

# Building trust and understanding with others

A guide to planning your stakeholder engagement

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*ACT Academy, NHS Improvement*

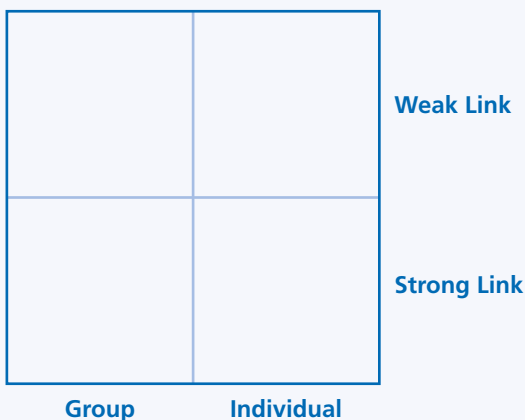


## Introduction

This guidance outlines how to think about stakeholder engagement. It offers a template that is designed to enhance the understanding of your stakeholders as well as plan ways to build trust and collaboration. Understanding others is a key and fundamental aspect of identifying cultures and assumptions within teams and across organisations, as well as enabling you to plan effective collaboration in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

### Using the template

The template on the next page is best used in small groups or teams to encourage conversations. Ideally, the templates you complete should be revisited and added to as you gather more information. Before using the template, it is helpful to identify a range of stakeholders (both individuals and groups) that you have close links with and those with whom you have weaker links (so know less about). Normally this is done as a brainstorming session using the following grid:



Once this is complete, move on to completing the template below. It can take around 30 minutes per stakeholder to complete the template.


## Building trust and understanding

Stakeholder: .....

Our goals for this change are: .....

**Assumptions**

1. What do we know about their goals?
2. Is this based on an assumption or fact?
3. What do we think they know or assume about us?



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**Understanding and trust**

1. What activities can we use to build trust and understanding?
2. What more do we want to find out?
3. How can we align our goals?

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**How can we frame our messages?**  
*(based on what we know about them)*

Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3
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**Commitment**

1. How committed are they to the change?

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**Collaboration**

1. How do we communicate?
2. How do we want them to work with us?
3. Who will ask?

## Instructions for using the template

### 1. Team vision

It is surprising how much discussion identifying the goals for the change can generate in a small group. This helps bring into the open both implicit and explicit understanding of the goals to create a shared understanding. If as a small team, you have different goals, think about how this may be magnified across multiple stakeholders.

### 2. Identify a stakeholder

Based on the stakeholder brainstorming session, choose one of the stakeholders you have listed. The stakeholder can be an individual or a group but ideally a stakeholder you wish to understand better and engage in your change efforts.

### 3. Think about the assumptions you may have

Discuss what you know about your stakeholder's goals. Do you know for sure what they are, or are you making assumptions? If you make assumptions about your stakeholder, it is likely they make assumptions about you.

### 4. Plan how you will build trust and understanding with your stakeholders

If you recognise that some assumptions exist, it is important to plan your activities for challenging them. How can you find out what really matters to your stakeholders and what their true goals are? How can they understand you better? By seeking to understand, you are making the conditions more favourable for collaborating, agreeing and aligning goals.

### 5. Think about how you will frame your messages

It is important to communicate in a way that appeals to the recipient. A key way to do this is to frame your messages so people fully engage with them. Framing involves understanding what matters to your stakeholders so you can create messages and communicate in a way that is meaningful for them, engages them positively and brings them on board with what you want to achieve.

Remember that if you have not had the opportunity yet to get to know your stakeholder, your discussions about framing the messages may be based on your assumptions. Treat this discussion of framing as an initial set of ideas you can build on as you learn more about your stakeholder.

### An example of framing

You are due to present to 10 leaders of change from a range of organisations on the topic of how to tackle obesity in their local area. What 'frames' would you use to communicate your messages and encourage them to become involved?

If you understand who your stakeholders are and what they are interested in, you can adapt your messages accordingly. For example, you may want to use frames such as:

- enhancing
- reducing hospital admissions due to obesity-related problems
- improving children's health and increasing their activity-levels
- promoting a healthier high street with fewer fast-food outlets.

By understanding and modifying your frames accordingly, it is more likely your messages will resonate with your audience and they will engage more fully.

## 6. Ask how committed your stakeholders are to the change

If you want your stakeholders to be involved in your change work, it is important you identify how committed they are. While it is not necessary for every stakeholder to support your goals 100%, you need to understand where they are and where you want them to be. It also helps you direct your efforts to those stakeholders you need to prioritise. Using a simple tool, such as the Continuum of Commitment (below), can help.

Stakeholder	Obstructing	No commitment	Let it happen	Help it happen	Make it happen
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					
F					

*Adapted from: NHS Improving Quality (2014) Leading Large Scale Change: A Practical Guide*

### Using the Continuum of Commitment

Start by identifying your stakeholders (individuals or groups) and add them to the left-hand column. Then ask yourself, 'how committed are they to my change work?' Indicate on the grid where you feel they currently are in terms of their commitment, and then indicate on the grid where you would like your stakeholder to be. Most often, you will want more commitment from your stakeholders, but sometimes you may want less: eg if a stakeholder is too caught up in the detail of your work when it is better if they use their influence to champion the overall aims of the change.

The distance between the two points on the grid helps you think about how much work you need to do with your stakeholders to change their commitment level as well as what sort of commitment you would like from them in future.

## 7. Plan your collaboration

The final task is to plan the collaborative activities you will undertake with your stakeholders. This is the stage that occurs after you have built trust and understanding. It includes how you will communicate with them (being mindful of framing), how you will encourage them to work with you and identifying who in your team is most suited to communicating with them.

## Summary

The template is useful for identifying goals and assumptions and then planning communication and engagement activities with your stakeholders to build trust and understanding. If you are making assumptions about your stakeholders, check these out and return to your completed templates periodically to check progress on your plans and activities.

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