



Defining & Structuring Stakeholder Engagement in Minnesota Management & Budget's Impact Evaluations

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Stakeholder Engagement Guide: Principles

Guiding Principles

We consider stakeholder engagement from two perspectives: engagement as partnership and engagement as mixed-methods evaluation.

- Engagement as partnership means attending to the work of building strong relationships with those stakeholders who are the intended users of our research.
- Engagement as mixed-methods evaluation means mobilizing a broad range of social science methodologies to incorporate into our analyses and interpretations the unique expertise and experiences of stakeholders involved in and affected by our evaluations.
- These two approaches to engagement work in concert to generate rigorous, relevant, and useful impact evaluations that support effective, evidence-based policymaking.

We understand stakeholder engagement as a process, not an event.

- We design unique engagement strategies for each evaluation we undertake, and do not apply principles or frameworks mechanically. That is, we contextualize stakeholder engagement— we understand and approach it in accordance with the context of the given evaluation, the intervention under study, the involved stakeholders, and our Evaluation Policy.
- We iterate on stakeholder engagement strategies, pausing regularly and often to debrief and change course when necessary.
- We understand that our capacities and strategies for stakeholder engagement grow and evolve over time and from evaluation to evaluation. We work as a team to systematically reflect on and document our engagement practices; learn from past successes and failures; and apply those learnings to future engagement efforts.

We map the stakeholder landscape and gaps in our understanding of it at the outset of every project.

- We understand that setting the foundation for engagement at the outset of a new evaluation is critical. To that end, we employ “hygiene” methods at the outset of every evaluation to inform the development of a stakeholder engagement plan, which we consider a living document. We create (and update, when necessary) stakeholder maps at the outset of every project to articulate how different stakeholders may have influence over, or may be impacted by, an evaluation.
- We develop explicit criteria specific to each evaluation for identifying and engaging with stakeholders.

- We discuss our team's biases or blind spots in identifying and engaging with relevant stakeholders for each project.

We work in active partnership with the stakeholders of our research throughout and beyond the evaluation lifecycle.

- We involve stakeholders in the research process beginning with the evaluation design stage, and we work to sustain stakeholder involvement through all subsequent stages of the research process, where possible and appropriate. These opportunities include, at minimum:
 - Co-defining research questions and goals;
 - Influencing the make-up of the partnership team;
 - Co-designing new interventions;
 - Commenting on draft reports and interpretations; and
 - Co-determining the most useful formats and forums for dissemination.
- We prioritize building and sustaining mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual benefit with our stakeholder partners. We understand that trust and respect from partners is earned, not a given.
- We have open and clear conversations with stakeholder partners about roles and responsibilities, which may differ from project to project depending on the needs of the evaluation. We co-define these roles and responsibilities from the outset using written agreements. We understand that these roles and responsibilities may need to be revisited throughout the lifecycle of a project, and commit to making time and space for those renegotiations to take place.
- We create opportunities for frequent and open two-way communication. Stakeholder partners are given clear modes of access to the evaluation team.
- We sustain and expand relationships with stakeholder partners beyond the delivery of a report. When possible, we strive to support auxiliary efforts to disseminate, promote, and operationalize the learnings from our evaluations with and for stakeholder partners.

We value stakeholders' unique expertise as a necessary element of any successful evaluation.

- We recognize the broad range of expertise held by our stakeholder partners as complementary to the expertise of the IE Unit. To that end, we acknowledge stakeholder partners as co-researchers and work to integrate their expertise into the research process and products, both formally and informally.

We embrace the paradox between independence and close collaboration with stakeholders.

- We conduct evaluations *with* and *for* stakeholder partners; that is, we co-design, conduct, and report evaluations to meet the needs of the intended users. Conclusions, recommendations, and lessons are clear, relevant, targeted, and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended goals. At the same time, we are committed as an independent evaluation team to producing rigorous, credible, and transparent results.

We recognize that meaningful engagement with our stakeholders takes time, effort, resources, and vision.

- We commit to building a culture of continuous education and improvement for our research staff with regard to best practices and strategies for relational and methodological approaches to stakeholder engagement in impact evaluation. We convene regularly as a team to discuss and learn more about stakeholder engagement practices and how they fit into our work.
- We collectively create and shape long-term visions for stakeholder engagement in our work. We ask and answer: What kind of relational engagement practice do we want to have 5 years from now? What methodological expertise and practices do we want to see in our evaluations 5 years from now? How do we plan to get there?