Including Stakeholders in Data Meetings

This section contains recommendations for including stakeholders as active participants in data meetings.

Establish a clear objective for stakeholder participation.

It is important to have a clear objective and defined timeline to identify potential participants. Consider the role you want stakeholders to play in the data meeting. What will successful stakeholder participation look like? What are you hoping stakeholders will contribute? States, for example, may convene stakeholders for a variety of reasons, including serving as an advisory group to leaders and providing input on decisions for education planning and implementation.

Identify relevant perspectives for inclusion.

Once you have defined the objective and successful participation well, you can identify the perspectives you need represented.

Examples of data meeting participants could include

- state education agency (SEA) staff (including special education and general education);
- students, parents, and families;
- local education agency (LEA) and local program staff;
- regional education support providers;
- special education advisory groups;
- preschool and postsecondary school partners;
- other child and family-serving agency staff; and
- community organization or advocacy group members.

The perspective of stakeholders can influence the way they approach data. Stakeholders who are education professionals may have a deeper understanding of data. However, due to their experience, they may be prone to make assumptions about the data. Other individuals, such as family members, may best relate to data at the personal level, that is, data about individual children or grade levels. Some stakeholders will understand data from the school, district, or state level depending on their perspective. While data discussions benefit from diverse viewpoints, knowing the experiences and backgrounds of your stakeholder group will help you most effectively support stakeholders' participation in the data meeting.

As the need for skills and knowledge regarding data analysis increases, the pool of possible stakeholder participants may grow smaller. Consider participants with a variety of diverse perspectives for the most robust analyses of the data. This could include a broad range of individuals from different units, organizations, backgrounds, and roles (e.g., state staff, local/regional staff, practitioners, policymakers, and community members). Start with questions such as

- Who has a stake in the information?
- Who can provide context to the data that will be analyzed?
- Will stakeholders represent consumers (of services or programs)?

- Will stakeholders represent all needed voices?
- Do stakeholders represent multiple interests?
- Will they benefit from the project? Are they direct recipients of the outcomes?
- Are they (their organization) involved in funding the project?
- Do they have political interests in the project or its intended outcomes?
- To what extent will each stakeholder be committed to the project or agency?
- Does the group present a range of experience levels of understanding and using data?

Students are frequently overlooked as potential stakeholders. When appropriate, strive to include students who could be affected by the work of the group and any resulting policy or practice changes. If it is not feasible to include students in a data meeting, consider other meaningful ways to include student perspectives (e.g., focus groups). Work to ensure that the group of people reviewing and analyzing the data reflects the student population (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, disability) whose data they will review.

Determine a structure and timeline for stakeholder participation.

You may engage stakeholders as part of a short-term group developed for a specific purpose with an identified goal. Examples of short-term stakeholder groups might include:

- groups tasked with developing new graduation requirement recommendations for the state; and
- groups revising state practices around significant disproportionality requirements.

On the other hand, your stakeholder group may be ongoing, with new members joining periodically when others rotate off. Some typical examples of ongoing groups include

- state advisory panels for special education; and
- Work Groups for SSIPs, where membership changes as the work shifts through three distinct phases of development and implementation.

If you plan to use an existing group to address your data meeting needs, consider the following:

- Will the current group membership be sufficient? Will you need to add stakeholders for full representation?
- Which stakeholders will be able to commit the time required to participate fully?
- Does this work fit within the established objectives of the group? Will the group need more time to complete this data analysis as well as meet other previously identified objectives?
- Should this group be working on these objectives, or does a different group of stakeholders need to complete the data analysis?

As you engage stakeholders in the data meeting group, document the list of members along with the rationale for asking each member to join. As the composition of the group changes over time, document those changes as well.

Support stakeholders in their understanding and use of data.

Careful attention to building stakeholders' understanding and interpretation of the relevant data is critical to getting meaningful feedback from stakeholder participation. Meeting plans always should include time for developing that understanding to most effectively support the ability of stakeholders to examine and discuss the data.

Education is a data-rich field. Most stakeholder groups do not need to know all the data available at the national, state, and local levels. However, it may be helpful to provide context by introducing the group to the available types of education data and the importance of data prior to introducing them to specific datasets. Stakeholders should receive support to learn about the data pertinent to the purpose of the group. Such support can help stakeholders move from simply observing data to using data to make informed decisions (Mandinach and Honey 2008).

For example, the following types of data would be important to a group advising the state on new graduation requirements: data on current graduation rates; trends by year; and graduation rates of various subgroups, such as low income, disability, race/ethnicity, and English learners. In addition, contributing data such as course completion, attendance, disciplinary incidents, and retention also would be vital to the discussion. In some instances, it may be important to consider whether regional or local data (e.g., school, district, county, service area) are critical to the conversation.

The function of your stakeholder group has direct implications for how to best support group members in understanding the data they will review. When the entire group is new, you need to make sure you provide all group members with knowledge development opportunities, and you may want to conduct trainings or workshops before or as part of your meetings with them. Some data meeting leads will find it necessary to spend quite a bit of time during the first meeting(s) developing stakeholder understanding of the data. Others may find that they can introduce the data over multiple meetings, a little at a time, based on the objectives of each meeting.

There are various options for providing support to ongoing stakeholder groups that add new members regularly. One option is to provide an introduction to the data through an orientation for new members (individually or in a group) prior to meetings of the entire stakeholder group. Another option is to offer training or preparation prior to each meeting to prepare the stakeholders for the content that specific meeting will address.

Finally, be sure that stakeholder participants have an understanding of relevant privacy and confidentiality policies and regulations. This includes *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) and *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996* (HIPAA) and often may include a discussion on guidelines for sharing data outside the group.