



# SLDS Target Team: Stakeholder Engagement

## Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit: Traversing 'Stakeholder Land'

*Although stakeholder engagement can be challenging for state and local education agencies to achieve (SEAs and LEAs), it remains crucial to create a long-term plan for statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs). Effective stakeholder involvement can increase community buy-in, develop a common goal among diverse interest groups, and increase and improve communication with relevant communities. Most importantly, stakeholder engagement remains necessary to creating a sustainable SLDS.*

*This stakeholder engagement toolkit guides readers through "Stakeholder Land," an imaginary board game that helps SEAs and LEAs develop a strategic approach towards stakeholder engagement. Although not an actual game, this toolkit equips interested parties with a six-step plan that builds towards effective stakeholder engagement. Along with the six steps, the toolkit supplies guiding questions, exercises, and tips to help users identify where they are in the stakeholder engagement process and where they need to go.*

*This guide is intended primarily for state, district, and local education agencies in support of SLDSs. Because stakeholder engagement is critical to the success of any SLDS, this resource is designed to help various systems throughout the P-20W environment (from early childhood through the workforce).*

### Defining Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals and groups directly or indirectly affected by an SLDS, beginning with the design, development, and implementation of the system. These groups include a wide range of individuals—from LEAs (administrators, teachers, parents, students), to the state and federal levels (legislators, legislative staff, governors, etc.), to the public arena and business community.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples of Stakeholders

- Policymakers
- Legislators and/or Governor's Office
- State IT Agency
- State Education Agency (SEA)
- Other state agencies (health and human services, social services, department of children and families, etc.)
- Head Start collaboration office
- Office of Early Learning
- SEA CIO
- SEA Program Staff
- SEA IT Staff
- Postsecondary board members
- Representatives from institutes of higher education faculty and administration
- Representatives from state workforce agency
- Workforce Development board members
- Local Education Agency (LEA)
- LEA CIO
- LEA IT Staff
- Local Head Start programs
- School Leadership (Principals, Assistant Principals)
- Teachers
- State Advisory Groups
- Parents
- Community/Business
- Students
- Other

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*For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program, additional SLDS publications, or for support with system development or use, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds>.*



<sup>1</sup>Stakeholder Engagement Plan for Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Guide and Template (2012). Available to states upon request to [support@slds-sst.org](mailto:support@slds-sst.org).

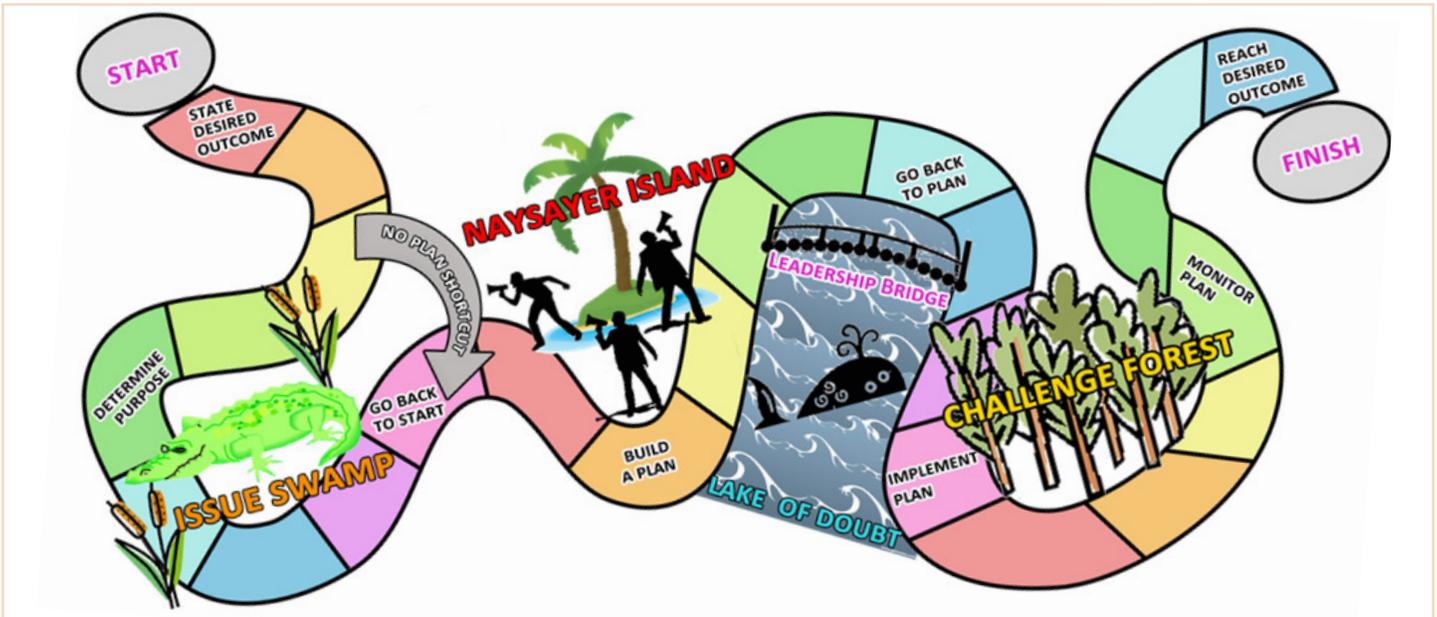


Figure 1. "Stakeholder Land"

## Stakeholder Land Directions

Make your way through "Stakeholder Land," accomplishing the six steps along the way. Play by the rules, avoid shortcuts, and you will soon be on your way to reaching your desired outcome!

In Stakeholder Land, there are six steps to building effective and successful stakeholder engagement:

1. State Desired Outcome(s)
2. Determine Purpose
3. Build a Plan
4. Implement the Plan
5. Monitor and Adjust the Plan
6. Reach Desired Outcome(s)

*Questions to answer when stating desired outcomes:*

- What does successful stakeholder engagement look like?
- How will you know that you have successfully engaged stakeholders?

For more information about desired outcomes, please see: "State Desired Outcomes and Determine Purpose Statement: An In-Depth Look."



## Step 2: Determine Purpose

After discussing and conceptualizing what stakeholder engagement looks like (Step 1: State Desired Outcome(s)), it is time to sit down with your team and narrow your focus. Creating one or multiple "purpose statements" will help members agree on the overall aims of the engagement. When developing a purpose statement, be as specific as possible. A good purpose statement will be focused with clear aims and unified, common goals. A poorly defined purpose statement will be vague and open to many interpretations.

The purpose statement can be seen as a thesis that will be constantly referred back to throughout the entire stakeholder engagement process, and updated as needed. The most important aspect is to not lose sight of the purpose statement.



## Step 1: State Desired Outcome(s)

The first step to successful stakeholder engagement is to state desired outcomes with your team. Stating desired outcomes helps set the tone of the engagement process and helps begin to uncover the big picture of successful stakeholder engagement. Although only the first step, stating desired outcomes allows everyone to start on the same page.

*Questions to answer when creating a purpose statement:*

- Why should stakeholders be involved?
- What value will stakeholders add to the SLDS project?
- What do you want to have achieved overall at the end of this process?
- What tangible products do you want to have produced from this stakeholder engagement process?



### Step 3: Build a Plan

Once the purpose statement(s) has been created, a detailed engagement plan must be built. The engagement plan needs to be written to provide the framework for how to engage with stakeholders. At this point in the process, all aspects of the engagement must be considered and evaluated. Like creating the purpose statement (Step 2), the stakeholder engagement plan must clearly articulate the goals of the engagement. Unlike the purpose statement, the plan is comprehensive and thorough, describing the logistics and a rundown of the timeline.

*Questions to ask when building a plan:*

- What stakeholders are going to be involved?
- What is the best communication strategy?
- What is the timeframe that will allow us to succeed?
- What strategies and techniques will be used to engage stakeholders?

For more help on building your stakeholder engagement plan, please refer to the planning tools and templates available in the Public Domain Clearinghouse via [grads360.org](http://grads360.org).



### Step 4: Implementing the Plan

Once the plan has been built and approved by the team, it is time to implement the stakeholder engagement plan and put key actions into play.

Communication early on with stakeholders must be part of the implementation process. Ongoing and targeted communication ensures that all members are on the same page. Even if it is just a quick email, it is important to keep all stakeholders and interest groups in the loop (even if there is nothing to report)<sup>2</sup>

With constant communication, there are more opportunities for stakeholders to become committed to the SLDS, which creates buy-in. Communication throughout the implementation creates the building blocks towards a sustainable system.

*Questions to ask when implementing the plan:*

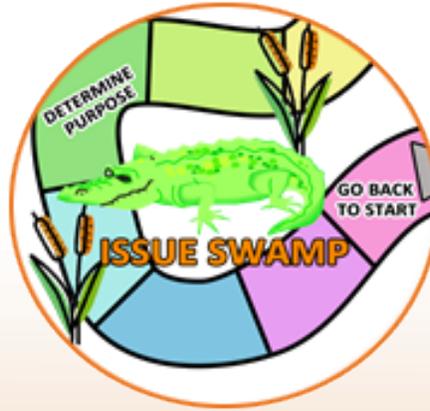
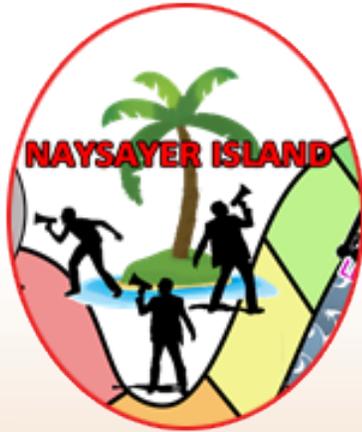
- How will implementation issues and challenges be handled?
- What strategies and techniques will be used to engage stakeholders?

<sup>2</sup>SLDS Best Practices Brief: Stakeholder Communication, May 2011. Available at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/best\\_practices.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/best_practices.pdf).



### Tip: Beware of Shortcuts

Veering from the six steps to stakeholder engagement may seem like a good idea if you are moving quickly through the preliminary steps. But be warned: in stakeholder engagement cutting corners may save time initially, but in the long run, it may cause you to start over.



## Stakeholder Land Challenges

Earning stakeholder buy-in requires time and lots of patience. Regardless of how well prepared your team is, challenges and obstacles are imminent.

During the implementation, it is important to acknowledge and address any challenges early on. Ignoring challenges or conflicts will hold you back from accomplishing desired outcomes, and may undo work up to that point. When facing challenges, it is important to revisit the purpose statement and focus on the common goals of stakeholder engagement.

*Questions to ask when facing challenges:*

- Why are we here and what are the challenges we are facing?
- Are there any immediate steps we can take to resolve this issue?
- What are some long-term solutions that can be implemented to prevent similar issues from occurring?



### 5. Monitor the Plan

Once the stakeholder engagement plan has been implemented, the plan should be monitored. When monitoring the plan, you will know if the desired outcomes have been reached yet. If not, it may be time to revisit the original desired outcomes and purpose statement(s), and find out how far along in the plan you are. This monitoring can also be built into the initial planning phase (Step 3). These reviews need to include the perspective of all those involved in the process, including leaders, decisionmakers, and stakeholders.

*Questions to ask when monitoring the plan:*

- What is the status of stakeholder engagement?
- Should the plan be adjusted? If so, how?
- Are you there yet?



### 6. Reach Desired Outcome(s)

Congratulations! You have made it to the end of “Stakeholder Land.” But, wait, the game is not quite over yet. Once you have reached your desired outcome, it’s important to revisit and review the entire process of stakeholder engagement. Discuss what went well, what did not go well, and ways to improve for ongoing stakeholder engagement.

*Questions to ask once you have reached desired outcomes:*

- Do we need to create a new purpose statement?
- Do we need to add more members to our stakeholder group?
- What went well? What did not go well?
- How can we make our stakeholder engagement plan more streamlined?



### Tip: Take Advantage of Leadership Buy-In

While not an official step in stakeholder engagement, leadership buy-in is a crucial part of stakeholder engagement.

Leadership buy-in can help gain support on a local and community level, leverage the work already accomplished, and work as a mouthpiece to the community. Most importantly, leadership buy-in can help you move faster towards not only desired outcomes, but also a sustainable future. A great strategy to gain leadership buy-in early on is to create “quick wins.” Giving answers to relevant questions to community leaders—for example, the total number of students leaving the state after graduation—can show the value of the SLDS and increase leadership buy-in.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>. Ibid.

## Resources

Florida Department of Education (2008). How Do You Leverage Longitudinal Data to Inform Stakeholders? Presentation available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/LDSShare/SLDS.aspx>

National Center for Education Statistics (2011). Stakeholder Communication: SLDS Best Practices Brief. Available at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/best\\_practices.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/best_practices.pdf)

National Center for Education Statistics (2010). Traveling Through Time: The Forum Guide to Longitudinal Data Systems, Book II: Planning and Developing an LDS. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011804.pdf>

State Support Team (2012). Stakeholder Engagement Plan Guide and Template. Available to states upon request to [support@slds-sst.org](mailto:support@slds-sst.org)

National Center for Education Statistics (2012). State Approaches to Engaging Local K12 Stakeholders Available at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/spotlight\\_engaging\\_local\\_stakeholders.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/spotlight_engaging_local_stakeholders.pdf)

State Support Team (2012). Stakeholder Engagement Plan Guide and Template. Available to states upon request to [support@slds-sst.org](mailto:support@slds-sst.org)

State Support Team (2012). P-20W Data Governance Manual Template and Example. Available to states upon request to [support@slds-sst.org](mailto:support@slds-sst.org)

State Support Team (2012). P-20W Data Governance Policy Template. Available to states upon request to [support@slds-sst.org](mailto:support@slds-sst.org)

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program (2012). P-20W Data Governance: Best Practices Brief. Available at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief4\\_P\\_20W\\_DG.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief4_P_20W_DG.pdf)

National Center for Education Statistics (2012). Vendor Engagement Tips from the States. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief3.pdf>