



Guide to Equitably Engage Community Stakeholders in an Audit

Refer to the tool, [“Considering DEI in a Stakeholder Analysis.”](#) for tips on using a DEI lens to identify stakeholders.

When engaging community stakeholders in an audit consider safeguards and strategies to make the engagement process more equitable and accessible for diverse individuals and groups. This is especially important when involving people who are in vulnerable situations or who are from underserved and underrepresented communities.

Using equitable engagement strategies is important for both **direct and indirect involvement** of stakeholders:

Direct Involvements	Indirect Involvements
Interviews	Observations
Surveys	Data Files
Focus Groups	
Listening Sessions	

This guide includes tips on the following:

- Community partnerships
- Confidentiality, disclosure and consent
- Providing accommodations, assistance and incentives for equitable participation

It also includes links to audits that used equitable strategies to engage diverse stakeholders

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

When directly engaging people who are in vulnerable situations or who are from underserved and underrepresented communities, consider partnering with relevant, trusted community organizations.

- Community organization provide the following resources:
 - Representatives may have helpful insights to inform the planning process for engagements, such as strategies to reduce barriers to participation, accommodation needs, and recommended engagement methods or event formats.
 - Valuable partners in implementing stakeholder engagements.
 - Positioned to help recruit participants for focus groups or interviews or distribute surveys.
 - If a community organization’s space is frequently visited by stakeholders, consider hosting an engagement event, such as a focus group or listening session, at the site to make the event more accessible for participants.



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CONFIDENTIALITY, DISCLOSURE AND CONSENT GUIDELINES¹

Direct Involvement

- Start with discussing any assumptions or biases you may have prior to engaging with the community; this can help you be mindful of language you use to refer to the population, for example using “people without immigration documentation” rather than “illegal aliens.”
- Inform stakeholders of the purpose of the audit and offer to answer any questions about the audit.
- When interacting directly with people who are service recipients, inform them that their participation is voluntary and will not affect their ability to receive jurisdiction/auditee services
- When directly involving community members who are in vulnerable situations, auditors should only record their relevant status (e.g. a client or person who is incarcerated) and should not record their name to protect confidentiality.

Disclose the following information when practical and appropriate:

- A description of the audit
- A description of how the input gathered from participants will be used in the audit process
- A description of what participants can expect after the audit is completed:
 - How to obtain a copy of the completed report
 - Your jurisdiction’s process for follow-up on audit recommendations
 - Clear, transparent information on any limits of the process (for example, you may state that you are unable to guarantee a certain outcome as a result of participants’ input)
- A disclosure that participation is voluntary
- A disclosure that participation will not affect current or future ability to receive jurisdiction/ auditee services (particularly when engaging users of the auditee’s services)
- A disclosure that notes could be subject to public records laws, depending on your jurisdiction.
- A description of reasonably foreseeable risks or benefits (an example of a risk is a psychological risk of recalling trauma; benefits are usually not expected except for overall program improvement)
- Offer to answer any questions about the audit.

Disclosure information may be provided verbally or in writing; use your judgement to determine whether written disclosure and/or a signed consent form is necessary.

If the individual has a guardian, provide disclosure information to the guardian and request permission from both the guardian and the individual for participation.

Indirect Involvement

When observing operations in facilities that provide services to vulnerable populations (e.g., facilities with children, jails, residential facilities for intellectual and developmental disabilities or behavioral health, or aging services), take the following steps when practical and appropriate:

- Request permission from clients before visiting
- Request that providers notify clients of the auditors’ visit ahead of time
- Refrain from documenting identifiable information

¹ While audits are not subject to human subject review boards, these guidelines borrow from common research practices in informed consent.



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If, while doing an observation, clients or providers share private information that is not pertinent to the audit, consider leaving the room. If leaving is not practical, ask the client's permission to be present and do not take notes.

When working with identifiable data, ensure safeguards are in place to protect the data.

Conduct interviews with subject matter experts who are familiar with the data and compliance regulations prior to receiving/requesting the data to consider what fields may be protected or sensitive, whether those fields should be omitted from your data request, and any necessary safeguards.

When relevant, consider consulting with relevant community groups and obtaining community input about the data analysis plan prior to conducting the analysis.

ACCOMMODATIONS, ASSISTANCE, AND INCENTIVES GUIDELINES

To promote equitable participation, provide requested accommodations to all stakeholder participants in the audit process. Before meeting with stakeholders:

- Ask if any participants need accommodations and provide a point of contact for coordination
- Inform participants that written materials can be available in alternative formats or professionally translated, upon request
- Ensure event spaces are ADA accessible
- Allow for multiple avenues to communicate with you if people cannot attend in-person meetings

When planning stakeholder engagement events, such as a listening session or focus groups:

- Consider hosting the event at a community space, such as a library, park, or community organization site rather than a government facility; this may be perceived as more welcoming by participants from marginalized groups
- Select an event space that is geographically convenient for most participants (rather than audit staff) and accessible by public transit, when relevant and feasible
- Consider work schedules and child care needs of participants when scheduling events; evenings and weekends may be most convenient for community members

In addition, when feasible and appropriate, consider offering the following assistance for participants:

- Language interpretation services
 - Consider ways to host the event in the primary language of participants with interpretation provided for speakers of other languages (including audit staff)
- Child care
- Transportation assistance
- Food, when event is during meal times

For engagement through surveys:

- Provide the survey in multiple languages relevant to your jurisdiction and/or inform participants that surveys can be professionally translated upon request
- Inform participants that written materials can be available in alternative formats in compliance with ADA



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- Consider digital access rates (available through U.S. census data) to determine electronic and/or physical distribution of the survey

Offering incentives for participation helps reduce barriers for stakeholders and honors people's time and expertise. Incentives could include:

- Food, at an event during meal times
- Gift cards
- Stipends or honoraria

AUDIT EXAMPLES

[Long Beach, CA: 2021 Library Services Performance Audit](#)

In this audit, the auditors facilitated focus groups with nearly 150 community members to understand community needs and interests related to library services. They used equitable engagement strategies and collaborated with community-based organizations to include historically marginalized groups, including people experiencing homelessness and people with limited English proficiency. They also interviewed representatives from 15 Library stakeholder agencies.

[Princeton Public Schools: 2017-2018 Educational Equity Culture and Curriculum Audit](#)

This audit identified and engaged diverse stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, parents/guardians, and students through interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Input from the stakeholders' various perspectives informed the findings and recommendations and direct quotes were incorporated throughout the report.

[King County: 2017 Access ParaTransit: Action Needed to Address Cost, Quality and Equity](#)

This audit used interviews to engage auditee staff, contractors, community members, and representatives of local councils and coalitions.

Adapted from: Office of the Auditor, Multnomah County. 2020. Draft Policy on Involving Underserved and Vulnerable Populations.