

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Watch Video 1
for more
information

Implement strategies at the beginning of a project that focus on building a strong community

① BUILD INITIAL TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

Establish in-person meetings with the whole team when possible

Team members appreciate opportunities to meet in person at least annually.

Do personal check-ins at every meeting

When team members feel connected to the project leaders/staff, their engagement increases.

Try This

- > Sign onto video platform a few minutes before time to say hi to early participants.
- > Ask how everyone is doing towards the beginning of the meeting.

Unite the team on a common goal

Establish awareness of the specific objectives your team will be working on to increase passion for the project.

Create an environment where everyone has an equal voice

Make sure everyone feels heard and understood.

② CULTIVATE COMMITMENT

Communicate clear responsibilities along with project expectations

Make sure all team members know what their role is on the team.

Set up a consistent structure for each meeting

Keep your meeting in a reliable format so it is easy to orient your team to new information.

Try This

- > Start each meeting with a quick check-in.
- > Recap the previous meeting, the actions taken between the meetings, and the purpose of the current meeting.
- > After finishing agenda, spend time catching up with each other's lives.

Simplify participation:

- Send 1-2 email reminders with video platform hyperlinked
- Include clear agenda and meeting documents
- Record all meetings
- Create a centralized website to house all materials and recordings

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

VIRTUAL PROJECTS

Watch Video 2
for more
information

Virtual projects can affect the ability to fully contribute

1 MEET IN-PERSON WHEN POSSIBLE

In-person meetings (e.g., annually) can help strengthen the project community by:

- Building connections among team members and project leaders/staff
- Bolstering relationships that then take place in a mostly virtual setting

2 CONDUCT VIDEO MEETINGS

Video meetings help everyone stay connected when in-person meetings are not available

They can also increase accessibility for people who may not be able to meet in-person on a regular basis.

Video platforms allow people to:

- Read facial reactions and body language
- Communicate nonverbally via chat functions

Try This

- > Show the team how to use reaction buttons to add another option for virtual participation.

3 PROVIDE TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Offer training on how to use the video platform

Provide times outside of the meeting to work with anyone who might have trouble using video platforms.

Provide team members with equipment

If needed, offer equipment (e.g., webcams) and provide set-up guidance.

Check in throughout the project

Take the time to see if anyone has technology questions or if additional training is needed.

4 FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT

Help the team remain engaged

Engagement is important during virtual meetings where it can be harder to interact.

Try This

- > Watch for individuals who might be on mute (or unmuted) without knowing.
- > Look for people who seem like they have somethings to say but are having trouble finding an opening.
- > Gently ask if an individual wants to share their thoughts to ensure they feel included.

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

SIMPLIFYING PARTICIPATION

Watch Video 3
for more
information

Team Members can feel overwhelmed with:

- Balancing project commitments with busy schedules
- Keeping up with a dynamic project
- Differences in abilities to process information

① PROVIDE A COMFORTABLE SPACE

Remember and use each person's preference for contact:

- During meetings (e.g., speaking aloud, group chat)
- Outside meetings (e.g., email, phone, or text conversations)

Use breakout rooms to have smaller discussions

Breakout rooms are especially helpful when trying to get everyone's input. For more, see the tip sheet on [Group Formation](#).

② SEND REMINDERS & CHECK-INS

Reach out to team members

Checking in on an individual level helps each person see how important they are to the project.

Try This

- > Text or send an email reminder if someone is unexpectedly not on a call.
- > Reach out during/after the meeting if they share personal news (e.g., the death of a loved one).

③ ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

Promote open communication

Validate your team's input and provide thoughtful feedback. Have one organization member be a point of contact outside of meetings to make it easy for your team to reach out.

④ BALANCE AGENDA & TEAM BUILDING

Prioritize team building

Take the time to get to know everyone on the team.

Try This

- > As meeting moderator, share something about yourself to set the tone for the rest of the group.

⑤ FACILITATE THE MEETINGS

Make it easy for the team to engage

Appoint a staff member to provide updates on previous meetings and take notes so that team members can fully engage with the current meeting's content.

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

MANAGING CONCERNS

Watch Video 4
for more
information

Team members may feel apprehensive about their ability to give meaningful feedback in a group environment

① PROVIDE A COMFORTABLE SPACE

Treat everyone equally and value what they bring to the project

Consistently provide validating statements when team members share their views.

Try This

> Use phrases such as “That’s a great idea!” or “What an interesting point; I had not thought of it from that perspective” when others voice their opinions.

② CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Model patience and empathy

For example, provide long pauses for people to gather their thoughts during meetings.

③ SHOW RESPECT & UNDERSTANDING

Balance efficiency with relationship building:

Pay attention to and validate when people share personal experiences.

Try This

> Use phrases such as “I can tell how important this topic is to you. Thank you for sharing with us.”

④ MODEL ACTIVE LISTENING

Follow these active listening steps:

In the Moment:

1. Reflect statements back to ensure understanding
2. Share specific ways that their input is useful or insightful

Follow Up:

3. If applicable, report back how their input was used and the ways it influenced the project

⑤ ACKNOWLEDGE EXPERTISE

Recognize that each individual is an expert on their own experience

Reinforce the importance of the experience that each individual brings to the group.

⑥ RESPECT TIME & PRESENCE

End meetings when the agenda is finished, even if that means ending early

Don’t meet just to “check the box”! Make sure the content of the meeting is worthy of your team’s time.

Always end meetings on time

Even if the agenda isn’t fully completed, stay consistent with set meeting time.

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Watch Video 5
for more
information

Changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to:

Increased feelings of isolation,
stress, & burnout

① CREATE STRUCTURE AND GOALS

Intentionally build and communicate the meeting structure from the start

Adhere to a familiar process and meeting time.

Try This

> Provide consistency by:

- Keeping the meeting times as expected
- Staying on the agenda
- Working toward the project goals

② MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION

Communicate with the team regularly

- Provide meeting reminders, documents, and communications on a consistent basis
- Reach out to group members to offer support outside of meetings as needed

Frustration with virtual meetings
that were once in-person

① ACCOMMODATE VIRTUAL FORMAT

Modify meeting structure:

- Shorten meeting to reduce screen time
- Allow for frequent breaks if the meeting needs to be longer

Try This

> If an in-person meeting was originally scheduled to last all day, try splitting the virtual version into two half-days.

② PRIORITIZE VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING

Build a close-knit community

Intentionally create opportunities to foster relationships among the team in a virtual setting.

③ PERSONALIZE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Add personal touches to your meetings

Try This

> Play agreed-upon music during meeting breaks.

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

WORKING THROUGH DIFFERENCES

Watch Video 6
for more
information

Challenging topics can impact team engagement

① ALIGN SHARED PASSION & GOALS

Focus on shared experiences

Emphasize commonalities as opposed to concentrating on differing opinions.

Try This

> Use phrases such as, "I am thankful to have a space where we are all so passionate about this topic. This might be a good time to refocus on the next agenda item."

② FOSTER COMMUNITY OF RESPECT

Establish a deep level of respect and connection

Prioritizing relationships at the beginning of the project can help members feel united even when disagreements occur.

Try This

> Use phrases such as, "While we might not all agree on this topic, I appreciate how respectful everyone has been in this discussion."

③ VALIDATE SHARED FEELINGS

Provide support by highlighting shared emotions and then direct folks back to the topic at hand

Have a space where controversial topics, like COVID-19, can be discussed openly and with a focus on uniting the team.

Try This

> Use phrases such as, "We hear you, thank you for sharing your opinion. We can all understand what it is like to feel frustrated."

④ REVISIT THE PROJECT'S PURPOSE

Return to the team's goals and shared values:

- Consistently revisit the project's shared values and make space for all opinions
- Allow space to be vulnerable, and model understanding and support by the team
- Have respect and empathy towards each other

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

GROUP FORMATION

Consider these factors when constructing your team

① GROUP SIZE

Larger Group Size (>10 members)

Pros:

- ✓ Provides breadth of opinions and perspectives
- ✓ Less pressure to feel the need to speak
- ✓ Easier to disseminate information quickly

Cons:

- x Harder for less vocal members to feel comfortable speaking up
- x More difficult to see all group members on one screen during a video meeting

Smaller Group Size (<10 members)

Pros:

- ✓ Easier to interact with all group members
- ✓ Easier for all members to have ample time to voice their opinion

Cons:

- x More pressure to be “on” and ready to share

② GROUP LIAISON

Appoint a liaison between groups who attends all meetings

This person can be seen as a bridge across roles (e.g., project leaders, staff, and team members) as they attend all meetings.

Have the liaison report any questions/feedback to each group meeting for continued collaboration

③ BREAKOUT ROOMS

Breakout rooms allow for more interaction, especially during large, online meetings

Consider diversifying breakout rooms across project roles to facilitate relationship building among the group.



Try This

> If you are noticing that all participants do not have ample time to share their input during your meetings, this could be a good indication to use breakout rooms.

④ MEETING LENGTH

Longer Meeting Length (60-90 minutes)

Pros:

- ✓ Ample time for members to share opinions and complete the agenda

Cons:

- x Harder to schedule/make accessible
- x Can be difficult to maintain focus

Shorter Meeting Length (<60 minutes)

Pros:

- ✓ Easier to maintain focus, particularly for those with attention difficulties

Cons:

- x May feel less group connection because there is less time to interact
- x May not be able to finish agenda

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

A strong focus on diversity and inclusion is necessary for effective, person-centered projects

1 **PRIORITIZE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION**

Your team should accurately reflect the demographics of the communities your project aims to reach

Your team is accountable to the communities that are impacted by your project. Make sure all team members' opinions are integrated throughout the project.

Always engage in shared decision making, transparency, & accountability

While there are different roles throughout a project, it is imperative that the whole team has an equal voice, and that each role's expertise is represented in the project outcomes.

Prioritize underrepresented and underserved groups

By paying attention to historically underrepresented and underserved groups, your project can identify and prioritize the unique needs of that group to support equitable inclusion.

Try This

> **Emphasize the importance of both professional expertise and lived experience expertise when making decisions that impact your project.**

2 **CREATE A WIDE NETWORK**

Utilize your existing network

Consider the network you plan to use to create your project team – does it accurately reflect the community you are aiming to impact with your project?

Try This

> **If your current network is missing valuable insight from the communities that will be impacted by your project, identify and partner with members of that community.**

Update your network

It is important to maintain accountability to community partners through transparency and ongoing, consistent communication. Make sure that if you are asking for help and insight from community members that they feel fully informed.

Include community goals

Make sure to include any goals that the community may have for your project. The objectives of your project should be mutually beneficial for your community partners.

PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT:

SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

These ideas may be helpful for increased group engagement

① ACCOMODATE PREFERENCES

Use multiple methods for presenting information

Team members appreciate when project leaders use both slides and conversation throughout a presentation. They appreciated when there were clear opportunities to give their input.

Try This

- > Try using slides to orient team members to your agenda. Slides help to create content clarity.
- > Make your slides easy to read by using bullet points and short phrases.

Provide opportunities for team members to present on their expertise

Team members enjoy opportunities to learn about each other and the different professions that make up the team.

Try This

- > Ask professional team members to present on their area of expertise. This can encourage networking and coordination among multiple professions that are a part of your project.

② INCREASE GROUP COHESION

Be proactive about keeping team members involved

Clearly describe team member's responsibilities so they can easily engage with the project.

Include team members in dissemination strategies

Clearly describe dissemination goals and ask team members for their own ideas.

Provide personalized feedback:

Acknowledge when team members provide valuable input. Also, consider providing team members with regular feedback on their contributions.

Involve project leaders in team member meetings

Have project leaders attend at least 1-2 team meetings for increased visibility.

Try This

- > Consider investing in your project leaders & staff by providing virtual group facilitation training to set your team up for success.