

# Guidance for Engaging Critical Perspectives

## Who should participate in teams and decision-making processes?

To be responsive to complex and ever-changing needs in education and other agencies serving children and families, we need to cultivate a culture of deep learning and ongoing improvement. Shepherding this culture are teams who can effectively leverage the expertise of various perspectives both within and without an agency and navigate challenging conversations. To that end, this document guides selecting and engaging diverse critical perspectives essential to this way of working.

Throughout this document, the term “critical perspectives” is used to refer to individuals and groups including, but not limited to school and other child and family serving agency staff, children, families, and community partners.

## Identifying and Engaging Critical Perspectives: The Process at a Glance

Guidance for selecting and engaging diverse voices is briefly outlined within this graphic.

Reference Table 1: Selection of Critical Perspectives Guidance [HERE](#)

### Identify

- Who will contribute to our objective?
- Who will be affected by it?
- Who can influence our objective, directly or indirectly?

Table 1: Selection of Critical Perspectives Guidance (Column 1 & 2 of Engagement Plan)

### Map

- What is the needed level of engagement from each collaborator?

Level of Engagement Pyramid (Column 3 of Engagement Plan)

### Analyze

- What are potential barriers to their engagement?
- How can we mitigate those barriers?
- What are the rationales and/or facilitators of their engagement?

Engagement Plan (Column 4 & 5 of Engagement Plan)

### Plan

- What is our plan for engaging collaborators?
- Who is responsible?

Engagement Plan (Column 6 & 7 of Engagement Plan)

Before you begin the decision-making process, meet with the Implementation Team charged with making the change. Ensure the team understands the identified need for change and is clear about the vision or direction. Document the issue or need in the **Plan for Engaging Critical Perspectives Template** to keep front of mind and centered in your decisions regarding whom to engage.

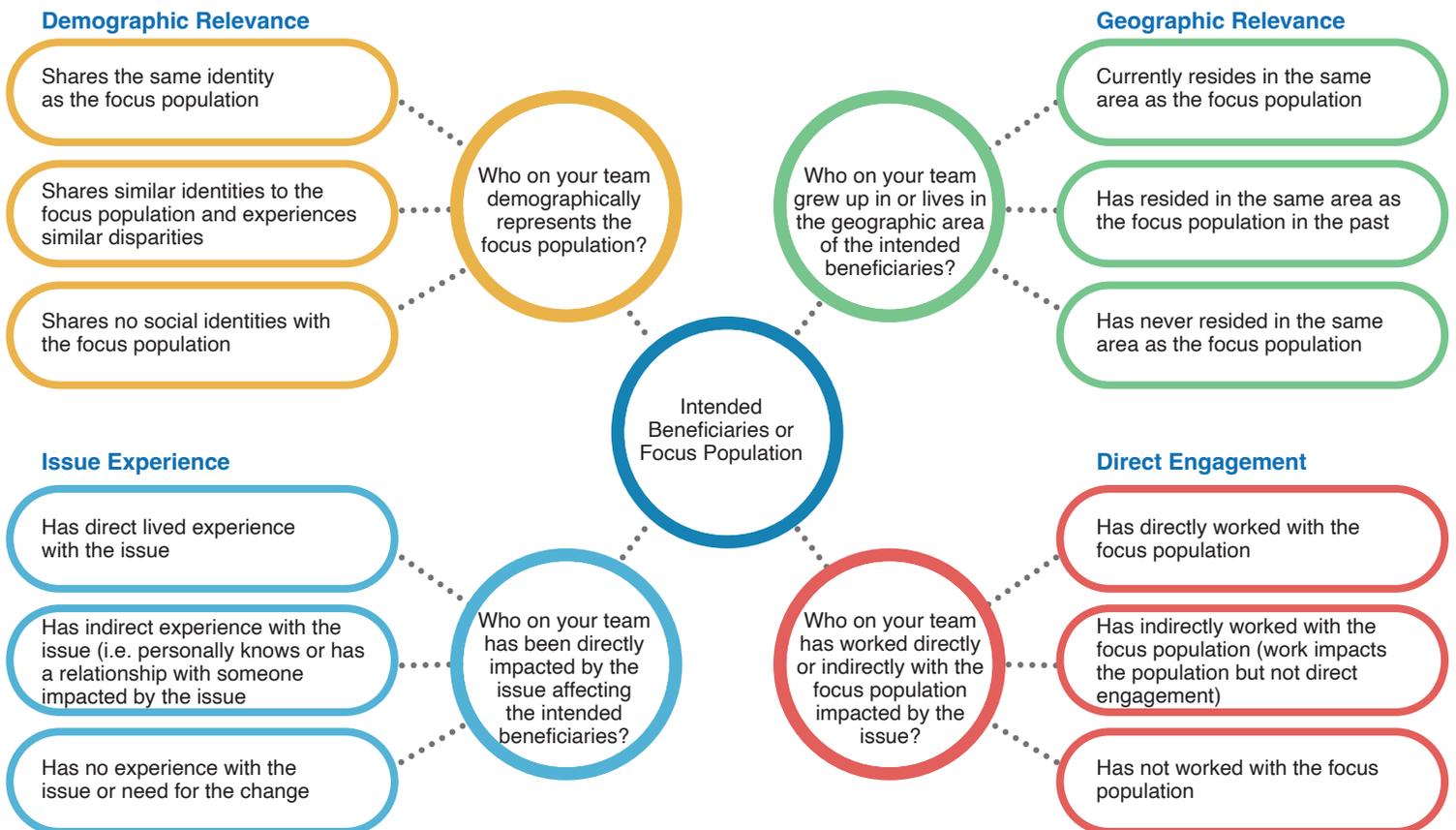
## STEP ONE: Identify

Once you have identified the need for change, understanding who is on your Implementation Team can help you identify what strengths and opportunities you have in terms of experience and context expertise about the intended beneficiaries, issues, and communities you serve. If most of your team represents perspectives not directly involved in the identified need, engaging other perspectives is more critical.

Before you begin this step, consider (document in Engagement Plan):

- Why is engagement from additional partners important to your initiative?
- How will it contribute to better results?

### What Perspectives are Needed?



Now that you have mapped the perspectives of those on your implementation team:

- Do you have the right participants that understand the population, issue, and community and are empowered to engage in the decision-making?

If no:  
What gaps exist on your team?  
What additional perspectives are needed?  
(Document in Column 1 of your Engagement Plan)  
Who might fill this role(s)?  
(Document in Column 2 of your Engagement Plan)

## STEP TWO:

### Map Level of Engagement

Not every critical perspective is needed for the same level of engagement. While those most directly impacted or those who can support your team in a deep understanding of the population, community and issue are critical for active participation in decision making, others with less direct experience are still valuable contributors but in different ways. Consider the levels of engagement below.

### Levels of Engagement



Adapted from International Association for Public Participation (2018). Spectrum of Public Participation. Retrieved from: <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

Please note that as you increase the level of engagement, more effort is required on the part of the Implementation Team. It is also recommended to have a smaller decision-making team to keep their processes efficient and effective. The lower the level of engagement, the less effort and the greater the ability to incorporate more perspectives.

Document your decisions in Column 3 of the Engagement Plan.

### STEP THREE:

#### Analyze

To ensure that those chosen for any level of engagement with the decision-making process can fully and actively engage, the team should outline any potential barriers and facilitators to engagement. Given those barriers and facilitators, the team should outline solutions to mitigate barriers and leverage any facilitators. Consider:

- Is there only one person with a given perspective? Are we asking them to be the sole spokesperson for their race, gender, disability status, etc.? OR are there multiple people that share specific social identities with different perspectives?
- Do those whose perspective you want to engage have connections/relationships with team members?
- Are those selected for engagement familiar with any jargon or other information needed to be fully participatory? OR will more time and effort be asked of them to acquire any background knowledge needed? How will you know?
- Is language or accessibility a barrier? OR are there resources that can be leveraged to be fully inclusive?
- Is there a cost to engagement (i.e., time, lost wages, travel, stress on relationships, etc.)?
- Have they previously demonstrated resistance or concern regarding the named issue? How might you include their perspective to gain a deep understanding of every angle of the problem being discussed?

Document your considerations and others essential to your process in Columns 4 and 5 of the Engagement Plan.

