

## Stakeholder engagement

### Strategies and challenges for effective stakeholder engagement

The content of this fact sheet stemmed from the August 2018 Family and Child Evaluation Community of Practice session. Members were invited to share their knowledge and experience with stakeholder engagement during a roundtable discussion. Discussion topics included:

1	Who are the stakeholders?
2	Why should you engage with stakeholders?
3	In what ways should stakeholders be involved?
4	How do you achieve stakeholder buy-in?

This fact sheet is based on members' input, and is designed to provide the reader with general considerations for stakeholder engagement. Readers are encouraged to access the additional resources (see end of fact sheet) for further information.

#### 1. Who are the stakeholders?

Stakeholders are people or organisations invested in the program, and are interested in, or have a stake in what will be done with, the results of the evaluation. Stakeholders are also those affected by any decisions (e.g. service users or clients).

##### Questions to consider:

- Who are the key stakeholders that should be considered during the evaluation?
- How do you identify the key stakeholders?
- What demographic/profile data do you need to collect/report?
- How will you ensure representativeness of stakeholders?

##### Tip:

- Map stakeholders to ensure you consult with the right people and are inclusive of harder to reach groups

##### Example: Stakeholder mapping

The purpose of stakeholder mapping is to help identify relevant stakeholders and their interest in the program or evaluation. Create a list of stakeholders, outlining:

- Name
- Type of stakeholder (i.e. program funder, program staff, client, etc.)
- Interest in the evaluation (i.e. will use the results for program planning)
- Potential role in the evaluation (i.e. provide data, make decisions about the evaluation, utilise findings)

#### 2. Why should you engage with stakeholders?

Understanding stakeholders' perspectives and priorities is fundamental to informing the evaluation process, interpreting the data and increasing the utilisation of the evaluation findings.

##### Questions to consider:

- What do you hope to achieve from the engagement? (i.e. aims and objectives)
- What are the key benefits? (i.e. common set of priorities, transparency and accountability)
- Are there any risks to consider? (i.e. ethical considerations, stakeholder burden, supports)

##### Tip:

- Stakeholder engagement is fundamentally about building professional relationships to understand and improve an issue. When working with stakeholders we should be consistent, inclusive, open and respectful.

Engaging stakeholders in evaluation can yield a variety of benefits. The following table presents some commonly cited benefits.

Improved understanding	Stakeholders can provide contextual information about how the program is intended to work and potentially identify aspects overlooked by external evaluators.
Utilisation	By engaging stakeholders, findings are more likely to address their information needs.
Credibility	Engaging a range of stakeholders can improve the transparency and credibility of your evaluation.
Capacity	Involving stakeholders in the design of the evaluation or data collection can build their evaluation capacity.
Foster relationships	Stakeholder engagement offers an opportunity to build relationships and collaborate with stakeholders.



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### 3. In what way should stakeholders be involved?

Not all engagement strategies will work for everyone. You may need to consider time, budget, geography, existing relationships, availability, and familiarity with the evaluation or program.

#### Questions to consider:

- What role should stakeholders play and at what stage during the evaluation process should they be engaged?
- How can you achieve efficient and cost-effective engagement with limited resources?
- What human and budget resources are available?
- How much time and effort is required for the engagement?
- What lessons can you learn from past activities undertaken to engage a particular stakeholder?
- What was the impact of the engagement?

#### Tips:

- The engagement approach should be fit for purpose and may require a mix of methods, including adopting different language and terminology.
- If engaging with vulnerable stakeholders, ensure that appropriate supports are in place.

While the engagement should have a clear purpose and objectives, the needs of stakeholders should be considered and any conflict between the two acknowledged in order to manage expectations.

### 4. How do you achieve stakeholder buy-in?

The time and effort devoted to relationship building will assist in getting stakeholders on board and building consensus.

Be aware of yourself, your own background, position and agency, and the potential impact this may have on stakeholder engagement.

#### Questions to consider:

- What strategies can you use to achieve stakeholder buy-in?
- How will you maintain buy-in when follow-ups are required?
- What do you do when stakeholder's priority areas differ from your own? (i.e. managing expectations)

#### Tips:

- Consider the benefits for the stakeholder in participating in the evaluation and develop strategies to reduce the burden on them.
- Consider stakeholder fatigue and be aware of stakeholder involvement in other initiatives.
- Stakeholders should see evidence of how the information has been used to inform and improve the quality of a program.

Involve stakeholders from the start of an evaluation and keep engagement purposeful and timely.

#### Common engagement pitfalls

- Unclear purpose
- Differing capacity of stakeholders
- Unfocused dialogue
- Failure to review and evaluate

## Additional resources

Australian Government. Department of Health. [Stakeholder engagement framework.](#)

Australian Government. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. [Engaging stakeholders.](#)

Better Evaluation. [Identifying the Intended User\(s\) and Use\(s\) of an Evaluation.](#)

Better Evaluation. [Understand and engage stakeholders.](#)

Facility Solutions Group. [A practical guide for engaging stakeholders in developing evaluation questions.](#)

Glasgow Centre for Population Health. [Supporting community-based evaluations of participatory budgeting.](#)

Program Management Institute. [Planning effective stakeholder engagement strategies.](#)

Tasmanian Government. Department of Health and Human Services. [Stakeholder analysis \(stakeholder matrix\).](#)

Victorian Government. Health and Human Services. [Stakeholder engagement and public participation framework and toolkit.](#)