

Slide 1



Welcome. This presentation provides an introduction to stakeholder engagement and the process through which stakeholders become involved and invested in providing input throughout an initiative, project, work team, or committee. This information sets the stage for a closer look at stakeholder engagement and its application to your involvement as a Part C or Part B 619 stakeholder in an integrated data system initiative, as well as your work with your own data system stakeholders.

## Stakeholders and Stakeholder Engagement

**Stakeholders**

- can be internal *or* external to an organization/agency.
- are affected by the outcomes of a project or initiative.
- provide guidance on the progression of a defined scope of work.

**Stakeholder engagement**

- is the use of stakeholders as participants in a collaborative process that guides the creation and execution of a defined scope of work.

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Let's begin by defining stakeholders and stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders are individuals, either internal or external to an organization or agency, who are affected by the outcomes of a project or initiative. In other words, they are the people who “hold a stake” in outcomes. Ultimately, stakeholders help leaders understand the effect a line of work may have on others or on a system as a whole. Therefore, they play an important role in providing input and guidance throughout the progression of a project. To ensure that all perspectives are considered when managing a project or an initiative, it is important to seek input from stakeholders within an organization, as well as from stakeholders outside the organization.

Stakeholder engagement means to use stakeholders in a collaborative process to gather a wide range of perspectives and input at multiple levels of an organization or system. Stakeholder engagement occurs at various points and throughout the lifecycle of a project or initiative.

## Selecting Stakeholders

- Ensure that multiple levels of an organization/system are represented in the stakeholder group
- Include a variety of viewpoints to contribute to comprehensive and responsive decision-making
- Seek stakeholders who can help the group achieve the benefits and desired outcomes of the initiative

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The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center’s work on systems change emphasizes the importance of engaging stakeholders from multiple levels of an organization or system when attempting to fully understand the nature of the challenges that need to be addressed, as well as defining the vision of solutions. A comprehensive selection of stakeholders helps ensure that all perspectives are considered as the group moves forward. It is important for the project or initiative leader to pay attention to whether important viewpoints are left out, and make adjustments to the stakeholder group in ways that ensure comprehensive and responsive decision-making.

Effective stakeholder engagement relies on strong leadership in selecting the right people to participate in the group’s work. Deciding who participates as stakeholders is based on exactly what the group is trying to achieve, including the benefits and desired outcomes.

## Benefits of Engaging Stakeholders

- Promotes buy in and ensures multiple voices are heard on key issues
- Provides creative and collaborative group problem solving
- Broadens the reach of the work
- Supports effective implementation and sustainability



Soliciting input from stakeholders promotes buy-in, as well as ensures that many voices are heard on key issues. Diverse groups often provide creative solutions to important issues and lead to strategies that create meaningful results for all parties involved in, or served by, an initiative. In addition, solving problems together for a common cause and broadening the reach of efforts to create positive outcomes brings tremendous satisfaction to everyone involved in the process, and leads to more effective implementation and long term sustainability of projects. For these reasons, stakeholders are used in a wide range of systems level initiatives.

## Principles of Effective Stakeholder Engagement

**Relevant to stakeholders**

- Define and articulate purpose
- Specify desired outcomes
- Identify short and long term outputs/outcomes

**Relies on trust-based partnerships**

- Establish an agreed upon group process
- Articulate expectations of stakeholder engagement

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There are four core principles that guide effective stakeholder engagement. When applied effectively, these principles lead to stakeholder buy-in, shared problem solving, trust-based relationships, and increased accountability.

The first principle emphasizes the importance of leaders ensuring that the initiative, project, work team or committee is relevant to the stakeholders. This includes clearly defining and articulating the purpose of the work to be done in ways that are meaningful to the stakeholders. It also includes explicitly outlining the desired outcomes and indicators of progress and success along the way. Lastly, defining short and long term outputs or products within specified timelines contributes to increased accountability for everyone involved in the initiative.

The second principle highlights the importance of relationships in the stakeholder engagement process. Building and sustaining trust-based partnerships form the foundation for collaboration among leaders and stakeholders. Establishing an agreed upon group process and clearly articulating expectations for stakeholder engagement help all participants understand the nature of the work and their role in the process.

## Principles of Effective Stakeholder Engagement

**Emphasizes effective communication**

- Establish consistent, responsive methods of communication
- Ensure accessibility of information to all stakeholders
- Address conflicts or dilemmas

**Requires shared ownership of problem solving**

- Ensure all voices are heard
- Provide timely, reflective, and responsive decision-making
- Define the scope of stakeholder decisions

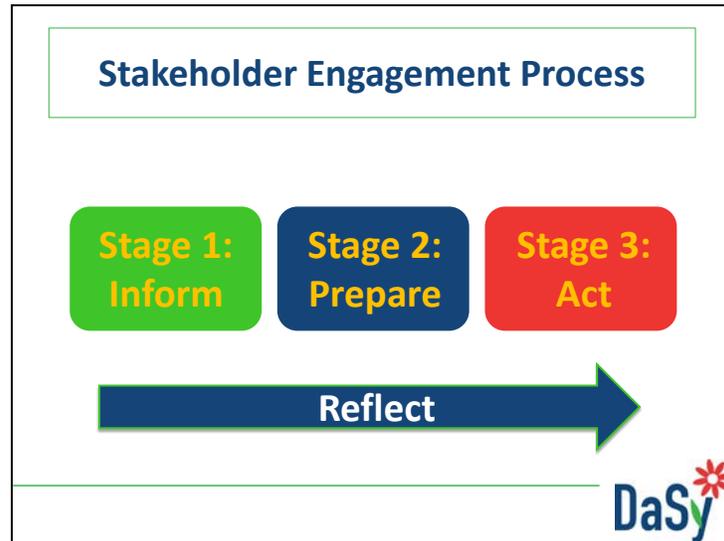
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The third principle emphasizes the need for effective communication throughout the stakeholder engagement process. Effective communication is consistent, responsive, and reflects the needs and expectation of stakeholders. Communication loops use many methods of communication to ensure timely and accurate access to information. Stakeholders will be more engaged and able to contribute more effectively to the work and the needed decision making when they are well informed at all points in the process. Effective communication also includes directly addressing any conflicts or dilemmas that arise as part of the process, either between individual stakeholders in the group, or when there are differences between the expectations of the group and the actual work or project.

The last principle highlights the importance of establishing shared ownership of problem solving in the stakeholder engagement process. Leaders of stakeholder groups should emphasize the importance of shared problem solving by ensuring that each stakeholder's opinion, information, and ideas are shared and heard. Effective problem solving involves timely, reflective, flexible, and responsive decision-making. This requires effective leadership, organization, and strategic planning on the part of all members of the stakeholder group. This shared decision making also includes being clear about the scope of the decisions to be made and what decisions will and will not be made by the stakeholder group.

When applied effectively, these principles will lead to an efficient and collaborative stakeholder process that achieves better outcomes.



With an understanding of the important role stakeholders play in a wide range of initiatives, projects, work teams and committees, let's look at a process that supports the use of the principles for effective stakeholder engagement. This process follows a progression of three stages: Inform, Prepare, and Act. Each stage requires the accomplishment of particular tasks that lead to readiness for the next stage. The process guides stakeholders to actively and meaningfully participate in a given scope of work. Ongoing reflection throughout the process is critical in linking performance and outputs with desired results, and is guided by the principles of effective stakeholder engagement.

## Stage 1: Inform

- Learn about the project's purpose and desired results
- Develop interest and motivation for the project's work
- Understand the benefits of the project





Now let's take a closer look at each stage of the stakeholder engagement process from the perspective of a stakeholder. Inform is the first stage of the process. In this stage, those leading the initiative inform stakeholders of the purpose of the work, the desired results, and the reasons why they have been selected to participate as a stakeholder. This helps stakeholders develop their interest and motivation to become involved, as well as understand the benefits of the work to themselves and others. Stakeholders who feel well-supported during this first stage often provide the needed momentum to begin moving the work forward successfully.

## Stage 2: Prepare

- Become empowered to share perspectives and opinions
- Participate as active, collaborative contributors
- Build relationships between and among all participants
- Recognize and value contributions of all participants
- Gain an understanding of the context of the project
- Learn about expectations for involvement (possibly articulated in a stakeholder engagement plan)

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Knowledge gained in the Inform Stage promotes readiness for the second stage, Prepare. During this stage, stakeholders become empowered to share their perspectives and opinions and participate as active, collaborative contributors to the work. Relationship-building is key, both between and among stakeholders and between stakeholders and leaders of the initiative. Relationships will be critical when stakeholders are asked and expected to provide input.

During the Prepare stage, stakeholders begin to recognize what they bring to the conversation and develop an understanding of the value others bring to the work as well. This value may include certain experience, expertise in an area, or representation of an important group affected by the work. Throughout the engagement process, it is important for stakeholders to develop a sense of the type of input they can provide. This requires an understanding of the context in which the work is occurring. Context includes individual, agency, or state factors that influence how each stakeholder views the work and their involvement in the work, and can ultimately impact how the stakeholder process proceeds. A thorough understanding of the context helps individual stakeholders identify where they are in relationship to the work or the initiative. Engagement also comes from stakeholders' understanding of the exact expectations for their involvement in the project. Creating this individual connection or investment to the work is critical to promoting and sustaining engagement.

Often leaders of an initiative work with the team to create a stakeholder engagement plan. Such a plan is useful for sharing the purpose, outcomes, timelines, and specific activities for communication and decision making. For the stakeholders, this plan clarifies expectations, roles, and responsibilities—all important to building a strong foundation for the work to be done.

### Stage 3: Act

- Apply knowledge, skills, and strategies gained in previous stages (Inform and Prepare)
- Accomplish project's tasks to achieve desired outcomes
- Sustain open, trusting relationships among all participants



Once stakeholders move through the Inform and Prepare stages, they are ready to act as members of a collaborative team. Their ultimate success as contributors to the work depends on their ability to apply the knowledge, skills, and strategies gained in the previous stages of the engagement process.

In stage three, Act, stakeholders provide input to help leaders do the work they planned to create the outcomes they set out to achieve. To accomplish the desired results, leaders continue to build and support strong relationships with stakeholders, as well as facilitate relationships between stakeholders. Stakeholder groups can create very complex environments for building interpersonal relationships. It takes time to develop quality relationships, over many different interactions. Building and sustaining meaningful relationships among the individuals involved in an initiative fosters working and productive partnerships, which ultimately helps the group meet its goals. Stakeholders who feel they are members of a group based on trusting and open relationships are more likely to actively participate. It is important to remember that all stakeholders have a “stake” and interest in the initiative, but they will each own a different role in the overall work.

If the group is having difficulty moving forward, leaders and stakeholders should initiate conversations about the way the group is interacting and propose ways to improve the group's effectiveness. Leadership might need to promote changes to the group process to ensure that decision making occurs in an effective and efficient manner.

## Reflection

- Occurs throughout the stakeholder engagement process
- Guided by the principles of effective stakeholder engagement
- Serves as gauge to measure progress toward the project's goals
- Used to examine group dynamics and assess the quality of the group's functioning
- Involves celebration of milestones and successes

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Reflection helps everyone know that their participation makes a difference and the work is moving in a forward direction. Reflection should occur throughout the stakeholder engagement process, prompted and facilitated by the project's leaders. Reflection can be guided by the principles of effective stakeholder engagement. Revisiting these principles can help the group determine if the work is staying true to its defined purpose and if stakeholders are meaningfully involved. Reviewing the status of outputs and outcomes serves as a gauge for leaders and stakeholders alike to measure the progress made and to help define next steps.

Interjecting opportunities for reflection throughout the Inform, Prepare, and Act stages helps leaders and stakeholders assess the quality of everyone's engagement and identify how effectively the group is functioning. The outcomes of reflection can then be used to guide the group process, including the development of strategies for strengthening group dynamics.

Remember to celebrate milestones or successes achieved! Everyone appreciates recognition for a "job well done", so even small successes should be celebrated. Often these celebrations provide the motivation needed to continue the important work at hand.

## Connecting to DaSy Technical Assistance

DaSy technical assistance providers are available to support you with stakeholder engagement-related activities in a variety of situations, including when you are:

- Strengthening your data systems within Part C or Part B 619
- Coordinating data system efforts between Part C and Part B 619
- Participating in Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) initiatives
- Participating in P-20+ State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) initiatives

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Stakeholder engagement is an important part of our technical assistance work at the DaSy Center. The DaSy Center can support you in a variety of different activities involving stakeholders. You may be interested in using stakeholders to strengthen your data system within Part C or Part B 619. You may be interested in convening a stakeholder group to strengthen or initiate efforts to coordinate between Part C and Part B 619. You may be asked to participate as a stakeholder in your state's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) initiative or in your state's broader P-20+ State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) initiative. Stakeholder engagement can apply to any of these situations, so DaSy technical assistance providers are prepared to support you with a range of stakeholder engagement-related activities.

If you would like technical assistance to serve as a stakeholder or lead an initiative in which you will need to involve stakeholders, please contact DaSy staff.

### Stakeholder Engagement

- Requires strategic and purposeful planning
- Should be grounded in the principles of effective stakeholder engagement
- Is a collaborative process that unfolds in stages – Inform, Prepare, Act – each involving ongoing reflection
- Benefits the knowledgeable, dedicated, and invested partners from all levels of an organization/system as they work together to achieve desired outcomes

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In summary, it is important for leaders and stakeholders alike to understand the purpose of stakeholder engagement and the benefits it yields to an initiative, project, work team, or committee. Stakeholder engagement requires strategic and purposeful planning on the part of everyone involved. Grounding the work in the core principles of effective stakeholder engagement promotes a shared commitment to accomplishing the group's desired goals.

As the stakeholder engagement process unfolds, each stage can be facilitated by revisiting and reflecting on the principles of effective stakeholder engagement. At the heart of this work is a shared understanding that knowledgeable, dedicated, and invested individuals benefit from working together to improve outcomes.

