



Engaging the Public: Working With, *Not* For

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Prepared for the Reforming the Family Justice System Initiative

By the Diversity and Inclusion Subgroup of the Engaging the Public Working Group

The Reform of the Family Justice System Commitment

The RFJS initiative is a collaboration of individuals and agencies that are seeking system-wide change in the family justice system as a result of their collective efforts.

We are committed to engaging diverse perspectives in our work. We have intentionally included participants that might not traditionally be considered as part of the justice system but we recognize as key members of the family justice community, such as psychologists, social workers, health care providers, educators and financial advisors.

We have adopted the principle of putting the public first in all aspects of our work. The public will be engaged with the cross-sector working groups as members and as participants in prototyping, designing, implementing, and evaluating ideas.

The RFJS recognizes the unique contribution that people with lived experience can bring to reform.

“I think it is critical in Human Service delivery that time is spent speaking with recipients of services and benefits to hear directly from them. In the projects we have done – from homeless counts that use surveys to developing long term affordable housing strategies; program evaluations to redesigning income benefits; strategic planning to developing plans to end homelessness – we fundamentally believe that the voice of the consumer must be heard in legitimate, defensible ways to inform and empower end users of services. The adage “Nothing about us without us” from the psychiatric survivor movement rings very true in our work.”

“Input from Persons with Lived Experience” (quote from De Jong at OrgCode Consulting, Inc. Catalysts for Better Outcomes: <http://www.orgcode.com/2012/06/20/input-from-persons-with-lived-experience/>)

Purpose of this Guide

This guide has been prepared to assist the Reform of the Justice System collaborators engage *the right public at the right time in the right way*. It is meant to provide a framework to support equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work, both *internally and externally*.

All RFJS committees are asked to review the guide and endorse it for use in their activities.

Members of the Engaging the Public Working Group are available to discuss the guide and to provide assistance in finding and using other engagement resources and tools.

If you have any comments to make on the Guide or wish to talk with a member of the Engaging the Public Working Group, please contact Sarah King D’Souza (sking@fl.legalaid.ab.ca).

What a Framework is and How to Use It

This framework provides the core principles and ideas that underlie the RFJS’s approach to engaging with the public. It recognizes that many publics have interests in the kind of family justice system we have in Alberta. The framework will help to ensure that we have appropriate representation from those publics in our committee work and in designing, developing, and implementing changes to the system.

It also contains some tools to help assess

- who should be involved in a particular activity,
- when they should be engaged, and
- how might be best to do that.

Collaborative Action Approach

The RFJS is being undertaken as a collaboration in which community stakeholders and the public are actively engaged in efforts to improve the family justice system through

- a shared agenda,
- mutually reinforcing activities,
- continuous communication, and
- shared measurements.

The work of the collaboration is supported by a backbone committee that provides organizational and logistical services.

The Collaborative Action Approach is defined as:

Working together in a cooperative, equitable, and dynamic relationship in which knowledge and resources are shared in order to attain goals and take action that is educational, meaningful and beneficial to all. (Adopted from the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice)

This Collaborative Action Approach is an adaptation of several approaches to working collaboratively including the collective impact framework for empowering people to make a real difference in their communities. The framework identifies five conditions necessary for success:

Achieving Large-Scale Change through Collective Impact Involves 5 Key Conditions for Shared Success

Common Agenda

All participants have a **shared vision for change** including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions

Shared Measurement

Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Participant activities must be **differentiated while still being coordinated** through a mutually reinforcing plan of action

Continuous Communication

Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation

Backbone Support

Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to **serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies**

Applying an Equity Lens

Without vigilant attention to equity, reform efforts can inadvertently reinforce institutional patterns that promote disparities and constrain progress for our most vulnerable community members. We are also more likely to miss opportunities to seek out, recognize, and purposefully resolve inequities that can block the change we seek to achieve.

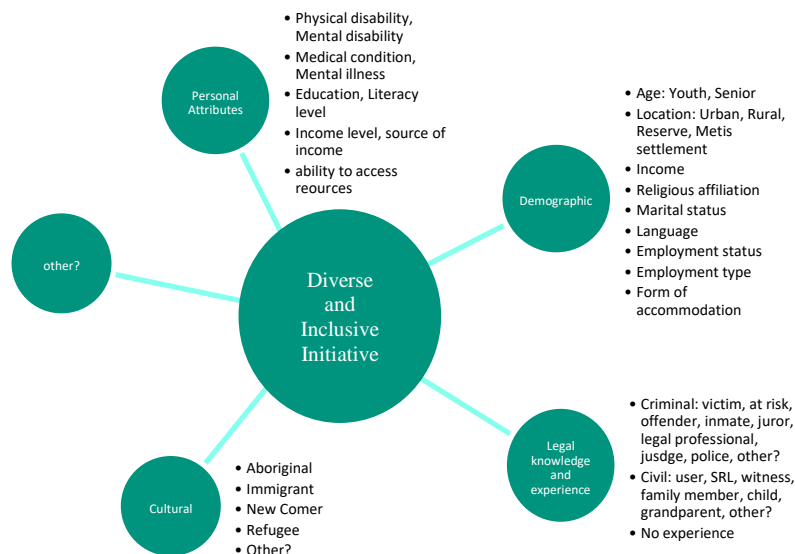
[Paraphrased from John Kania and Mark Kramer, “The Equity Imperative in Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (October 6, 2015):

http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_equity_imperative_in_collective_impact?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=%20on%20SSIR.org.%20&utm_campaign=20151006SIREquityBlogFSG]

An equity lens is a set of principles, reflective questions, and processes that focus at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels to create economic and social systems, services, and practices that promote equity. It helps to illuminate patterns, barriers, and opportunities that promote equity. Using the lens requires you

- to systematically consider who should be involved in the work of RFJS in general, and specific activities in particular.
- to ask reflective questions about what you are proposing to do.

To ensure appropriate engagement from the diversity of people affected by a proposed initiative, it may be helpful to explicitly consider some of the types of difference that you might want to include in your work. The following are meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive:



Core Values of Engagement

The International Association for Public Participation has developed a list of core values for use in the development and implementation of public participation processes. The purpose of these core values is to help make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities.

IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

(See also link to IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/imported/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf)

Core Principles of Engagement

The National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation created a set of principles to guide their work.¹ We offer it as useful insights into engaging with the public.

1

Careful Planning and Preparation

Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organization, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.

2

Inclusion and Demographic Diversity

Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

3

Collaboration and Shared Purpose

Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.

4

Openness and Learning

Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate the process.

5

Transparency and Trust

Be clear and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.

6

Impact and Action

Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential.

7

Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture

Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

¹ National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, *Resource Guide on Public Engagement* (October 11, 2010). Retrieved from http://www.ncdd.org/files/NCDD2010_Resource_Guide.pdf

Core Practices of Engagement

Long-time advocate for positive social change, Iain De Jong, has developed 12 tips to introduce/improve interactions with persons with lived experience in one's work. He developed this list for use in conducting research purposes but is easily adaptable to other types of projects. We offer it as an aid to RFJS collaborators in engaging with members of the public.

De Jong's 12 Tips for Engaging with Person's with Lived Experience

1. Have a research [or project] design.
2. Seek informed consent [or provide meaningful information when soliciting participation in an activity].
3. Do not talk down to people.
4. Bring in outsiders.
5. Set the tone.
6. Do something with what you hear.
7. Empower people to have a say.
8. Do not limit responses to folks that are accustomed to participating.
9. Be willing to go to places not usually associated with research/feedback.
10. Do not confuse lived experience with expertise.
11. Gather the input on a scheduled basis.
12. Do not underestimate access to technology.

<http://www.orgcode.com/2012/06/20/input-from-persons-with-lived-experience/>

Because conducting surveys and focus groups other research activities pose particular ethical and methodological issues, tips for conducting research have been included later in this Guide.

Getting Started

The next section of this guide provides suggestions in how to get started thinking about engaging with relevant publics.

- I. ***Engaging the Public Assessment Tool*** for RFJS Initiatives and Working Groups may be a useful starting point in thinking about engaging various publics in your work. It is meant to be used in conjunction with other tools provided in this guide.
- II. ***Getting to Know your Publics*** poses some questions that may help you decide if you know enough about relevant publics to begin soliciting participation in your initiative.
- III. ***Selecting the Appropriate Way of Engaging*** provides a variety of ways of engaging with publics that range from minimal involvement through to full empowerment. The chart is suggestive of potential mechanisms but is not meant to be a complete inventory of possibilities.

I. Engaging the Public Assessment Tool

for RFJS Initiatives and Working Groups

1. What is the proposed initiative or working group?
2. What challenge or situation is the proposed initiative or working group seeking to address?
 - a. Which publics might have an interest in the proposed initiative? (See p.12, 17)
 - b. What kind of participation should you seek from each of these publics? (See p.13-14)
 - c. When is it most appropriate to engage each of these publics?
3. What result is expected to be achieved or what is the intended successful outcome of the proposed initiative or proposed working group?
 - a.. Which publics might have an interest in the proposed outcomes? (See p.12, 17)
 - b. What kind of participation should you seek from each of these publics? (See p.14)
 - c. When is it most appropriate to engage each of these publics?
4. What existing or potential challenges are anticipated to the proposed initiative or proposed working group?
 - a. Which publics might have an interest in the proposed initiative? (See p.12, 17)
 - b. What kind of participation should you seek from each of these publics? (See p.13-14)
 - c. When is it most appropriate to engage each of these publics?
5. How will the composition of this group or initiative support equity, diversity and inclusion?

Have you purposefully used an equity lens in answering these questions?

II. Getting to Know Your Publics

Once you have identified the relevant publics for the initiative or working group you are considering, it may be helpful to determine

- what you already know about those publics,
- what research already exists with respect to their needs or interests, and
- with whom you already have relevant relationships. Those contacts may be appropriate for testing out your ideas and refining your initial work plan.

Questions that might be useful at this early stage include

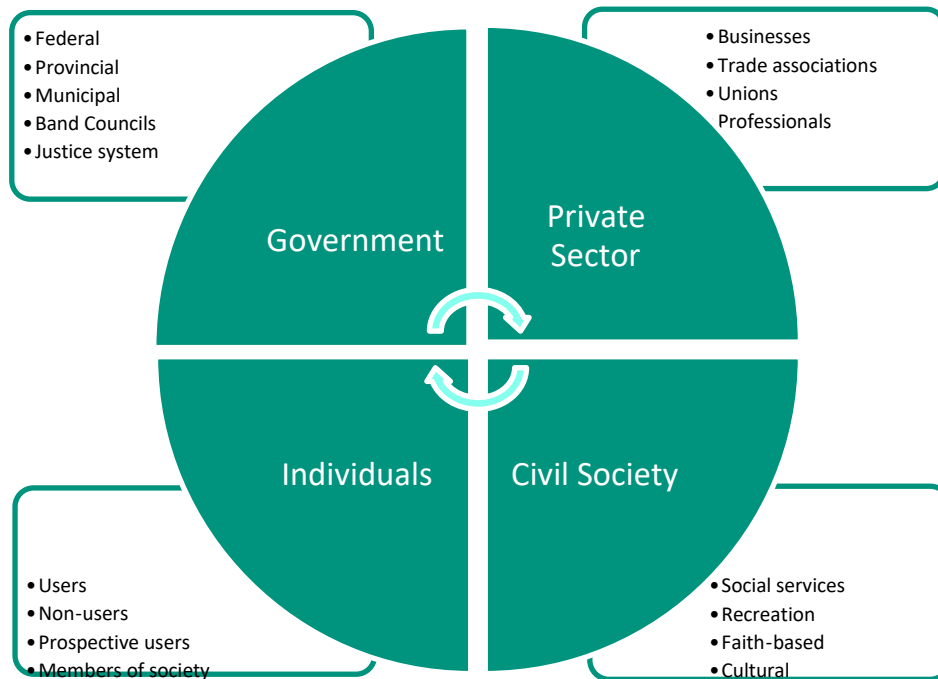
- What is the context in which prospective participants live and work?
 - What more do you need to know about the context?
- What accommodations need to be made to facilitate participation?
 - Can you make those accommodations? If not, what alternatives might be appropriate?
- Who are leaders or other trusted intermediaries that may be useful in learning more about this public or in soliciting involvement?
 - Who should contact them?
- What should your initial messages be in soliciting the involvement of this public?
 - What commitments are you prepared to make to them?

It is important to be realistic about what you are asking from prospective participants and what commitments you are making to them about the nature of their involvement and about the potential impact of the initiative. Be sure you can follow through with your commitment before you begin soliciting involvement.

Have you purposefully used an equity lens in answering these questions?

Identifying Your Publics

To identify the publics relevant to the initiative you are considering, it may be helpful to consider the major sectors that make up the context of the proposed activity. This diagram suggests some potential categories. The blank worksheet included at the end of this document may be useful in documenting the particular publics you want to include in your work.



The Family Justice Ripple Effect

Our work has the potential to not only affect particular individuals, but all of Alberta society.



III. Selecting your Engagement Strategy

The field of public involvement is expanding rapidly. New approaches are emerging and older ones are being given new life. Before committing to a particular strategy it is important to be clear on

- what your purpose is in engaging a particular public,
- what strategies might best suit that purpose and the particular features of your initiative,
- the extent to which you wish to engage the selected public,
- the context in which the selected public works and lives,
- the relevant attributes of the selected public, and
- your resources: financial, expertise, infrastructure.

Ideal forms of engagement may be out of reach. On the other hand, minimal forms of engagement may not honor the contribution the selected public can make and might not yield useful results. Finding the balance may not be easy.

The **Ways of Engaging** chart on the next page of this guide is meant to be suggestive of the possible options. However, you will need to do more to assess which options best suit your circumstances.

Ways of Engaging

These are examples of ways of engaging publics that range from simply informing them of initiatives to empowering them to make change. This list is not intended to be comprehensive but rather suggestive. Many options do not fit nicely into a particular level of engagement but rather vary depending on how they are used in the actual setting.

Empower

- Search conference: search for ways to attain a desirable future. Participants follow through on the action decided upon.
- Select, design, develop, evaluate prototype
- Participatory action research: empower communities to address issues
- Design charrette: empower planning and design

Collaborate

- Round table
- Scrums and sprints

Involve

- Community visioning: framing and discussing scenarios that advance understanding of problems and challenges
- Workshop
- Choice-Dialogue: involved participants in discussion of policy objectives and options
- Citizen conference

Consult

- Polling: used regularly to track progress
- Key informant interview
- Focus group
- Public hearing
- Survey

Inform

- Town Hall
- Forum
- Communication campaign
- Web site

Increasing engagement!

Researching With, *Not For*

The RFJS is committed to working ***with, not for***, publics as we design, develop, implement, and evaluate potential changes to the Family Justice System. In doing so, we embrace research ***with*** relevant publics, not research ***on*** those publics. This type of research can take several forms but includes what is often referred to as participatory action research. While this form of research may not always be the most appropriate for RFJS work, it is important to consider the relevant role publics should play in determining the research question, strategies, methodologies, intended impacts, and potential unintended consequences.

What is Research?

Research is a process that involves asking questions and using the methods of various disciplines to advance our knowledge and understanding of the subject. Research is sometimes described as a systematic or disciplined investigation of a topic to establish facts and reach conclusions. This distinguishes it from an unsystematic collection of anecdotes. Common forms of research include surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Why Does it Matter?

Research with human participants is a privilege not a right (Family Health International). That privilege requires us to respect those who participate in the research, to maximize the value of the research for them and for society, and to minimize any risks that the research may entail.

Conducting Research Ethically

There are currently many guidelines for conducting research ethically. Post-secondary institutions, in particular, have adopted ethics review processes and so have some communities. Increasingly funders require applicants to demonstrate that they have received ethics approval by some body constituted for that purpose. In addition, specific protocols exist for conducting research in aboriginal communities or about aboriginal knowledge and special attention must be paid to research involving vulnerable populations.

Obtaining Ethics Approval

RFJS collaborators include members of the Alberta academic community. They are required to ensure ethics approval is obtained on any research they are associated with. The process of obtaining approval is rigorous but not necessarily time-consuming. Post-secondary institutions recognize that much research entails little risk to participants and have processes that make

approval of that research efficient to obtain. However, research that involves participants who have experience with the family justice system may cause them to revisit unpleasant, even traumatic situations, and so must be carefully thought through before ethics approval is sought. How can psychological or other harms be minimized? Should participants be screened in some way before being accepted into the research project? Should provision be made to provide support to participants who might experience distress?

Participatory Action Research: Research With, Not For

Participatory action research is an evolving form of research that tends to have the following characteristics:

- It is undertaken collaboratively with the community effected
- It is action-oriented in addressing questions and issues that are significant to the community
- It is rigorous in its use of research methods but does not assume that researchers themselves are disinterested parties but includes community members as co-researchers.

Because it empowers communities to play multiple roles in the research project and in ensuring results are useful to and used by communities, proponents see it as more ethically sound research. However, participatory action research is still subject to ethics review and careful attention must be still be paid to ethical issues and any protocols that may exist in research involving vulnerable participants.

Relevant Publics for _____ Working Group Worksheet

Please print off this page to use in brainstorming exercises with your working groups when attempting to identify any publics you might engage in initiative work.

