

# Unlocking Potential: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

**MAY 2019**

Prepared by Meg Boyd

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

### Overview: Oregon's Plan

Oregon's Plan is our state's response to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and represents the hopes, dreams and values for Oregon's students and schools. While the plan itself addresses specific federal requirements, it also serves as a renewed commitment for Oregonians to work together to ensure all students in our state have the opportunity to learn and thrive. Central to Oregon's Plan and the work ahead are key commitments generated through the feedback and voices of Oregonians. We believe these commitments serve as the foundational tenets and levers to strengthen and shape our educational system to better serve Oregon's students:



- Prioritizing and Advancing Equity
- Promoting a Well-Rounded Education
- Strengthening District Systems
- Fostering Ongoing Engagement

### Why Stakeholder Engagement?

ESSA required state education agencies (SEAs) to develop state plans through extensive outreach and engagement efforts to everyone from policymakers to educators to tribal organizations to parents. For Oregon, its broad, inclusive engagement efforts resulted in a statewide vision for education and new champions for improving outcomes for all students across the state. To continue this work, the Oregon Department of Education will support the expectation that all school districts develop "collaborative processes to engage stakeholders to provide input and feedback" in local plan development.

### What is "Stakeholder Engagement?"

*Stakeholders* are community members who are involved and invested in districts, schools, programs and outcomes for students. *Engagement* is the process of communicating to, learning from, and collaborating with stakeholders to acknowledge the unique needs and strengths of the stakeholders involved.

### Principles to Guide Stakeholder Engagement

Inclusive	Accessible	Ongoing	Well-Informed	Focused
Engage a wide range of people and organizations, with a commitment to engaging historically excluded voices.	Make it easy for people to participate, to understand what is happening, and to be heard.	See stakeholder engagement as a continuous process involving ongoing dialogue – not as a one-time, static event.	Ensure information shared is clear, accurate and timely. Put feedback loops in place.	Use opportunities to engage as a stepping-stone toward building long-term partnerships that can help school systems improve and sustain success.

## Roadmap for Engagement

Use these ten strategies as a starting point for approaching stakeholder engagement in a way that seeks out a broad range of perspectives. Think about how the strategies can assist district leaders in their efforts to assess their current engagement approach and how you might help them find opportunities to expand on existing efforts.



1. Clarify your Goals
2. Work with Partner Organizations
3. Speak to your Audience
4. Use Multiple Vehicles
5. Identify Ambassadors
6. Ask for Input Before Decisions are Made, and Use it
7. Keep Materials Simple and Brief
8. Communicate Early and Often
9. Keep Staff Informed
10. Turn Connections into Long-Term Relationships

## Part I: Getting Started

### 1. Clarify your Goals

Before communicating with stakeholders, district and school leaders must be clear on what they want to say. Start at the top: what is the district's overall vision for education? How will stakeholders help the district work toward these goals? Keep in mind why the district is engaging stakeholders in the first place, and develop goals and a plan to support and guide engagement efforts. This isn't about compliance, or about making people happy – it's about seeking input from the people most closely tied to the public education system and facilitating timely, authentic, two-way dialogue about improving school systems.

- Ask stakeholders how they want to be engaged.
- Let stakeholders know why they were invited.
- Make engagement activities public.
- Come with an open mind.

### 2. Work with Partner Organizations

We often hear from the same group of stakeholders when we need input. Consider broadening the net and reaching out to leaders from different interest groups, ethnicities, demographics and parts of the community. Continue to ask: "Who are we missing?"

## Who Are Your Stakeholders?

- Educators & Education Professionals
- Students and Youth
- Parents, Families and Communities
- District and School-Level Leaders
- Tribal Leaders
- Civil Rights Organizations
- Early Learning Advocates and Providers
- School Board Members
- Researchers and Advocacy Organizations
- Elected Officials
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Higher Education
- Health and Social Services
- Youth Development
- Business Community
- ...and many more!

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

- Encourage a range of perspectives and solutions.
- Leverage existing networks before you create new ones. Ask partners to connect with existing community and peer networks, and encourage leaders in those groups to participate in school improvement efforts.
- Partner with stakeholder(s) who the community trusts. These stakeholders can put the audience at ease and ensure greater attendance and participation.

### Part II: Engagement Best Practices

#### 3. Speak to your Audience

Engagement strategies that may be successful in one community may not work in another. Not all stakeholders will come to the table with the same level of education or background. That does not mean that their voices should not be heard. Recognize up front that many stakeholders will not be education experts and may need context before they can fully contribute to, and engage in, a valuable discussion.

- Ask stakeholders what interests them.
- Anticipate stakeholders' concerns and questions.
- Have you documents reviewed in advance.
- Avoid edu-speak and using jargons or acronyms.
- Leave enough time for stakeholders to respond.
- Identify a clear point of contact.

#### 4. Use Multiple Vehicles

Traditional outreach methods like parent nights or flyers are no longer the only – or even the best – ways to reach every audience. Blogs, websites, social media, webinars, focus groups and surveys are among a myriad of other strategies to connect with specific stakeholders. This means the district will need to adopt a strategy that incorporates more than one vehicle to effectively make the connections they need. Not all people get their information in the same way anymore, so to be most effective – and to ensure that no one is inadvertently left out – districts need to intentionally seek out and use the vehicle that work best for the people they are trying to reach.

- Meet people where they are.
- Leverage communication vehicles people are already using.
- Cover your community.
- Schedule meetings around traditional workday hours.
- Don't just put everything online.
- Ask what works best and do more of that.

Possible Communication Vehicles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Webinars</li> <li>• In-person forums</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Roundtable discussions</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Email listservs</li> <li>• Personalized emails</li> <li>• Monthly coffee chat</li> <li>• Text messages</li> <li>• Online chat</li> <li>• Conferences</li> <li>• Video conferences</li> <li>• Livestreaming</li> </ul>

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

### 5. Identify Ambassadors

Stakeholders will respond more openly when they discuss information that could potentially impact them directly with a colleague, peer or trusted source. Create a relationship map or draw out a delivery chain to determine the best ways to reach stakeholders and your best ambassadors to reach each group. Districts should develop tools and resources such as talking points and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents to support outreach by ambassadors to ensure their communication remains clear and that they are set up to gather meaningful feedback and measure responses.

- Determine when and how to use ambassadors.
- Make sure ambassadors know what is expected.
- Invite active participants to play an ambassador role.

### 6. Ask for Input Before Decisions are Made, and Use it

The intent of meaningful engagement is to make sure the people affected are at the table from the start. Asking for input on issues after decisions have already been made leaves stakeholders feeling devalued, and like their time has been wasted. Approach stakeholders with rough ideas to get their reaction, and be clear from the start on which issues have been resolved and are no longer up for discussion.

- Clarify what is on – and off – the table.
- Come with questions your district needs answered.
- Ask for ideas.
- Close the feedback loop by reporting back out to stakeholders.

### If the District is Engaging...

**Parents:** Remember that parents care deeply about their child and their school. Lean on social media. Offer food, child care and translation services to increase participation.

**Educators:** Some educators may need convincing to participate, based on past experience. Work with unions and associations to engage with educators, and consider ways to address potential barriers to their involvement.

**American Indian Tribes:** Oregon has nine federally recognized tribes that are geographically dispersed, and will need time to convene. Tribes are sovereign governments, so start with a government-to-government relationship. Many tribes have an agency for education and a director who can connect the district to its parents and community members.

**School Boards:** Most school board members have full-time jobs outside of their local board responsibilities. Work with them to schedule time for listening sessions and work sessions where they can actively engage and participate.

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

### 7. Keep Materials Simple and Brief

All written, online or presentation materials should be concise and easy-to-understand, written to illustrate how the content relates to student achievement and to the district's strategic vision. Differentiate materials by audience and design them to be as responsive to questions and concerns as possible. Keep in-the-weeds details about process for in-person discussions.

- Create materials your stakeholders can share.
- Watch out for acronyms and jargon.
- Use visuals.

### 8. Communicate Early and Often

Do not let stakeholders first hear about changes to the district from other stakeholders or the news media. Proactively take steps to own the message and create opportunities and tools for stakeholders to have their questions answered and provide input along the way. Generate a regular, reliable stream of information, made available in multiple formats and translated into multiple languages to keep stakeholders informed, and to keep the public aware of the process, decisions made and next steps. Utilize ambassadors, associations and other partners to help disseminate information along the way.

- Create a timeline to plan out an engagement strategy.
- Create a communication advisory group.
- Only communicate when you have something to say.

## Part III: Sustaining Engagement

### 9. Keep Staff Informed

Internal teams represent a group of critical stakeholders and potential ambassadors. Make sure they are included in all outreach with other stakeholder groups. Provide them access to information about key themes, dates and decision points. Hold information sessions for internal teams to keep them informed and to seek input.

- Rely on internal planning teams.
- Be coordinated.
- Share outreach materials.
- Provide staff with talking points.

### 10. Turn Connections into Long-Term Relationships

The required engagement with stakeholders for improvement planning provides districts with an opportunity to create new relationships with stakeholders who have not traditionally been at the table. Engage with a wider array of stakeholder groups, actively listen to their input, answer their questions and show how their feedback is used to strengthen district plans. Remember that long-term relationships and engagement is not about agreeing 100 percent of the time, but about working through issues together. Seek to deepen relationships with civil rights organizations, unions, administrator associations and other advocacy groups through this process and commit to working together in the future

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

to expand the districts' reach to support all schools.

- Let stakeholders know the district is committed for the long haul.
- Set up regular checkpoints.
- Report on your results.
- Create an advisory group, but don't just rely on them to represent your stakeholders.

### Planning Tools (more to come!)

Use the calendar as a starting point to help organize your thinking, clarify timeline(s), identify ambassadors and map out your engagement strategy.

### Timeline (January 2019 – June 2019)

	January 2019	February	March	April	May	June
Outreach						
Meetings						
Milestones						
Decisions						

### Your Role as Leaders: Start a Conversation!

You play a pivotal role as a district and school leader who wish to strengthen ongoing, meaningful engagement with stakeholders. Use this resource as a tool to help district and school leaders think collaboratively about how to build, strengthen and maintain a culture of ongoing, meaningful engagement.

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

Strategies	Guiding Questions	Facilitation Considerations
Clarify your goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we have / what is our vision? Why?</li> <li>• What is the communities' vision for our schools? How could engagement advance this vision?</li> <li>• Who are the key communities we want to reach?</li> <li>• Who have we engaged in the past and how has that impacted where we are now?</li> <li>• What kind of results / feedback came from engaging our stakeholders?</li> <li>• Who will be impacted by the decisions we make?</li> <li>• What do we want stakeholders to know?</li> <li>• What actions would we like them to take?</li> <li>• Do our stakeholders know why they are being engaged?</li> <li>• Have we built an internal system to ensure that input is reviewed and that decision makers know what input is received?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The format and timing of engagement should be driven by its primary audience(s).</li> <li>• Districts should seek to engage parents who represent their student body in multiple locations.</li> <li>• Lean in to the district vision conversation. This is the foundation from which all improvement strategies come from. Is it current? Relevant? Vetted by stakeholders?</li> <li>• Is the vision about student learning and can all staff state it?</li> </ul>
Work with partner organizations to identify and engage with your stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are our historically underrepresented parents and other stakeholders?</li> <li>• Who are we missing? Who is particularly challenging to work with? What do we do when you invite members of stakeholder groups and they don't attend?</li> <li>• Who does this decision impact?</li> <li>• What community resources exist and how are we set up to support the districts' vision?</li> <li>• Which organizations work directly with these stakeholders?</li> <li>• How can we partner with these organizations to collect feedback?</li> <li>• How do partner organizations represent the demographics of our school/district?</li> <li>• What are our partner organizations goals?</li> <li>• Who have we engaged in the past? What worked?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and other stakeholders may be more inclined to share feedback and ask questions in sessions led by a trusted community group and held at a neutral location, outside of work hours.</li> <li>• Parents and other stakeholders may be more inclined to attend a session with translation services are made available.</li> <li>• There are many reason people get involved. Finding out their why, is just as important as your own.</li> </ul>

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

<p>Speak to your audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What knowledge, experiences and priorities do our stakeholders bring?</li> <li>• What concerns might they raise?</li> <li>• What context will they need?</li> <li>• What assumptions do our stakeholders have about the community at large?</li> <li>• Who could help lead this conversation?</li> <li>• How will we 'continue the conversation' with stakeholders? What ongoing communication is planned?</li> <li>• How will we engage new stakeholders who enter the community?</li> <li>• Have we had our materials translated into multiple languages?</li> <li>• Have we had our materials reviewed by advocacy or community organizations for cultural competency?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider having the superintendent / other district leaders ask stakeholders directly: "what motivates you to be engaged? What do you hope to learn more about? What would you like to have happen as a result of your attendance, involvement, feedback? What are your hopes, dreams for your student and his/her school?"</li> </ul>
<p>Use multiple vehicles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What vehicles of communication are currently used?</li> <li>• Whom do we want to have more engaged?</li> <li>• What feedback have we received from stakeholders to help better understand how they want to be communicated with?</li> <li>• What is our "why" for engaging stakeholders?</li> <li>• What do we consider authentic engagement?</li> <li>• How do we apply an equity lens when determining "authentic engagement?"</li> <li>• Do we have a process for addressing the effectiveness of our communication system?</li> <li>• How can we reach our stakeholders where they are?</li> <li>• Where and how do our stakeholders get their information?</li> <li>• How can our meetings be made inviting for families from diverse backgrounds?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a combination of vehicles— including community forums, email communication, social media, direct mail, text messaging and radio—to reach the widest audience.</li> <li>• Families may need certain accommodations to participate in meetings, such as childcare, translation services, and transportation.</li> </ul>
<p>Identify ambassadors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do key stakeholders trust, and could they serve as ambassadors to champion our efforts?</li> <li>• How do we communicate with ambassadors? (the why, the what, and the how)</li> <li>• Who are our ambassadors and whose voices are heard?</li> <li>• What past practices have been successful?</li> <li>• What professional learning have our ambassadors received?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusted community members can help to get buy-in from stakeholders.</li> <li>• Keep ambassadors on the same page and using the same message by providing them with talking points, slides and FAQs to use on the district's behalf.</li> </ul>

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the district team ever considered leveraging ambassadors for key stakeholder groups, especially those hardest to reach?</li> <li>• Whom do staff go to for answers?</li> <li>• Are we unintentionally leaving anyone out?</li> <li>• Do ambassadors understand the culture of schools, districts?</li> <li>• Are ambassadors representative of the community you serve?</li> <li>• How can ambassadors help you reach more stakeholders, answer questions and collect feedback?</li> </ul>	
<p>Ask for input before decisions are made, and use it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What questions do we need stakeholders to answer?</li> <li>• How will the district use the data?</li> <li>• What processes have been used in the past for garnering input?</li> <li>• How are decisions communicated to stakeholders?</li> <li>• Are we seeking multiple perspectives?</li> <li>• Clarity on – what types of decisions require stakeholder input?</li> <li>• What are stakeholder saying about why they are not responding or engaging? How do we get the ambassadors to get that information to them directly?</li> <li>• Are we using qualitative and quantitative data and are we using inductive and deductive reasoning?</li> <li>• In the process transparent and include a clear purpose, and how input will be used?</li> <li>• How will we report to them on how you used their feedback?</li> <li>• How will we address feedback that you did not incorporate?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make materials available in advance and give enough time to respond.</li> <li>• Build trust by showing how you used and incorporated stakeholder feedback.</li> <li>• Is everyone at the table that should be there? If not, ask about those involved.</li> <li>• Listen for whether decisions have already been made. Does the district have established protocols for making decisions?</li> </ul>
<p>Keep your materials simple and brief</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which materials does each type of stakeholder need to review most? Least?</li> <li>• How is this (document, presentation, etc.) easily understood by multiple audiences?</li> <li>• Have we considered equity (using an equity lens) in preparing communications/materials?</li> <li>• What is the background knowledge of the audience?</li> <li>• How much background do they need?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents are likely most interested in information that affects their child and their school.</li> <li>• Keep in mind how people process information.</li> <li>• Look for ways to scaffold information.</li> <li>• Leave enough time to have materials reviewed, translated, and made accessible for people with disabilities.</li> </ul>

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which community partners can review our materials?</li> <li>• Which details can be saved for hyperlinks or appendices?</li> </ul>	
Communicate early and often	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some of the successful ways we have been able to communicate with stakeholders?</li> <li>• Do we have a communications plan in place?</li> <li>• How frequently will we give progress updates?</li> <li>• What existing vehicles (newsletters, etc.) can we leverage to provide these updates?</li> <li>• How are new families engaged? What do they experience and what does the initial communication look like?</li> <li>• What other opportunities do we have to communicate with our stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help assess whether the district is using the right communication vehicles with the right frequency.</li> <li>• With each round of input, encourage the district and school to publish a summary.</li> <li>• Consider offering that the superintendent assign at least one person to “own” the regular communications with stakeholders to create consistency and give people a reliable contact for questions.</li> <li>• Bring ideas that may be used or seeing success in other districts.</li> <li>• Consider helping the district take an initial inventory of the vehicles they use to communicate most frequently. Are they working? If not, why not?</li> </ul>
Keep your team informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about our internal communication system.</li> <li>• How is our team structured?</li> <li>• What barriers have we encountered when it comes to internal communications?</li> <li>• What do all staff need to know about our improvement efforts?</li> <li>• Which staff can serve as ambassadors to external stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District and school leaders should provide all staff with basic information about improvement efforts so there is a common understanding and message.</li> <li>• Listen for how many internal staff (and whom) receive regular updates from district leadership.</li> <li>• Are feedback loops in place? What does the district typically do with feedback once it is received?</li> <li>• Remember: not all will be on board.</li> </ul>

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: A Tool to Support Ongoing, Meaningful Engagement with Stakeholders

<p>Turn these new connections into long-term relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our current practices to invite and cultivate long-term relationships?</li> <li>• Tell me about our relationships with organizations like teachers' association, NAACP, tribal leaders, and others?</li> <li>• Which stakeholders have we connected with who could help with future implementation efforts?</li> <li>• Who do we still need to reach?</li> <li>• What long-term role can these stakeholders play?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value and appreciate perspective, local context, and voice.</li> <li>• Consider where you have common ground. What is working well?</li> <li>• Build relationships through trust, transparency, and consistency.</li> <li>• Stakeholders can inform efforts to continuously improve systems and structure in place.</li> <li>• Consider roles stakeholders can play on existing or new advisory groups so their voices continue to be heard.</li> </ul>
--	--	--