Take advantage of their expertise to increase your own knowledge and the knowledge of others in your stakeholder group.

There are numerous resources available to help you increase your knowledge of data systems, including those on the DaSy web site. Use opportunities to gain knowledge through conversations that help you build on current relationships and allow others to more fully engage in the effort. Most of all, create an environment where everyone feels comfortable to ask questions by you leading the way. Ask for clarification and more information through good questions that enhance your learning and the learning of others.

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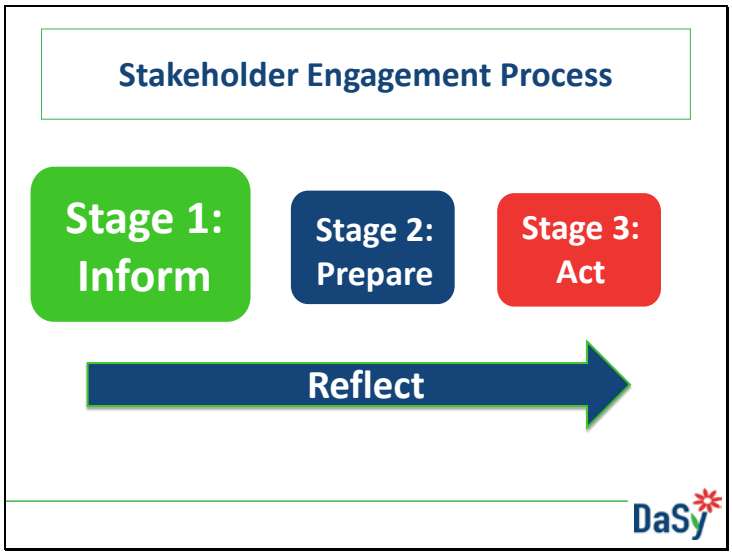

With an understanding of your role as it relates to the Inform Stage of the Stakeholder Engagement Process, continue to build your competence as a stakeholder leader by examining your role in Stage 2: Prepare.