

## Making it Real: Stakeholder Engagement in Any Research – August 24, 2020

### 1. Descriptive Information

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| <p><b>Making it Real: Stakeholder Engagement in Any Research</b></p> <p>This Affinity Discussion is based on the premise that respectfully engaging stakeholders in the research process is possible and can improve the knowledge gained in studies of all kinds. At the same time, we recognize that there are challenges and limitations of engagement depending on the type of research and the context.</p> <p>We will focus our discussion around the question, "How can researchers respectfully include stakeholder perspectives in the research regardless of the funding stream, scale, or purpose of the research?"</p> <p>Let's brainstorm challenges and solutions together.</p> | <p><b>Facilitators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Teresa Derrick-Mills</b>, Urban Institute</li><li>• <b>Jessica Barnes Najor</b>, Michigan State University, Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship</li><li>• <b>Colleen Vesely</b>, George Mason University</li><li>• <b>Gretchen Kirby</b>, Mathematica</li><li>• <b>Karen Ruprecht</b>, ICF</li></ul> <p><b>Scribe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Katie Caldwell</b>, ICF</li></ul> |
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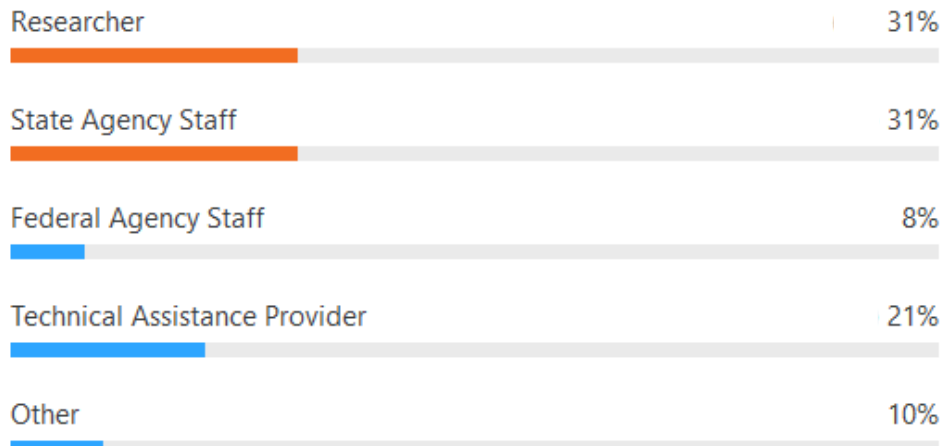
### 2. Documents Available on Website

- Making it Real: Stakeholder Engagement in Any Research Presentation
- Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities
- CER Abacus Templates
  - CER Abacus Instructions

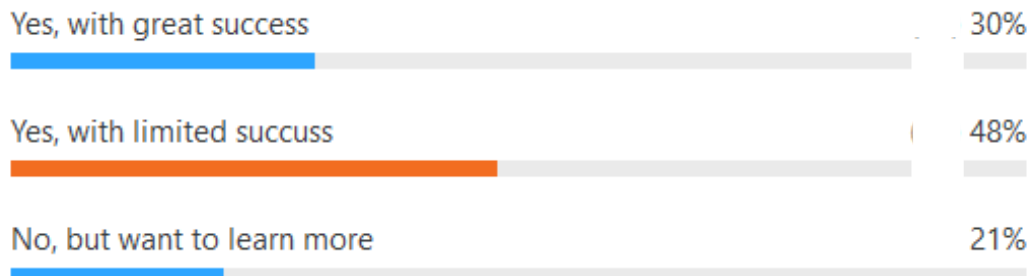
### 3. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Teresa Derrick-Mills
  - This webinar was originally supposed to be an Affinity discussion at the in-person 2020 CCEPRC meeting, so it is meant to truly be a discussion.
  - Different types of research have different opportunities for engaging stakeholders. This discussion will focus on how to respectfully engage stakeholders throughout the entire research process, and for all types of research, even research that was not designed as community-engaged. We want to begin the session by acknowledging that even when we are trying to engage stakeholders it can be challenging. In this session, we want to openly discuss challenges and strategize together on solutions.
  - Polls were conducted to get a sense of who was attending the webinar and their stakeholder engagement experiences:

## What is your primary role in ECE?



## Have you engaged stakeholders in your research?



- **Summary of Presentation #2:** Jessica Barnes-Najor
  - Community-Engaged Research: A collaborative form of inquiry based on equity and partnerships in the research process that focuses on the strengths of individuals and communities to promote community action and social change.
  - 5 Phases
    - Partnership development: building relationships
    - Project development: research, service project, community intervention
    - Project Implementation
    - Data analysis and interpretation
    - Product generation for public and academic audiences
  - The Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool: a tool that was developed to give a framework to including community in the research. The full citation for this tool is: Doberneck, D. M., & Dann, S. L. (2019). The Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 23(2), 93-107.

- Each part of the abacus represents a different component of the research and community engagement.
  - Sides: community partner’s voice and researcher partners voice
  - Rungs: steps in the research process
  - Beads: voice and power in decision making
- Why understanding the range of engagement is important
  - Clearer expectations for both parties
  - Determines who is responsible
  - Guides resource sharing
    - Points towards appropriately aligned methods for participation

- **Breakout Discussions**

Following the presentation, participants were released to facilitated breakout groups to discuss *how researchers can respectfully include stakeholder perspectives in the research regardless of the funding stream, scale, or purpose of the research?*

- How do you define stakeholders to engage in research?
- What supports stakeholder engagement?
- What is a barrier to stakeholder engagement?
- What lessons can we learn from to build on successes and overcome challenges?

Teresa, Jessica, Colleen, Gretchen, and Karen each facilitated a group. Summary notes from each breakout discussion are provided below.

- Teresa’s Group
  - How do you define stakeholders to engage in research?
    - CCDF Lead Agencies.
    - Child care providers, teachers, parents,
    - Stakeholders in the contexts of studying workforce registries, conducting QRIS evaluations, coaching for ECE practice, developing learning standards, creating feedback loops to the CCDF Lead Agency on program/policy implementation, and promulgating regulations.
  - What challenges are identified?
    - Time -- it can take a long time to develop the relationships; might be multiple years.
    - Being sure that your work is WITH, not ON the community.
    - When working on a national study, it is hard to know all the communities and there can be large differences in practices and expectations across them.
  - What solutions are identified?
    - Begin getting to know stakeholders and forming collaborations BEFORE you have a research project you want to do (within this is a challenge that unless you are doing community-based research that the stakeholders are defined by the research and so you don’t have a “before” period).
    - Seek out connector organizations who are close to/in the communities you are interested in reaching. Organizations such as child care resource & referral agencies are an example. Sometimes local universities also have strong partnerships. Other examples are communities of faith, local health departments, and other community-based nonprofit organizations.
    - Think carefully about how you communicate with stakeholders; for example, if you want information from a state agency, start off with an informal request (don’t start off with an Open Records request). If you are communicating less formally, they may be able to communicate less formally with you and find out what you really need. But if you have

used an Open Records request, they have to follow very formal procedures which may or may not get you what you actually wanted.

- Think about weighting of importance of the rungs in the Abacus Tool. For example, a product that sounds like it is only academically-focused might actually be the report that garners attention of the press. It has the words that will represent the community and stakeholders to the public for years to come; maybe they need a say in that.

○ Colleen's Group

- What challenges are identified?
  - Identifying stakeholders, especially if there is a broad group of potential stakeholders. If there is a broad group of stakeholders it may be difficult to engage them. Ensuring that stakeholders are not all pre-determined but that throughout the research we remain open to new stakeholders depending on how the research unfolds.
  - Determining what you are engaging stakeholders for, and which stakeholders will hopefully take on leadership roles. It was suggested to add an "L" to the abacus to denote who is leading each effort in the research process.
  - Communication can be challenging if there are multiple partners and in turn, gatekeepers to stakeholders/ communities. Can be challenging to know who is doing the communication? How to access the community?
  - Resources---time, money, people.
  - COVID-specific: stakeholders are more willing to engage and it may be "easier" to engage diverse stakeholder, but some are finding that their stakeholders are exhausted because they are being tapped for multiple things.
- What solutions are identified?
  - Resources-- time, money, people.
  - Effective communication and group facilitation skills training--can help with building relationships and rapport in a short period of time.
- What resources are identified?
  - Communication and group facilitation skills training.

○ Jessica's Group

- What challenges are identified?
  - If the community doesn't already have a problem or question to start from, it can be hard to engage from the beginning. Working with families using virtual services (comfort, access). How do you reach communities if you can go to them - can't host a dinner. Do people want to do "one more Zoom call"? Creating different products can be time consuming. Different backgrounds of different stakeholders/participants.
- What solutions are identified?
  - Involving stakeholders from the beginning - thinking about how you can do this from the beginning is better, even though it might be more challenging. Working with families using virtual services (can make it easier to reach more people). Working with rural communities - more people coming to virtual events. Having more opportunities to elicit feedback throughout the process (from beginning to end), and having more ways to get feedback (surveys, focus groups, interviews). Create different versions of products to share with different audiences. Offering a relaxing place for people to share thoughts. Asset based approaches - encouraging people to participate by not referring to them as the struggles.
- What resources are needed?
  - Need incentives to have community to show up.
  - Language speakers to help with community member input (translation).

- Need ideas for virtual engagement.
- What resources are available?
  - <https://engage.msu.edu/covid-19/resources>
  - Doberneck, D. M., & Dann, S. L. (2019). The Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 23(2), 93-107. <https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/1453/1445>
  - Blank abacus template to be provided by conference organizers.
- Gretchen's Group
  - What challenges are identified?
    - Including many voices but also being efficient. In quality improvement initiatives, states and implementing organizations want to be responsive and place the needs of providers and the community at the forefront to make the system more connected. But, it is time-consuming and resource intensive to do so.
    - Quality is defined in many different ways depending on the perspective—providers, parents, children, staff. Getting stakeholder input into quality improvement is challenging because there are so many ways to consider quality. In addition, the varied dimensions of quality makes it hard to achieve a balance among stakeholder priorities.
    - Involving ECE staff in research or quality improvement initiatives can be challenging given pressures on their time and generally low wages.
  - What opportunities or solutions identified?
    - Inviting input early in the process; not including stakeholders as a perceived after-thought but engaging from the beginning.
    - Use early stage of stakeholder engagement as a first step in building an understanding of the field; getting to a shared understanding that programs are centers of education, not just child care—the ECE system is an important support for child development. We might be able to change mindsets through the engagement process.
    - Offer providers and teachers incentives to participate as stakeholders.
    - Provide useful tools, materials (like curriculum), or coaching to help promote engagement.
- Karen's Group
  - How do you define stakeholders?
    - Stakeholders are those that are impacted by the project, such as parents, providers, or others that might be impacted by the research. A starting point in identifying stakeholders is to think about the purpose of the research or project and think about who might have an interest or be impacted by the results.
  - What challenges are identified?
    - It is important to include stakeholders whose voices aren't traditionally represented, including people of color and/or people who do not speak English. The challenge is conducting outreach in these communities with trusted advocates.
  - What opportunities or solutions are identified?
    - Recruit data collectors/research staff from stakeholder groups. Research and program implementation teams should seek conduits to the communities in which the research is being conducted.
    - It is also important to not only involve stakeholders in data collection activities, but also to share data and be open to different interpretations of the findings from the different stakeholder groups. This may take additional time, but can add a richness to the findings and stakeholders may be more open to adopting different approaches based on the findings if they are involved in the interpretation of the results.

#### 4. Brief Summary of Discussion

Following the breakout groups, each group reported back to the whole, an overview of the topics they discussed and invited comment and further discussion. Report backs:

- This group had a few state administrators in the discussion and they advised researchers to please ask questions don't just submit an open records request.
- Start partnerships and relationship building before you start the research as this really facilitates the process
- Abacus tool- in addition to breath and depth, considering the different weights that the rungs might have in the process could be helpful
- Who are the stakeholders? Stay open to new stakeholders that come along in the process of the research.
- Thinking about who is going to take on leadership role- perhaps this deserves a place in the abacus
- Communication- who are the gatekeepers and who is communicating with whom throughout the process
- What does it mean to have effective relationships with stakeholders?
- In today's current environment, many researchers are experiencing the opportunity to hear from a diverse set of stakeholders who previously may not have raised their voices to the conversation
- A foundational step in community engagement is getting everyone on the same page about Early Care and Education, particularly emphasizing education and helping all stakeholders to understand it is not just child care.
- How can you engage many voices but still be efficient?
- Important to find balance across stakeholder issues.
- Common theme: importance of building relationships and make it personal.
- Some shared successes: offer financial incentives to teachers to engage in research (since they are often working for a lower wage) and at the provider level offer tools to improve quality to get buy in.
- Importance of defining the goals and objectives of the research and who it impacts, who's voice needs to be heard on the research issue? Another important consideration is to examine the power dynamics both with the research setting and the community so that it is not only those with power who have a voice in the research.
- Researchers aren't always the conduit to the community, there are other relationships that need to be explored.
- What does the data mean to those in the community?
- How do you engage new stakeholders around the table? When the table starts looking familiar, especially during ongoing research, it's important to think about dynamic representation throughout the process.
- Currently many researchers cannot meet physically with stakeholders because of Covid-19. This has obvious drawbacks but it is allowing more people to participate who could not participate before of distance, physical and resource limitations. Some teams are still creating a relaxing spaces for people to share virtually- in lieu of having a meal together in person, participants will bring a meal to the "virtual table" and hang out together.
- Supporting virtual engagement via technology like Facebook live, WhatsApp and for older communities that might include phone calls.
- Translators are vital in communities where English is not the primary language so all participants can contribute.

## 5. Questions and Comments in the Full Group Following Report Out

- In the area of promoting and walking the "equity talk", are researchers willing to provide their own "researching methods" requirements to funding sources to ensure that stakeholder communities "must be included"...In other words, pushing funder research policy change from researchers to funders?
  - Karen- Previously a Fellow at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and that Foundation used strong language around community stakeholder engagement within their RFPs.
  - Colleen-My work is funded by a foundation that is local to the community. When the local foundation approached my University about conducting research, we pitched back a Community Based Participatory Research Project that included pay and incentives for community members in addition to supporting the research.
  - Jessica- It is important to create some common language to advocate for community partners to be paid at the table and create equity within the research process.
  - Gretchen- I'm thinking about responding to federal research grants which is much of my work. OPRE does have a stakeholder engagement task within their research requirements. As researchers we do have a responsibility to engage stakeholders creatively.
- Dadi- How do we define research? Can we reframe research in broader terms to empower stakeholders to contribute? Really look at the impact of the research and relationship.
  - Alan- Agree with Dadi, not making assumptions about who the stakeholders should be.
- As researchers we need to create a paradigm shift for how to define research. It is essentially co-creating something together.

## 6. Summary of Key Issues Raised

- It is important to begin community engagement right away, before the research gets underway, when possible.
- The Degree of Collaboration Abacus Tool is a useful way to think through incorporating community partner voice into research.
- Examining the power dynamics within research and the community setting is important when engaging stakeholders. Consider the supports that community participants need to engage in the research, helping to elevate the voices of those who may be marginalized, focusing on what the community perceives as its own needs are all ways to work towards equity within the research process.
- It's important to do the work of figuring out who should be at the research table from the community and recognizing that it could change as research progresses.
- Connector organizations can play important roles in helping to bridge between researchers and stakeholders, especially when researchers are not well-known in the community or when the researchers are less familiar with the community.