

Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide



Planning for Engagement With Stakeholders in Designing Educator Equity Plans

About This Guide

The *Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide*, developed by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center), is designed to aid Chief State School Officers and state education agency staff in brainstorming and implementing effective ways to engage critical stakeholders—including teachers, principals, district leaders, parents, and civil rights and community organizations—in developing and implementing their State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators. This guide is intended to provide options and guidance without being prescriptive, given each state's unique context. It consists of two parts: Part 1 is intended for states that are new to stakeholder engagement while Part 2 is intended for states that are ready to dive in.

Companion Resources

Following are additional resources to support the development and implementation of equitable access plans:

GTL Center

- *Moving Toward Equity Technical Assistance Resources Overview*
http://www.gtlcenter.org/TA_resources_overview
- *Moving Toward Equity Online Tool*
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity>
- *Moving Toward Equity Quick-Start Guide*
http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/Quick_Start_Guide.pdf
- *Innovation Station Database*
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/innovation-station>

Public Agenda and American Institutes for Research

- *Everyone at the Table: Engaging Teachers in Evaluation Reform Website*
<http://www.everyoneatthetable.org>

Reform Support Network

- *Educator Evaluation Communications Toolkit*
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/educator-evaluation-communications-toolkit.pdf>

GTL Center staff are available to provide state education agencies with direct technical assistance in using these and other resources, including a root-cause analysis workbook, an equitable access data review tool, and the *Talent Development Framework for 21st Century Educators: Moving Toward State Policy Alignment and Coherence*. For more information, please contact Ellen Sherratt at esherratt@air.org.

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in Designing Educator Equity Plans

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Introduction

On July 7, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education announced the Excellent Educators for All initiative to help states and school districts support great educators for the students who need them most. As a key piece of the initiative, states are required to submit plans to ensure equitable access in June 2015. These plans must describe the steps that state education agencies (SEAs) will take to ensure that children from poor and minority backgrounds are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers—a requirement that has been in place since the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

In his July 2014 letter to Chief State School Officers, Education Secretary Arne Duncan further stated that **“to prepare a strong plan, each SEA will analyze what its stakeholders and data have to say about the root causes of inequities and will craft its own solutions.”** Although states developed teacher equity plans in 2006 (and revised them subsequently), this is the first time that many SEAs will be actively engaging stakeholders in the development of the plan. The *Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide* is intended to help Chief State School Officers and SEA staff successfully navigate through this process. It provides materials for SEAs that are new to stakeholder engagement (see Part 1) as well as materials for SEAs that already have strong structures and processes in place for engaging stakeholders (see Part 2).

NOTE TO CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Whether you have been a Chief State School Officer for many years or are brand new to the position, your approach to engaging with your state’s teachers, principals, district leaders, parents, teacher preparation programs, and civil rights and community organizations sets the tone statewide for determining critical educational policy decisions in a collaborative way. Your approach to developing plans to ensure that all students, regardless of their ZIP code, have access to effective teaching provides a model for local education leaders across your state to also set important directions in an inclusive, as opposed to top-down, way. Bringing stakeholders to the table on this challenging but shared ideal of equitable educational opportunities for all presents a unique opportunity to improve student outcomes.

There are many benefits to utilizing the expertise and experience of diverse partners in developing plans for equitable access to effective teaching and leading. By collaboratively reviewing data and identifying the root causes behind equity gaps, there is tremendous potential to forge and strengthen critical partnerships while at the same time developing a strategic, innovative, and context-specific plan to attract, deploy, support, develop, and retain effective teachers in ways that benefit *all* students. Effectively engaging and soliciting input from stakeholders has never

been more important. It is particularly valuable to effectively engage stakeholders at this time because:

- Stakeholder engagement will lead to the development of equitable access plans that are fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of those active on the ground in diverse capacities.
- Stakeholder engagement will lead to equitable access plans that are able to garner the public support and political will to implement the plans with success.
- Stakeholder ownership and buy-in are needed to overcome the considerable financial and political challenges that may be associated with ensuring equitable access to effective educators—challenges that require widespread support and advocacy.
- Stakeholder engagement will bring together leaders from the school, district, and state levels as well as the involvement of parents, civil rights, health and welfare, legal, and other institutions—each of whom will likely be involved in implementing the strategies developed.

Gathering people of good will from across many sectors to seek common ground on equitable access in education is a valuable investment for states. This process takes time and careful planning, but the end result has enormous potential. Building a coalition of partnerships and relationships on this issue will serve the state and broader community well on future initiatives and change efforts. More than any other education policy issue, ensuring that all students have access to consistent, high-quality instruction requires the input and support of all stakeholders. To lead the way on equitable access to effective teaching in your state, sparking discussions with all key stakeholders must be at the center of your planning. This guide provides step-by-step considerations to help you in planning and conducting those crucial conversations.

Purpose of This Guide

The *Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide* is intended to help Chief State School Officers and SEA leaders brainstorm and implement effective plans for authentically engaging key stakeholder groups. The input of such stakeholders will help ensure that state plans are designed and implemented in a way that not only complies with federal requirements but also leads to meaningful educational advancements.

Guiding Principles

Several guiding principles inform the contents:

- Suggestions for *short-term strategies* for engaging stakeholders, with the purpose of informing the design of a plan to ensure equitable access

- Suggestions for *long-term strategies* for building a coalition of critical partners, with the purpose of sustaining the commitment outlined in the plan and ensuring that educator equity goals and other systemic improvements are achieved
- Suggestions for implementing a system for continuous improvement through ongoing solicitation of stakeholder feedback

ENSURING THE PARTICIPATION OF STAKEHOLDERS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Although this guide is intended for use at the state level, the engagement of local education agencies (LEAs) and local stakeholders is critical. To solicit and ensure such participation at the local level, use **Resource 12: Developing a Local Stakeholder Engagement Guidance Document for Your Local Education Agencies** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_12). This resource assists SEAs in translating the approaches suggested here into a local-level stakeholder engagement guide. Creating a stakeholder engagement guide for districts is one way that SEAs can provide support to LEAs in the equitable access planning process.

Moving Toward Equity Online Tool and Framework

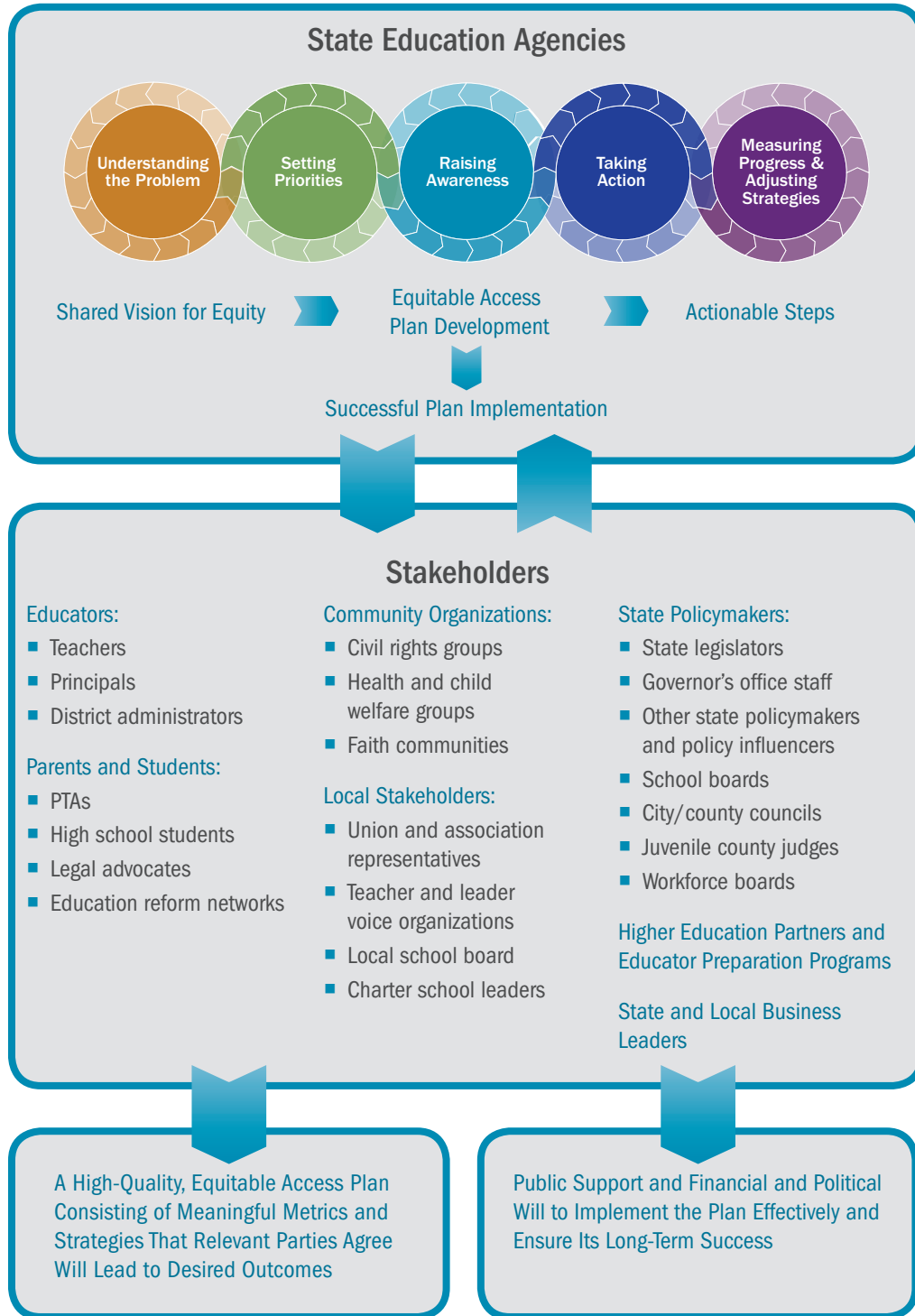
The materials in this guide are based on the GTL Center's companion *Moving Toward Equity* online tool (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity>). The *Moving Toward Equity* framework, illustrated in Figure 1, suggests five steps for moving a state from its current status to one that provides equitable access to effective teaching and leading. The five steps are as follows: understanding the problem, setting priorities, raising awareness, taking action, and measuring progress and adjusting strategies.

Figure 1. The *Moving Toward Equity* Framework



This guide applies the five *Moving Toward Equity* steps specifically to engaging stakeholders in designing equitable access plans. Figure 2 presents a theory of action, which indicates how engaging stakeholders (as outlined in this guide) can improve policy outcomes in your state. Through ongoing, two-way communication strategies, SEAs and stakeholders can develop a shared vision, a high-quality plan, and actionable steps for successful implementation of the plan. Together, you can harness the public and political will needed to ensure that *all* students have equitable access to effective teaching and leading.

Figure 2. Theory of Action for Stakeholder Engagement in Equitable Access Planning



Because each state's context is unique, this guide is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is meant to promote brainstorming, discussion, reflection, and action by providing ideas and options for states to choose from. As a result, this guide is best reviewed together by teams of 2–3 state-level education leaders who are charged with designing an SEA's plan and therefore engaging stakeholders in the process.

Structure of This Guide

This guide consists of two parts that guide SEAs through short- and long-term planning for equitable access.

Part 1: Getting Started

Part 1 guides SEAs that are newer to stakeholder engagement in getting started and envisioning the process. It focuses on the following steps:

- **Step 1.1: Building an Internal SEA Team.** This step summarizes the internal SEA team's composition and responsibilities and provides key steps to building an effective team for engaging stakeholders in developing a strong plan.
- **Step 1.2: Creating a Big-Picture Vision.** This step guides the internal SEA team in establishing a big-picture vision for planning for equitable access and includes sample vision statements upon which stakeholders can build.
- **Step 1.3: Identifying Stakeholder Groups.** This step provides tips for selecting stakeholder groups from across the education spectrum.
- **Step 1.4: Envisioning the Mechanisms for Engaging Stakeholders.** This step suggests a variety of specific formats for successful stakeholder engagement.
- **Step 1.5: Envisioning How Best to Prepare Stakeholders for Engagement.** This step helps SEA leaders make the most of stakeholders' time and knowledge by familiarizing them in advance with the relevant issues and data.
- **Step 1.6: Envisioning a Long-Term Educator Equity Coalition.** This step provides information for creating and maintaining an educator equity coalition.
- **Step 1.7: Planning for Stakeholder Engagement: A Suggested Approach.** This step details a suggested approach to the process of engaging stakeholders on educator equity, from start to finish.

Part 2: Taking Action

For SEAs that have structures and processes already in place for engaging stakeholders, Part 2 provides guidance for SEA staff to take action on stakeholder engagement in a way that will work in their unique state context. It walks SEA staff through the five steps of the *Moving Toward Equity* framework (presented earlier in Figure 1), offering guidance and supporting resources for engaging stakeholders each step of the way. Specifically:

- **Step 2.1: Engaging Stakeholders in Understanding the Problem.** The SEA gives stakeholders several opportunities to examine the relevant metrics on equitable access for various schools and populations across the state as well as other research and data (such as research on the important role that teachers and principals play in student learning). This examination should allow stakeholders to more fully understand the problem and at the same time deepen SEA leaders' understanding of the challenges behind equity gaps in effective teaching.
- **Step 2.2: Engaging Stakeholders in Setting Priorities.** Stakeholders conduct a root-cause analysis of the issue. In so doing, they exchange perspectives that will inform shared priorities regarding equitable access. Parents, teachers, and leaders at all levels will engage in tough but crucial conversations about the issues that lie at the heart of equitable access. This step also is a good time to take stock of existing current initiatives through a policy inventory.
- **Step 2.3: Engaging Stakeholders in Raising Awareness.** Stakeholder groups help the SEA raise awareness about the nature of inequities in access to effective teaching and leading as well as communicate the actions that the state is taking with stakeholders to rectify the situation. Through written and face-to-face communication, stakeholders share information widely within their networks and establish contact points to further gather stakeholder input. The communication planning process should begin on Day 1! (See “Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences” on page 39.)
- **Step 2.4: Engaging Stakeholders in Taking Action.** Stakeholders provide input into the actionable strategies that will be included in the state's plan. In addition, it may be necessary for stakeholders themselves to adopt actionable strategies—for example, to secure votes needed by the state board or legislature to adopt or authorize the strategies included in the equitable access plan.
- **Step 2.5: Engaging Stakeholders in Measuring Progress and Adjusting Strategies.** After the plan is adopted, stakeholders continue to be engaged with the SEA and local education agencies (LEAs). They provide ongoing input over time, from their vantage point, about how the plan is playing out, so progress can be measured and strategies adjusted.

Supporting Materials

The *Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide* is accompanied by a number of supporting materials, which are available online.

Stakeholder Engagement Resources

- **Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_1)
- **Resource 2: Sample SEA Internal Team Meeting for Identifying Existing State Efforts and Stakeholder Groups**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_2)
- **Resource 3: Sample State Vision Statements**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_3)
- **Resource 4: Sample Meeting Agendas**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_4)
- **Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_5)
- **Resource 6: Sample Timeline and Timeline Template for Developing a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_6)
- **Resource 7: Engaging Stakeholders in a Root-Cause Analysis**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_7)
- **Resource 8: “Taking the Temperature” Activity**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_8)
- **Resource 9: Sample State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_9)
- **Resource 10: Build-Your-Own State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_10)
- **Resource 11: PowerPoint Template**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_11)
- **Resource 12: Developing a Local Stakeholder Engagement Guidance Document for Your Local Education Agencies**
(http://www.gtllcenter.org/resource_12)

These 12 resources are provided in a format that allows for state adaptation (e.g., Microsoft Word, PowerPoint) so that they are useable in each state’s unique context.

Companion Resources

- **Moving Toward Equity Technical Assistance Resources Overview**

(http://www.gtlcenter.org/TA_resources_overview)

This overview provides a brief description of the technical assistance tools that the GTL Center offers for root-cause analysis, reviewing data, and engaging stakeholders in designing and implementing equitable access plans.

- **Moving Toward Equity Online Tool**

(<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity>)

This interactive online tool offers resources and strategies focused on ensuring equitable access. State education agencies, regional center staff, educator preparation programs, and districts can use this tool to set equity priorities, create actions plans, and measure progress toward ensuring equitable access.

- **Moving Toward Equity Quick-Start Guide**

(http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/Quick_Start_Guide.pdf)

This companion to the *Moving Toward Equity* online tool provides key questions and examples to help states set priorities and take action on their path to equity.

- **Innovation Station Database**

(<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/innovation-station>)

This online database offers the latest cutting-edge tools and resources on how to recruit, reward, retain, and extend the reach of highly effective teachers and leaders.

- **Everyone at the Table: Engaging Teachers in Evaluation Reform Website**

(<http://www.everyoneatthetable.org>)

This companion website to the *Everyone at the Table* book provides online videos and materials to help states and districts genuinely engage teachers in respectful dialogue on evaluation reform.

- **Educator Evaluation Communications Toolkit: Tools and Resources to Support States in Communicating About Educator Evaluation Systems**

(<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/educator-evaluation-communications-toolkit.pdf>)

This toolkit explores strategies and provides states with resources and tools to communicate effectively with their educators.

PART 1. Getting Started

Effective stakeholder engagement requires preparation and careful implementation in order to ensure desired outcomes. When developing a plan for engaging and soliciting input from stakeholders, first and foremost it is important to prepare for stakeholder engagement that is inclusive, two-way, and solutions oriented. Stakeholder engagement should *not* be a single event—nor should it be prescriptive or focused on a predetermined solution.

The following suggestions on the importance of communication and data are intended to generate ideas for successful and realistic stakeholder engagement in *your* state context.

The Importance of Communication

Planning for equitable access requires effective stakeholder communication—with key stakeholders and with wider audiences. Strategic communication can help or hinder the acceptance of a new teacher-equity initiative. This communication should take place at various critical junctures throughout the design and implementation stages, beginning when SEAs receive their state data profile from the U.S. Department of Education, if not before.

Communication planning should begin on Day 1. Examples of key communication junctures in the equitable access planning and implementation process correspond to the five components of the *Moving Toward Equity* framework: understanding the problem, setting priorities, raising awareness, taking action, and measuring progress and adjusting strategies. Details for the critical step of developing a communications plan are provided at “Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences” on page 39.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT STATE DATA PROFILES

Communicating effectively about your state’s data profile is critical to beginning the equitable access planning process with the right tone. This communication includes developing messages for stakeholders on the following:

- General information about your state’s data profiles: where the data come from, what they address, why they were provided, and how they will be used.
- The story that your data profile tells about students’ access to effective teaching and learning in your state.
- Likely policy implications and how stakeholders can voice their ideas about appropriate policies. More information can be found in Step 4 of Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_1).

The Importance of Data

At the center of the *Moving Toward Equity* approach is the idea that the dialogue with stakeholders be centered on data and evidence—data on the scope of the equity gaps, data on interventions and their impact, and data on progress toward achieving equitable access goals. At all stages of the planning process, consideration should be given to what data and evidence are available to inform decisions. Such data and evidence include teacher and principal distribution and mobility data, rigorous research study findings, program evaluations, teacher supply and demand data, or other relevant data.

The following list provides a few places to begin your search for relevant data for your state:

- The U.S. Department of Education will share a preliminary data profile for each state as a place to begin its work.
- Your own state data office or officer is responsible for tracking information ranging from demographics to student attendance, test scores to teacher placement. Connect with the appropriate office partners to examine which data currently are available.
- The Institute of Education Sciences provides a *Data Files and Tools* webpage (<http://ies.ed.gov/data.asp>), which includes links to research, education data, and analysis for all 50 states on a wide range of topics.

For more information about helping stakeholders to accurately analyze equitable access data and understand the story told by the data and its policy implications for your state, see “Tips for Reviewing Data With Stakeholders” on page 36.

MOVING TOWARD EQUITY DATA REVIEW TOOL

The *Moving Toward Equity Data Review Tool* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/data_review_tool) is part of the *Moving Toward Equity* suite of technical assistance resources for state education agencies to develop an equitable access plan that leads to meaningful improvements in historically underserved students’ access to effective educators. It provides guiding questions to help education leaders:

- Deepen their understanding of equitable access metrics.
- Strengthen their capacity to analyze equitable access data and the story those data tell.
- Overcome common mistakes made when drawing inferences from equitable access data.
- Effectively communicate about equitable access data.
- Plan and track progress as they work to ensure that all students have equitable access to effective teaching and leading.

STEP 1.1: Building an Internal SEA Team

In order to be successful in engaging stakeholders, build your internal SEA team as early as possible. Begin by identifying key offices and staff who are directly engaged in policies and initiatives impacting teacher recruitment, retention, and development. This team should reflect the diversity of the different offices and serve as your internal go-to group for up-to-date information on SEA policies, legislation, contract negotiations, initiatives, and pilot programs that are in progress now or have a legacy impact in your state. This team should be lean, with only 3–7 members. **Team members must be able to communicate in plain, direct language; avoid jargon; and communicate effectively with diverse audiences.**

Tasks of the Internal SEA Team

The internal SEA team has the following tasks:

- Lead the preplanning process, including identifying stakeholders and envisioning what their engagement will look like.
- Serve in an information support role for stakeholders, acting as a resource and continual point of contact and facilitating the various meetings with stakeholders.
- Serve as a critical element throughout the implementation stage, facilitating continuous two-way feedback and leading the ongoing assessment of progress.

Members and Roles of the Internal SEA Team

In building your internal SEA team, consider and select staff leaders from the following SEA departments, depending on the structure and responsibilities of your state:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Teacher Professional Development
- School Turnaround
- Assessment
- Data
- Early Learning
- Special Education
- Educator Talent (e.g., licensing, hiring, and evaluation of educators)
- Career and Technical Education
- Parent Involvement and Community Outreach
- Communications and Public Affairs
- Legislative Affairs

Next, consider what roles each SEA team member is best suited to fill. For example, you may assign a member to (a) be “on deck” for research questions that may arise during the stakeholder engagement process; (b) lead the communication strategy (see “Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences” on page 39); (c) consolidate and report back on stakeholder feedback; and (d) incorporate feedback into the draft plan.

Making an Inventory of Existing Policies, Initiatives, and Stakeholders

The primary purpose of the internal SEA team is to lead the stakeholder engagement effort; but if time allows, a useful initial activity involves taking stock of existing policies, initiatives, and stakeholders. Determining which coalitions of stakeholders focused on educator effectiveness and/or equity already exist in your state can save significant time. Likewise, inventorying existing policies and initiatives can help your state respond coherently to suggestions from stakeholders. Such an inventory will guard against redundancy and will inform your prioritization process in the plan design, charting a path toward proactive policy development that is grounded in your state’s unique needs and context.

Resource 2: Sample SEA Internal Team Meeting for Identifying Existing State Efforts and Stakeholder Groups (http://www.gtcenter.org/resource_2) describes a simple process for kicking off this discussion with your internal SEA team. For a more in-depth resource focused on this stage of the equitable access planning process, please see the *Talent Development Framework for 21st Century Educators: Moving Toward State Policy Alignment and Coherence* (http://www.gtcenter.org/talent_development_framework).

Your internal SEA team also may wish to gather other background information, such as the following:

- The history of your state’s litigation or legislation intended to redress unequal educational opportunity for low-income and minority students (e.g., court orders or settlements regarding the funding formula and adjustments for property wealth, enrollments of students with special needs or students from low-income families). If the state is not in compliance, be aware that your task will be somewhat more challenging because the stakeholders representing these students and their communities will want to push forward on this legal issue.
- Relevant economic and socioeconomic information (such as per pupil expenditures, conditions of school facilities, teacher salaries and benefits, patterns of segregated housing, overall cost of living, cost of commuting to high-need schools or availability of public transportation, available affordable housing for teachers).

STEP 1.2: Creating a Big-Picture Vision

After you have secured your internal SEA team and taken stock—either at the surface level or through an in-depth analysis—of what is currently in place in your state and who is actively involved with each existing initiative, you now may begin to envision the desired outcomes of this work. Research on effective school leaders emphasizes the importance of developing a shared vision for organizational success,¹ and the same guidance applies for leaders at all levels of the education system. Establishing a vision that is shared with your SEA team will enhance your ability to make quick, agreed-upon decisions during planning and implementation.

During this phase of the engagement process, consider the policy and political context of your state and stakeholder groups as identified by your internal SEA team. It also may be useful to consider the perspective of your key stakeholder groups. (For guidance on selecting key stakeholders, see “Identifying Key Stakeholder Groups” on page 14.) Based on this clear view of the present context and the information gathered to date, envision what outcomes are desirable to your team. Your vision statement may outline the initial concrete goals of your stakeholder engagement process, or it may express the goals of your equitable access planning. It may focus on access to *effective* teachers and leaders, or it may focus on access to *excellent* or to *highly effective* teachers. You may develop several vision statements and then choose the one that seems best. Most important, this vision statement is amendable. Down the road, you may wish to adjust the details of the vision as new data, insights, and priorities arise.

Following are two sample vision statements:

- **Sample Vision Statement 1:** “Our mission is to provide a high-quality, comprehensive, and meaningful education for all students, with special attention given to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to excellent teachers and principals. To achieve this goal, we will ensure that all students have access to an effective teacher by taking the following actions....”
- **Sample Vision Statement 2:** “Every student in [our state], regardless of background, will have access to an effective teacher. [Our state] will place the highest priority on improving school climate, improving efforts to recruit and retain the most effective teachers and leaders, and providing high-quality teacher preparation.”

¹ See Clifford and Ross (2013).

To flesh out your big-picture vision for this work, have your team consider the following questions:

- In your state, what would it look like to collect input from all relevant parties, keep the lines of communication open, and emerge from the equitable access planning process with agreement from all that it was a collaborative endeavor that moved your state in the right direction?
- What do you hope to be able to say your state achieved for equitable access?

For a more elaborate example of a state vision statement, see **Resource 3: Sample State Vision Statements** (http://www.gtlicenter.org/resource_3).

VISION ACTIVITY

***Instructions:** In the space below, brainstorm a vision for stakeholder engagement for your state today and over the long term. What would you like to be able to say about your state's approach and the short-term and long-term outcomes of your collaboration?*

STEP 1.3: Identifying Stakeholder Groups

The U.S. Department of Education's letter to the Chief State School Officers (Duncan, 2014) referred to teachers, principals, districts, parents, and community organizations as key stakeholder groups. But ideally, stakeholder groups should consist of individuals from across the education spectrum: teachers, administrators, state agency staff, teacher preparation program representatives, civil rights groups, stakeholders with technical expertise in an area relevant to educators, educator unions or professional associations, media, legislators, and local policymakers.

Because equitable access to effective educators has implications beyond the education system, the participation of community-based organizations is essential to the process. For all stakeholder groups, representation should include both urban

and rural communities across all regions of your state as well as representation of the full range of demographic and socioeconomic groups.

When selecting teachers in particular, care should be taken to ensure that the full spectrum of subject areas and grade levels is represented—including special education, English learners, and career and technical education.

In many states, distinct regions with widely varying cultures, priorities, and opportunities exist; thus, regional differences also should be considered in choosing a diverse group of representatives.

Considerations for Involving Education Stakeholders

For obvious reasons, when it comes to equitable access plans, an important perspective is provided by **teachers and principals**—especially teachers and principals who have worked in schools and districts with the highest rates of teacher and leader turnover. Teachers and principals are among those most immediately impacted by potential policy changes. They may share the reasons behind their choices to enter the profession, to apply to their school or district, and to stay (or not) in their school or in the profession. Moreover, teachers' understanding and appreciation for a state's equitable access vision and goals is critical for the long-term success of a system that will catalyze and sustain equitable access to high-quality instruction for all students. Including educator voices increases the likelihood that the policy changes will be perceived as responsive, fair, and beneficial—and, ultimately, that the changes will be accepted and promoted among all stakeholders. In addition, principals are an important on-the-ground catalyst of state and district policy.

Looking beyond educators themselves, local education decision makers also should be at the table. These may include **district administrators, human resources directors, local school board members**, charter school leaders, and other policymakers. These stakeholders will play an important role in implementing policy that may come out of discussions as well as provide a deep understanding of the context within which educators work. In addition, be sure to include members of **educator unions and professional associations**, especially members who have negotiated successful contracts that help ensure all students have access to effective teaching and leading.

Other education stakeholders include members of **teacher leader or teacher voice organizations or fellows** (e.g., America Achieves, Hope Street Group, Teach Plus, VIVA, or your state's Teachers of the Year), **professional organizations** (such as members of the National Science Teachers Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and others), **higher education partners** (both traditional and alternative preparation programs), and **educational researchers and technical experts**. All these people can provide unique expertise in their areas. This expertise can help provide a cohesive and strategic understanding of the different policy levers that influence where teachers and leaders choose to build their careers.

Considerations for Involving Community-Based Stakeholders

Other stakeholders also have critical perspectives to share regarding how to provide the supports that teachers and principals need to be successful when working in challenging settings. For example, **civil rights organizations** (such as the local chapter of the NAACP, Urban League, affiliates of the National Council of La Raza, League of United Latin American Citizens, or similar local or state-based civil rights organizations) and **local faith and business leaders, regional business coalitions, and children’s advocacy organizations** provide perspectives and considerations on the short- and long-term impacts of inequitable access to effective teachers and leaders. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations, also may be able to help identify leaders in these communities. High-level representatives of your state’s communities—such as the chair of the state board of education, chairs of legislative education committees, and the governor’s education policy advisor—also should be consulted. Engaging these stakeholder groups is a critical step in developing a meaningful and credible equitable access plan.

Considerations for Involving Parent and Student Stakeholders

Finally, **parents and students** are important stakeholders to include because they can bridge the discussion between the education-based stakeholder perspective and the community-based stakeholder perspective. In addition, they are the stakeholders most immediately affected by the level of access to effective teachers and leaders. The perspectives of parents and students must be considered thoughtfully and deliberately. Parent reactions and opinions may be strong, and there should be a plan in place to effectively communicate how any changes will impact their children, how parents can participate in and contribute to educational improvement, and what to expect. Parents want their children to have the educational tools to grow into the best and most successful people they can be.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING PARENTS AND STUDENTS

- Engage parents from the very beginning.
- Ask early to get on a parent-teacher association meeting agenda; space can fill up fast.
- Consider asking a teacher ambassador or parent leader to invite parents and students to the discussion. Communication from SEA staff may seem less inviting or friendly.
- Likewise, consider asking teacher or parent ambassadors to lead the meetings with parents and students to encourage open, honest dialogue in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Translate guidance and materials into multiple languages and, if possible, have a translator present at meetings.
- Try to accommodate parent schedules by hosting two gatherings: afternoon and evening.
- If possible, arrange for on-site childcare during the gatherings to ensure that parents of small children can attend.
- Consider convening smaller rather than larger focus group meetings to keep the discussion focused. (See “Formats for Engaging Stakeholders” on page 20.)
- At the same time, recognize that the small number of focus group participants may represent a small and unrepresentative parental perspective; their feedback may be better for unpacking challenging questions than for gauging parents’ views.
- Frame the message to parents as one of opportunity and improvement, rather than painting a picture of failure or an approach too focused on shortcomings.
- Be mindful of unclear language and terminology. See “Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences” (page 39). Also, see **Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_1).

Parent organizations may provide an easier way to access this key stakeholder group; however, SEAs and LEAs should be mindful of full parental representation and be sure they are engaging the fullest capacity of parent opinions and involvement. Communicate with the parent organization leader about participation; learn who typically attends and what parent groups are not as well represented. Work with parent organizations to develop strategies to increase parent participation from underrepresented groups. When reaching out to traditionally underrepresented groups, be mindful about utilizing culturally competent SEA staff.

Targeting the Expertise of Each Stakeholder Group

For each stakeholder type, thought should be given to how to tailor the guidance in this document. For example, **not all stakeholder groups are required to weigh in on every issue**. Rather, the best use of stakeholder groups is to capitalize on their areas of expertise and experience. For example, partners in higher education and district

Human resources directors are best positioned to advise and provide feedback on issues surrounding teacher recruitment to the profession and to specific districts, but teachers and principals are the best experts on working conditions within schools as well as the unintended consequences of policies that are implemented in schools and classrooms.

Targeting the conversations to gain specific feedback from different stakeholders also respects their valuable time. Likewise, the engagement format may differ across stakeholder groups. (See “Formats for Engaging Stakeholders” on page 20.)

After stakeholders have been identified and the meeting formats considered, it is time to take action and invite them to the discussion. Before inviting the identified stakeholders, consider the strategic messages you wish to communicate, which also may vary across stakeholder groups. See **Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning** (http://www.gtlicenter.org/resource_1).

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM ROLES FOR STAKEHOLDERS

When identifying stakeholders, consider that there may be short- and long-term roles, and it may make sense for particular stakeholders to be involved more in one role than another, or in both.

In the short term, stakeholders should have opportunities to bring their concerns and ideas to the table as the state’s equitable access plan is developed. Their input may be particularly helpful when reviewing state equity data profiles, to “bring to life” the statistical data.

A longer term goal of the stakeholder engagement plan could be to build a coalition or council from multiple groups to ensure successful implementation of a state’s equitable access plan. (For further guidance on creating an educator equity coalition, see “Envisioning a Long-Term Educator Equity Coalition” on page 25.)

STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION ACTIVITY

Instructions: In the space below, please note your responses to the following guiding questions about identifying stakeholders:

Question	Response
<p>1. Which stakeholders will you involve? What skills and experiences does each stakeholder bring to the work?</p>	
<p>2. What existing professional associations have a stakeholder engagement structure in place for teachers, principals, district leaders?</p>	
<p>3. What should be the role of higher education partners in your state's plan? Advocacy and membership organizations (e.g., housing rights groups, social workers union)? High-level state leaders from the legislature and governors' offices?</p>	
<p>4. Are some groups, such as advocacy organizations, actually representing another group? If so, how are they gathering input from that group?</p>	
<p>5. Who could be missing (e.g., are immigrant groups in your state represented)?</p>	
<p>6. Which stakeholder groups should be brought to the discussion immediately, and which should be included in a longer term educator equity coalition?</p>	

STEP 1.4: Envisioning the Mechanisms for Engaging Stakeholders

After stakeholder groups have been identified and invited, it is time to consider the most appropriate setting to engage each group. The right format for each group will ensure that participants can engage in dialogue unhindered by overcrowding, discomfort, tension, or feelings of lack of access. It also will help promote rich discussion, space for reflection, and broad information sharing, as needed. Consideration should be given to the type of data review that needs to happen. The following options are listed by size with helpful tips on group size and meeting purpose.

Formats for Engaging Stakeholders

- **Small-Group Strategy Meeting (6–10 participants).** This format is best for a strategic advisory session with leaders who have unique access to information about addressing equitable access in the state. This group need not be homogenous. In fact, mixing stakeholders in a small-group setting may surface connections and common obstacles and uncover potential solutions. **Best for:** advocacy organization representatives, professional association representatives, teachers, principals, parents, SEA internal partners, or department representatives.
- **Focus-Group-Style Discussion Meeting (8–12 participants).** This format could be used to glean big-picture insights on the causes of and solutions for equitable access to effective teaching and leading, or for gathering specific feedback and reactions to a draft plan. A focus group should be a homogenous meeting of a single stakeholder category with a moderator guiding the conversation. For example, you may wish to invite teachers from a single region to gather and engage in a moderated dialogue on a single topic or convene a group of principals from multiple districts to discuss a common problem. **Best for:** teachers, principals, district administrators, parents, advocacy groups.
- **Town Hall (50–200 participants).** A large town hall meeting is best for the end of the planning cycle. This format is good for receiving feedback on the proposed plan from a diverse group of community members, such as parents, union members, and higher education partners all at once. (This format, however, is not good for collecting advisory information or for extended discussion.) **Best for:** all groups—teachers, professional associations, district leaders, parents, principals, other community members.
- **Online Meeting (Up to 150 participants).** An online public meeting is an excellent way to present a proposed plan and receive feedback through a conference call and webinar. This format is similar to a town hall but allows for a larger geographic group to access the information. It is recommended that both an online meeting and a town hall are made available for maximum

access for the community to provide feedback on the proposed plan because not all stakeholders will have consistent or quality access to technology capabilities. **Best for:** all groups—teachers, professional associations, district leaders, parents, principals, other community members, rural stakeholders.

Sample Meeting Agendas

For every type of meeting, an agenda is recommended. Creating a meeting agenda helps you think through the best use of stakeholders' limited time. Meanwhile, circulating a meeting agenda signals that the meeting is not intended to disintegrate into side conversations but rather to stay focused and efficient. For agenda ideas, please refer to **Resource 4: Sample Meeting Agendas** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_4). Sample agendas are available for a small-group meeting, a focus-group-style discussion meeting, a town hall meeting, and an online meeting. These sample agendas are not meant to be prescriptive but rather to help SEA leaders brainstorm about the different types of ways to divide your time with stakeholders effectively.

Communication Tactics

As noted previously, effective communication strategies are critical to the success of your state's stakeholder engagement on educator equity. Communication strategies are needed to recruit people to meetings, ensure the success of those meetings, and follow up after each meeting. For details, see "Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences" on page 39.

A useful framework to consider is the Reform Support Network's Framework for Communications and Engagement (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/framework-communications-engagement.pdf>), which emphasizes communications that inform, inquire, involve, and inspire. This framework suggests the following: that SEAs should **inform** key audiences about their work and changes in key practices, expectations, and systems; that the initiative will be strengthened if the SEA can listen to feedback closely and **inquire** about audiences' unique needs; that SEAs should then **involve** key audiences in the work as active co-creators of policies and programs; and that this approach and the resulting new policies and programs will **inspire** others to act and to lead, ultimately strengthening education for all students.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REVIEWING TEACHER EQUITY DATA

When selecting the meeting formats, be sure to consider implications for reviewing data. Small groups of participants can partake in deep “data dives” or review large electronic data sets. If possible, invite participants to bring a laptop to use or provide laptops for participant use during the meeting. In larger group settings, key data may be presented on a screen. Small-group discussions at roundtables can allow for more detailed data reviews. If the data are particularly detailed yet clearly labeled and organized, it may make sense to distribute the data in advance of the meeting.

Following are some specific suggestions for engaging stakeholders when complex data are involved:

- **Check for Size.** Confirm that the data are large enough to read and are in high contrast colors (not red/green), particularly if they will be presented on a screen. If it is not clear that the screen will be large enough for all participants to see the data clearly, consider bringing printouts as well. Make sure the font size in the printouts is large enough to read.
- **Modify the Data Display.** Consider changing the data presentation format from how it came to you to a format that will be as user-friendly as possible for stakeholders to review. This time spent up front will prevent headaches later if participants are confused or frustrated by the data.
- **Start With a Presentation of the Data.** For most people, it is not immediately apparent what the numbers represent without an initial walk-through. Plan to repeat much of this information twice, depending on the level of familiarity that the stakeholder group has with data of this nature.
- **Give Participants Ample Time to Digest the Data.** Before rushing into a discussion of the story that the data tell and the recommendations that should emerge, give participants time to think through the data themselves, with guiding questions that they answer as individuals or in small groups.
- **Have Data Experts on Hand.** Especially when data literacy is lacking, consider providing each group with an expert who can guide the group in accurately exploring the data.
- **Divide and Conquer.** If the amount of data to dig through is extensive, break it into smaller pieces and assign small groups to tackle individual sections. Leave time for a whole-group share-out at the end so participants can weigh in on all sections in which they can lend perspective.
- **Highlight Key Data Points.** It is easy to get lost in spreadsheets of numbers, so consider highlighting in color or in bold the data that matter the most to the present discussion.

For additional information about identifying, analyzing, and presenting data, see the GTL Center’s *Moving Toward Equity Data Review Tool* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/data_review_tool).

Stakeholder feedback also may be solicited through exit cards (which request responses to questions at these meetings), surveys, presentations at conferences, and other methods. Whichever method is used, it is important to approach the event with the following:

- An agenda. (Please refer to [Resource 4: Sample Meeting Agendas](#), available at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_4.)
- Clearly defined expectations up front about how feedback will be used
- Materials for review (e.g., state data profiles, draft plan, state or district equitable access maps)

STEP 1.5: Envisioning How Best to Prepare Stakeholders for Engagement

Before engaging with stakeholders, it may be necessary to provide background materials that help to explain the issues related to equitable access. Equitable access involves complex issues and terminology that may not be familiar to all stakeholders. It is important to gauge your audiences' understanding of the key concepts before diving into the discussion. Before they can fully participate in the discussion, stakeholders will need to know:

- Background information
- Definitions of key terminology
- The issues and challenges

Before meeting with stakeholders, consider equipping them with prereading to increase their background knowledge and comfort with the metrics and data sources that will be referred to. Premeeting communications may include the following information:

- Why it is important to address issues of equity and ensure that all students have access to effective teachers and leaders.
- History and background on the U.S. Department's call to action with the Excellent Educators for All initiative.
- The importance and purpose for developing and implementing your state's equitable access plan.
- Past efforts that your SEA has taken to address equity gaps (including your state's latest plan) and any lessons learned.
- Definitions and clarifications regarding any technical terminology. Some stakeholders will have greater familiarity with technical terminology than others. It is always helpful to use plain and accessible language.

Ensuring Authentic Engagement

Whichever meeting format is decided on, *authentic engagement* requires approaching each meeting with a certain frame of mind. Specifically, engaging stakeholders in this process is about relationship building and ensuring that the perspectives of the participants are genuinely valued and will be considered. SEA staff should consider the following strategies for ensuring that stakeholder *communication* becomes stakeholder *engagement*:

- **Set Expectations Up Front.** Stakeholders should know from the beginning how their input will be used—whether as a presentation to a particular audience, a set of recommendations considered by the authors of the plan, or another approach.
- **Create Time for Authentic Engagement.** Set aside a sufficient amount of time to allow for thoughtful, engaging participation.
- **Build Trust.** Creating an environment of trust for stakeholders allows those involved to provide meaningful, productive feedback but also keeps them engaged in the process moving forward. By providing an accessible platform for stakeholder feedback and ensuring that they are being heard, education leaders demonstrate their recognition that stakeholder voices are important and their views have merit.
- **Encourage Participation.** All stakeholders should be welcome to openly participate and share their perspectives, suggestions, and feedback. For small-group and focus-group meetings, the room should be set up so all participants can see one another. The discussion facilitator should actively manage the discussion to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to speak and that the discussion is not dominated by a few participants.
- **“Practice” Engagement.** Bringing different stakeholder groups together is not always easy. By “practicing” on smaller, lower stakes issues, all involved can build policy vocabulary, familiarity with research, and practices outside their school or district—and develop trust in one another.
- **Assign a Note Taker.** Assigning a note taker and clarifying to the group that notes are being taken signals that what is discussed is important and will be revisited at different stages in the equitable access planning process. For information about incorporating these notes, see [Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms](http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5) (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5).

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Even the most well-intentioned organizers and discussion facilitators can see their efforts go awry. Following are some common mistakes to avoid:

- **“Cross-talk:** starting the conversation where leaders and experts are, rather than where participants are. Make sure participants understand [the issues at play in addressing equitable access to teachers by] providing them with the essential facts they need to understand its complexities.”
- **“Expert speak:** using jargon or unfamiliar concepts [such as *student learning objectives*, *teacher attrition*, or *educator mobility*, which may be second nature to some participants in the conversation but foreign to others]. This can be off-putting, so use plain, accessible language instead.”
- **“The data dump:** providing more data than people need or can cope with for a given question and conversation. Instead, provide only the critical information that they need to grasp the issue’s complexity and weigh the trade-offs.”
- **“Selling rather than engaging:** coming in with ‘the’ answer and expecting participants to buy it. Instead, come with the problem and work on answers together.”
- **“Framing for persuasion, not deliberation:** defining an issue to one’s advantage in the hopes of getting an audience to do what you want. Instead, offer participants a range of options to choose from to jump-start their thinking.”
- **“Partisan facilitation:** using facilitators who have, or are perceived to have, a stake in the issue. Recruit moderators and recorders who are trusted by participants as neutral and nonpartisan.”
- **Presentations rather than dialogue.** Leaving only limited time for dialogue because most of the meeting time was spent on presentations. Remember that presentations have their place, but engaging stakeholders is about ongoing two-way dialogue.

Source: Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, and Friedman (2013, p. 93)

STEP 1.6: Envisioning a Long-Term Educator Equity Coalition

Education initiatives “come and go” as individuals leave office and are replaced by new leaders with new ideas and initiatives. It’s important to create a coalition with a long-term role that is driven not by politics and ideologies but rather by a shared purpose and vision. A coalition composed of a broad range of individuals of different experience levels and backgrounds will build institutional memory to consistently implement and monitor the shared vision over time, regardless of individual turnover.

Although a long-term educator equity coalition is more likely to be led by an outside advocacy organization than by the SEA itself, by distributing the responsibility for implementing the plan to a set of committed partners, the SEA can demonstrate its long-term vision for this work as well as build stakeholder buy-in and investment in the work. A fundamental goal of the engagement process should be to promote a sense of shared responsibility for collective action toward improving equitable access.

Coalition Partners

Although the stakeholders involved with a state coalition for equitable access may be the same as those that are brought to the discussion in the short-term, they may be selected based on which stakeholder groups were most active during the development of the plan. These groups are best-positioned to carry out the long-term vision or other criteria.

Please revisit the Stakeholder Identification Activity (page 19) to consider which stakeholder groups should be involved in the long-term educator equity coalition in your state.

A Shared Vision and Long-Term Goals for Coalition Members

One of the first meetings of the coalition should focus on developing a shared vision. (This vision should build on the more immediate-term vision discussed on pages 13–14 for engaging stakeholders in developing your state’s equitable access plan.) What are the outcomes that members wish to see, what is a realistic timeline to realize them, and what are some intermediate signs of success along the way? What does the vision look like—meeting a certain numerical target, or something broader than data points alone?

When determining the vision for a state equitable access coalition, it is important to bear in mind that some participants already may have developed a strong (and sometimes unyielding) vision through their organization’s other projects. It’s possible that these visions will conflict across partners. This situation does not need to be a problem, however; in fact, it can be seen as a strength that your state already has much to work from. At any rate, consensus will need to be built over time for the shared vision for this group.

BUILDING CONSENSUS

Building consensus means...

- All group members contribute.
- Everyone's opinion is heard and encouraged.
- Differences are viewed as helpful.
- Everyone can paraphrase the pros and cons.
- Those who disagree agree to give the group's choice a try, at least for a certain period of time.
- All members share the final decision.
- All members agree to take responsibility for implementing the final decision.

Building consensus does *not* mean...

- All group members agree.
- The result is everyone's first choice.
- There are no differences in opinion.
- Everyone possesses a complete understanding.
- Conflict and resistance will be overcome immediately.
- All members lend their full-fledged support for the decision.
- All members must advocate for the decision.

Source: Adapted from Arbuckle & Murray (1989) as cited in Regional Educational Laboratory Network Program (1995, p. 15-24).

CLARIFICATION ACTIVITY ON BUILDING CONSENSUS

Instructions: On page 14, you outlined your vision for stakeholder engagement. In the space below, brainstorm your vision for your state's educator equity coalition. What characteristics are similar and what characteristics are different from the vision for stakeholder engagement that you outlined above? How does your educator equity coalition build on your immediate stakeholder engagement activities to achieve your long-term goals? What are the long-term goals in your state?

Coalition Action Steps

For the coalition to have “teeth,” specific concrete steps must take place to get your state from where it is now to the vision that the coalition determines. These steps, or activities, may involve developing materials and resources, creating a social media presence, or holding statewide conversations that bring everyone’s voice to the discussion. For example, the coalition could train and assign focus group moderators to hold systematic stakeholder meetings across all regions and all stakeholder groups in your state. The coalition could maintain responsibility for recruiting stakeholders to these conversations and collecting and collating their input to inform ongoing modifications to the equitable access plan and related work. In the longer term, the coalition could hold itself accountable for assessing data on progress made toward meeting equitable access goals.

TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Instructions: In the space below, sketch out a timeline of key action steps for your state’s educator equity coalition. It may help to consider the timeline of your state’s wider equitable access planning and stakeholder engagement activities. (For more details on timelines, see Figure 3 on page 4 and Resource 6: Sample Timeline and Timeline Template for Developing a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, available at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_6.)

Action Step	Timeline

THE COLORADO EXAMPLE

In 2012, the GTL Center's predecessor, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center), developed a brief to highlight Colorado's experience with stakeholder and communication efforts focused on educator evaluation. Colorado was strategic in communicating with stakeholders about its work on designing and implementing an educator evaluation system, using a variety of approaches and coordinating with multiple stakeholders throughout the process. In addition to identifying stakeholders for representation on the state council charged with designing the policy, Colorado identified the key statewide associations that should be at the table on an ongoing basis during the development and implementation process. Referred to as the "Five Cs," the following organizations were included:

- Colorado Education Association
- Colorado Association of School Boards
- Colorado Association of School Executives
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Department of Education

The TQ Center identified five key components of successful communication and engagement strategies for educator evaluation reform:

- **“Relationship building:** prioritizing face-to-face interactions with stakeholders and approaching these as opportunities to genuinely listen to teachers and others.
- **Inclusiveness:** involving all relevant parties, most particularly the statewide professional associations, at each stage of development and implementation.
- **Vision:** keeping the vision central to the reforms to ensure that your SEA's efforts and discussions with stakeholders stayed focused and avoided 'vision creep,' in other words, losing sight of what they hope to accomplish and for what purposes.
- **Expertise:** recognizing the need to consult with experts, in addition to engaging with stakeholders.
- **Time:** understanding the importance of allowing adequate time—although there may never be enough time—for each phase of the reform to be completed thoughtfully and in a way that allows for stakeholder engagement.” (pp. 2-3)

Each of Colorado's communication strategies included all these components to ensure that they would be successful and meaningful. This approach helped Colorado build credibility for the reforms and ensure that they were designed to work for teachers across multiple contexts. Some of the key communication efforts were:

- Convening the State Council for Educator Effectiveness to ensure collaborative development of the educator effectiveness system.
- Setting up 11 technical advisory work groups to lead recommendations and resources around evaluation requirements.
- Creating content collaboratives of teachers to create an assessment bank of possible measures of student growth across all grades and subjects.
- Using messaging focused on continuous improvement at all levels—including the state—and learning from the expertise of educators in the field.

- Using multiple new and existing face-to-face meetings and trainings to build trust and solicit input prior to online communication.
- Being accessible and using multiple forms of communication, including a comprehensive website, monthly newsletter, and webinars.
- Partnering with the teachers union from the beginning and on a regular basis to strengthen communication with teachers as the reforms rolled out.
- Using surveys, focus groups, and pilot projects to refine and revise the system over time.

Source: Behrstock-Sherratt, Biggers, and Fetters (2012)

STEP 1.7: Planning for Stakeholder Engagement: A Suggested Approach

Far too often, stakeholders are invited to comment on or even sign-off on a nearly finished product at the end of a planning cycle (instead of being involved from the beginning). This system creates an obstacle to meaningful input. From the stakeholder perspective, this approach may be “too little, too late” and can erode trust in the stakeholder engagement process. Poorly timed engagement may not provide SEAs with the information needed and may fail to support the ultimate goal of identifying effective solutions to the complex problems facing the field. Stakeholder feedback that is disconnected from the policy levers and choices available to SEAs also may be difficult to incorporate or act upon. How can your state avoid these obstacles? Although not meant to be prescriptive and perhaps not feasible in some state contexts, the following approach is suggested as a starting point for your planning process. In this approach, stakeholders have two distinct roles: advisor (early planning stage) and reviewer (providing feedback on a draft plan).

The Advisor Role:

- **Action.** Participate in a small-group strategy session or focus group to review and discuss state data and then share what they learn with their own networks and home communities.
- **Goal.** Provide insight into “on-the-ground” realities to inform the equitable access plan while developing stakeholder and public awareness and support for the effort.

Advisory groups can help SEAs on the front end to interpret data by offering their personal experiences and expertise to:

- “Breathe life” into the quantitative data, engaging in dialogue to ensure a complete breadth of interpretation of the data told by the data alone.
- Expand communications and outreach to widen the SEA’s reach.

- Conduct a root-cause analysis to help identify the potential underlying reasons behind inequitable access to high-quality teaching and learning in the state. Refer to the *Moving Toward Equity Root-Cause Analysis Workbook: A Guide for State Education Agencies* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/root_cause_analysis). (For detailed instructions on conducting a root-cause analysis with stakeholders, see **Resource 7: Engaging Stakeholders in a Root-Cause Analysis** at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_7.)

Under this approach, advisory groups are created for any of the stakeholders identified previously (see page 14), but at a minimum:

- Teachers, principals, district administrators, parents, civil rights and community organizations, and other stakeholders (e.g., students, businesses).

Advisory groups also may be organized by region. Either way, the work does not necessarily require heavy effort by the SEA staff because, as per the *Everyone at the Table* approach (see “The *Everyone at the Table* Initiative” below), the advisory groups may hold conversations on their own and report back only key findings.

THE EVERYONE AT THE TABLE INITIATIVE

Everyone at the Table is an approach to authentically engage teachers and other stakeholders in solutions-oriented dialogue based on challenging teacher effectiveness policy topics. It consists of sample videos, discussion templates, handouts, and other resources that get to the heart of stakeholder’s perspectives to strengthen policy, identify unintended consequences, and promote smooth implementation on the ground. *Everyone at the Table* provides numerous resources for successful stakeholder engagement in teacher evaluation reform. These resources are designed to be modified, by users like you, for bringing stakeholders together on other pressing topics, such as equitable access. The *Everyone at the Table Moderator’s Guide* (http://www.everyoneatthetable.org/docs/faq_42_2718164459.pdf) in particular provides tips on effective discussion facilitation, which advisory group members may find useful when leading dialogues on equitable access.

The Reviewer Role:

- **Action.** Participate in a larger format stakeholder meeting to review the SEA’s completed draft plan.
- **Goal.** Ensure that the final plan is as strong as possible, reflecting as many stakeholder priorities as possible.

After stakeholders offer their insights through advisory groups at the early stages of the planning process, invite them to serve as reviewers of the draft plan. At this stage, stakeholders come together to review and offer feedback on the SEA’s draft plan. This meeting can take place in a larger setting such as a forum or town hall, with the plan shared in advance and open comments heard by the SEA. If gathering

stakeholders together for this stage is complex due to distance, other ways to convene are through online meetings, webinars, and large conference calls (see “Formats for Engaging Stakeholders” on page 20). The SEA collects the comments from these stakeholder reviewers, makes any needed revisions or adjustments, and begins to transition the plan from draft to final product.

Figure 3 presents key steps in this suggested approach, with stakeholder participation highlighted according to these two roles of advisor and reviewer. Suggested communication activities also are noted. For more details on communication planning, see **Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_1). A more detailed timeline for stakeholder engagement is provided in **Resource 6: Sample Timeline and Timeline Template for Developing a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_6).

Figure 3. A Suggested Approach to Engaging and Communicating With Stakeholders on Equitable Access at Key Points in Time



Timeline: October–December 2014

Stakeholder Role: Advisor. Engage in a moderated discussion of the data in order to strengthen the stakeholder’s own understanding and to surface possible explanations.

Communication Focus: Communication will focus on ensuring that all parties have the most complete understanding possible of the equity gaps in effective teaching (and leading) in your state.

- What story do the compiled data tell about equitable access in your state?
- What stories can stakeholders share from their experiences?
- Who in the state needs to understand this problem, and how can that understanding take place?



Timeline: January–March 2015

Stakeholder Role: Advisor. Assist policymakers in setting priorities by providing insight into what is happening on the ground.

Communication Focus: Communication will focus on developing a preliminary equitable access plan.

- What are the priority areas that your state plan will focus on, and what are the key priorities of other stakeholder groups?
- What is the state doing to ensure that the priorities of all stakeholders are taken into consideration?



Timeline: October 2014–April 2015

Stakeholder Role: *Advisor.* Share what stakeholders learn with their own networks and home communities.

Communication Focus: Communication will extend as broadly as possible across your state, with the goal of developing stakeholder and public awareness and support for the plan. If possible, communication with the media will be leveraged to maximize reach across the state.



Timeline: April–May 2015

Stakeholder Role: *Reviewer.* Provide feedback by reviewing the SEA's draft plan for implementing strategies that will improve equitable access.

Communication Focus: Communication will center on the SEA's draft plan for implementing strategies to improve equitable access. Stakeholders will react to the plan. SEA staff will communicate how this input will be incorporated into the draft plan as well as respond to the U.S. Department of Education's comments on the plan, when it is approved, and what action steps will begin the implementation.



Timeline: September 2016 and ongoing

Stakeholder Role: *Reviewer.* Ongoing, two-way stakeholder feedback loops inform revisions to the equitable access plan.

Communication Focus: As the plan is rolled out, communication will take place regularly to share updates and collect input. When the plan is updated, communication will inform all stakeholders of the revised approach, why it is being adopted, and how it will affect them. (For more information on communication planning for implementation, see "Building Communication Loops" on page 39.)

PART 2. Taking Action

After you have thought through all the elements of engaging stakeholders in addressing equitable access (from identifying stakeholders to envisioning what successful stakeholder engagement would look like in your particular state context), it is time to plan for the stakeholder meetings themselves. Part 2 provides guidance for SEA staff for taking action on stakeholder engagement. It walks through the five steps of *Moving Toward Equity* framework, offering guidance for engaging stakeholders each step of the way.



STEP 2.1: Engaging Stakeholders in Understanding the Problem

The first step in engaging with stakeholders on addressing educator equity is for the SEA to provide stakeholders with opportunities to examine the relevant metrics on equitable access for various schools and populations across the state. The SEA also should provide other research and data, such as research on the importance role that teachers and principals play in student learning (see “The Importance of Data” on page 10).

The following optional substeps provide ideas for SEA facilitators to help stakeholders get the understanding they need early on:

- To begin, the SEA facilitator should review the *Moving Toward Equity* tool information about measuring equitable access within a school, across schools within a district, and across districts within the state. This information is available at the “Understanding the Problem” section of the online tool (<http://www.gtcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity/understanding-problem>).
- Then, the SEA facilitator should consider what information to send stakeholders in advance of the first meeting. (See “Envisioning How Best to Prepare Stakeholders for Engagement” on page 23.)
- Next, the SEA facilitator should convene stakeholders, preparing discussion materials in advance of the meeting. Discussion materials are detailed in the following sections: “PowerPoint Template,” “Taking the Temperature Activity Template,” and “Data Profile and Other Equitable Access Metrics.”

PowerPoint Template

An overview PowerPoint is one good way to provide stakeholders with the background information they need to offer informed feedback. This information may include:

- Historical background
- The national background

- Key players, timelines, and other information about the process
- Data and research on the importance of teachers and students' access to effective teachers and leaders in your state

Some stakeholders may need more background and explanation of the issues than others. For example, principals and teachers may be familiar with terminology (such as *value-added models*, *teacher attrition*, or *student learning objectives*) but these terms may require further clarification for parents and certainly students. The initial communication for some audiences may be an explanation of the problem, why it's important, and its history before you can begin asking for feedback. **Resource 11: PowerPoint Template** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_11) provides a shell to make it easier to create such a presentation.

“Taking the Temperature” Activity Template

Equitable access involves some complex concepts and terminology. When engaging stakeholders, it is important to gauge their understanding of the key concepts early on. To ensure their familiarity with equitable access concepts, it is suggested that you first assess their current knowledge and then provide an initial overview of the topic to help develop a shared understanding of equitable access and a common language for discussion. An activity to gain a sense of where the stakeholders are at may be warranted. This activity could include having participants take a presurvey (prior to the meeting) or having participants self-report their familiarity with terms and concepts on a poster-size Likert scale with dot stickers (at the beginning of the meeting). **Resource 8: “Taking the Temperature” Activity** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_8) provides guidance for this activity.

Data Profile and Other Equitable Access Metrics

The data profile provided to your state by the U.S. Department of Education indicates relevant information about the status of equitable access in your state's context. In addition, your state may collect its own equitable access data. When possible, and especially when working with small groups, one option is to invite stakeholders to bring their own laptops or provide laptops to share. Always provide printed handouts of these data to ensure access. The GTL Center's **Moving Toward Equity Data Review Tool** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/data_review_tool) provides examples of equitable access data displays and guiding questions to help SEAs and stakeholders accurately interpret their equitable access data and understand the story told by these data and the policy implications.

In addition to helping stakeholders understand the problem, this step in the *Moving Toward Equity* framework also can deepen SEA leaders' understanding of the equity gaps in effective teaching and leading. By asking stakeholders to share their personal

experiences and interpretations of the data, SEA leaders may gain new insights on the nature and causes of equity gaps in effective teaching and leading in the state.

TIPS FOR REVIEWING DATA WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Reviewing complex data with stakeholders can be tricky because stakeholders likely have varying degrees of familiarity with the metrics and with data interpretation. In addition, accessibility of and to the information is an essential consideration. The organizers should be mindful of economic, cultural, linguistic, and disability barriers—particularly regarding parents, students, and community-based stakeholders in the schools most in need. Following are some helpful tips:

- **Select the Most Relevant Data.** To avoid overwhelming your stakeholders with massive data files, consider in advance which data will be most meaningful for particular stakeholder groups or particular meeting topics. Then determine if you will provide only these data or provide all data—with the most relevant data highlighted.
- **Invite Your Experts.** Bring data leads to the meetings to answer questions about where and how the data are housed, how data security/privacy is maintained, and what data are or are not available and why.
- **Determine the Presentation of Data: On Screen or Hard Copy?** If presenting data on a screen, confirm in advance that the screen will be large enough for all participants to see the data easily. Otherwise, consider printed handouts or request that participants bring laptops to view the data online.
- **Make It Hands-On.** Engage stakeholders in a task with the data to help them make sense of its meaning. This task may include electronic presentations of data that they can manipulate in the meeting.
- **Present More Than Just Averages.** Particularly when data are on sensitive topics such as performance, participants may appreciate access to the full range of data.
- **Prepare for Concerns.** Be prepared for pushback regarding the validity of different metrics. Develop responses in advance detailing how the SEA will address these data concerns.
- **Provide Take-Home Information.** Even if the data primarily are presented on screen, consider offering paper handouts as well, so participants can share with their friends and neighbors. Be sure to bring extra copies!
- **Anticipate Needs for Translation Services.** Offer paper copies in other languages, or provide a translator for assistance.
- **Be Mindful of Participants' Special Needs.** Ensure that all meeting spaces are compliant with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



STEP 2.2: Engaging Stakeholders in Setting Priorities

The second step is to set priorities jointly with stakeholders. Begin by conducting a root-cause analysis of the issue and developing a theory of action for ensuring that all students will have access to effective teaching and leading.

The following optional substeps are intended to provide SEA facilitators with ideas for setting priorities with stakeholders:

- To begin, the SEA facilitator should review the “Setting Priorities” section of the *Moving Toward Equity* online tool (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity/setting-priorities>). This task involves consideration of where the greatest inequities exist, what their root causes are, and the extent to which current policies prioritize equitable access.
- Then, the SEA facilitator should prepare for and hold meetings to facilitate a root-cause analysis and/or a talent development policy coherence assessment to take stock of existing initiatives through a policy inventory. The following sections may be useful to review: “Root-Cause Analysis Workbooks” (page 37) and “Talent Development Policy Coherence Assessment” (page 38).

Root-Cause Analysis Workbooks

Conducting a root-cause analysis allows parents, teachers, and leaders at all levels to engage in tough but crucial conversations about the issues that lie at the heart of equitable access *before* jumping ahead to strategies. Such an analysis ensures that the strategies developed to address equitable access are in fact aligned with the root causes behind the problem. The *Moving Toward Equity Root-Cause Analysis Workbook: A Guide for State Education Agencies* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/root_cause_analysis) takes state teams through key steps involved in determining how to address equitable access. This workbook provides strategies, resources, and examples to help policy leaders in each state understand and define equitable access to teachers and leaders, measure the state’s progress toward ensuring equitable access, and set equity priorities based on the state’s needs. A key piece of the process is the root-cause analysis, which helps the state team think through the underlying reasons why equity gaps persist in their state by engaging with data, connecting stakeholder input, and setting priorities. The workbook includes tools to help identify areas for further research and other supports for a coherent and strategic approach to designing an equitable access plan.

This root-cause analysis workbook also has been adapted for stakeholder use. See **Resource 7: Engaging Stakeholders in a Root-Cause Analysis** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_7).

Talent Development Policy Coherence Assessment

In addition, the *Talent Development Framework for 21st Century Educators: Moving Toward State Policy Alignment and Coherence* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/talent_development_framework) helps states coordinate and align the many interconnected policies and practices that aim to:

- Attract the right talent into the profession to meet your students' needs.
- Prepare future teachers and school leaders to meet your students' needs.
- Develop, support, and retain educators in the field to ensure they can continue to meet your students' needs.

This tool provides an approach to inventorying the full spectrum of existing educator effectiveness policies and initiatives as well as examining priority areas in greater depth to identify areas where they can be strengthened. *Note:* The process of assessing coherence among interconnected policies and practices can be a time-consuming one. It may be conducted within the equitable access planning process or postponed to a later date though still conducted with equity considerations in mind.



STEP 2.3: Engaging Stakeholders in Raising Awareness

Raising awareness, the third step for engaging stakeholders in the *Moving Toward Equity* process, actually takes places throughout all phases of equitable access planning from Day 1. This step involves the creation of a communication plan to raise awareness widely, both about the nature of inequities in access to effective teaching and leading, and the action the state is taking with stakeholders to rectify it. Through written and face-to-face communication, the SEA leads the awareness raising—but with significant support from stakeholders, who share information across their networks. Throughout the process of raising awareness, the SEA and stakeholders continue to gather stakeholder input through two-way feedback loops to further inform the design of the equitable access plan.

The following optional substeps are intended to help SEA facilitators brainstorm ideas for raising awareness about equity initiatives to and with the support of stakeholders:

- To begin, the SEA facilitator should review the “Raising Awareness” section of the *Moving Toward Equity* online tool (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity/raising-awareness>), including information about raising awareness among a coalition, engaging the media, and leveraging various communication channels.
- Then, the SEA facilitator should develop a communication plan, including building communication loops. (These activities are detailed on page 39.)
- Finally, the SEA needs to implement the communication plan.

Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences

A strategic communication plan helps keep track of the many facets of communication with stakeholders and the broader community to ensure they are informed about the steps and progress with addressing equitable access. The communication plan includes four steps:

- Identify audiences for communication.
- Identify and implement strategies for communication with key stakeholders and wider audiences.
- Develop key messages for communication.
- Monitor the effectiveness of communication.

These four steps are outlined in detail in **Resource 1: Four Key Steps for Equitable Access Communication Planning** (http://www.gtcenter.org/resource_1).

Building Communication Loops

A critical piece of the communication planning is to develop communication and feedback loops. Feedback loops provide stakeholders directly affected by a policy with the opportunity to inform those administering the policy (SEA and LEA) about its impact and potential areas for improvements. The long-term success of the plan, through its implementation, relies on a strong design for collecting and responding to feedback from the field. Some of these mechanisms for communication can serve the dual purpose of sharing progress and celebrating milestones with stakeholders. Including a structure for continuous improvement and communication through the use of feedback channels is a critical feature of your plan.

Suggested methods for developing two-way, continuous feedback loops include:

- Website and a designated place for open public comment
- Online platform (e.g., website, Google Docs) to make materials (e.g., agendas, minutes, handouts, datasets) available to participants for further review or consideration
- Dedicated e-mail address
- Presence at stakeholder meetings and events in order to receive feedback
- Annual surveys to teachers, LEA administrators, stakeholder groups
- Annual stakeholder group forum to share measured progress
- Biannual coalition meetings
- Annual review to share measured progress with SEA team, coalition members

The measures of success that you gather and communicate through this feedback loop will depend on the specifics of your plan. One approach to measuring successes in your state is to convene stakeholders on an annual basis with a specific focus on any changing data points. Similarly, engaging in an annual policy scan with your internal SEA team also will provide insight into changing priorities and key stakeholder groups related to each policy lever or component of the plan. Remember that this plan is intended to be implemented and continuously adjusted over years, not months, so celebrating small changes as they happen will be key to maintaining momentum and support for the work.



STEP 2.4: Engaging Stakeholders in Taking Action

The fourth stage in engaging stakeholders on equitable access is to provide input into the strategies that will be included in your state's plan. The following optional steps are intended to help SEA facilitators brainstorm an approach for determining the contents of the equitable access plan in ways that reflect stakeholder ideas, concerns, and priorities:

- First, the SEA facilitator should review the information on “Taking Action” that is presented in the *Moving Toward Equity* online tool (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity/taking-action>).

This webpage includes information about policy levers as well as strategies for improving the following policy areas with the goal of equitable access: educator preparation and certification; recruitment, selection, and hiring; assignment and transfer; induction and mentoring; evaluation and professional learning; compensation; and educator environment. The *Moving Toward Equity Quick-Start Guide* (http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/Quick_Start_Guide.pdf) also outlines these strategies.

- Then, the SEA facilitator should consider the range of structured approaches to discussing this complex array of policy strategies. The discussions should be framed around the root-cause analysis (page 37) and data review (page 22). It is important to clarify up front what the parameters of the conversation are and exactly how stakeholder input will be used to inform the final plan. Several protocols for gathering stakeholder input on strategies for inclusion in the plan are described below; see the sections titled “Example of an Equitable Access Plan” (page 41) and “Build-Your-Own Plan” (page 41). Because conversations on this topic can get heated, these resources are designed to keep the conversation focused, constructive, and solutions oriented.
- The SEA facilitator should develop a systematic approach to documenting, collating, and incorporating stakeholder feedback to inform the equitable access plan. Refer to **Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5).

- After a draft plan is written, SEA facilitator should provide ample opportunity for stakeholders to review and provide feedback on the plan.
- The SEA may want to think about how to encourage stakeholders themselves to adopt actionable strategies.

Following are descriptions of several resources for consideration. These resources are purposefully provided as Word documents for easy modification by SEA leaders to ensure that the materials reflect the appropriate content for that particular state:

Example of an Equitable Access Plan

Resource 9: Sample State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

(http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_9) is an example plan that can be used for stakeholder thoughts and reactions. In addition, the updated Highly Qualified Teacher Revised State Plans (2006 equity plans) may be downloaded for reference from the U.S. Department of Education website (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/index.html>). One option is to ask stakeholders to react to your own state's earlier equity plan. Another option would be to compare plans from states that have a similar context.

Build-Your-Own Plan

Resource 10: Build-Your-Own State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

(http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_10) provides two tools to use with stakeholders. The first tool is a focus group discussion protocol that facilitates discussion of realistic approaches to ensuring equitable access to effective educators. For example, it describes the unique Teach Plus Turnaround Teacher Teams (T3) initiative, a teacher-designed model that addresses the problem of inequitable access to effective teachers in high-poverty schools through a staffing model. In this staffing model, T3 teacher leaders comprise 20 percent to 25 percent of a school's faculty and are supported by a strong, experienced principal; ongoing professional development; and various key instructional resources. The focus group discussion protocol asks stakeholders about this and other strategies for ensuring equitable access, drawing on the principles of choicework.

CHOICEWORK

Choicework is built on the premise that by presenting discussion participants with three or four realistic scenarios, a conversation will remain grounded, rather than disintegrating into venting or argument by anecdote; the scenarios also allow those involved to see that there is no perfect solution, but rather choices and tradeoffs that have to be made, each with pros and cons (Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, & Friedman, 2011).

The second tool provides a way to obtain some quantitative information about stakeholder priorities. Although surveys often are used as a means of obtaining stakeholder input, the approach described here, informed by the *Everyone at the Table*

approach (see “The *Everyone at the Table* Initiative” on page 31), surveys stakeholders immediately following an in-depth, focus-group-style conversation using structured protocols that promote consideration of the key issues from all angles. This brief survey captures the perspectives of stakeholders on the most meaningful equitable access metrics as well as the strategies for addressing equitable access that respond to the root causes and are realistic within the state context. See **Resource 10: Build-Your-Own State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_10).

Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback Into Your Plan

Successful engagement requires actually incorporating stakeholder input into plans and actions. It requires communicating at the front end how this incorporation will take place and again at the back end how stakeholder ideas were in fact incorporated. Following are some methods to simultaneously collect stakeholder feedback and share how feedback will be or has been incorporated:

- At each face-to-face presentation, devote a portion of the allotted time to two-way feedback.
- Provide an opportunity for comments or questions to be included on the website and social media sites—with the option of comments being anonymous or not, depending on the individual’s preference. Track these comments or questions and provide answers on the website and in Frequently Asked Questions documents.
- Solicit feedback while clarifying messages through an electronic survey tool. Report back to audiences about the findings and how the information will be used to improve communication, implementation, and other facets.

Almost any approach to incorporating stakeholder feedback will require that notes be taken of each conversation and that these notes be systematically collated into a final set of recommendations. One approach for recording and compiling notes that is particularly useful for stakeholder-led, focus-group-style conversations involves the following steps:

- A note taker is scheduled and assigned to each focus-group-style discussion. (See **Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms**, Part 1, at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5.)
- The discussion facilitator collects the e-mail addresses of each member in the focus-group-style discussion group.
- Immediately after each discussion, the note taker and discussion facilitator discuss what they heard and ensure that they heard the same thing.
- While the discussion is still fresh, the note taker compiles the discussion notes. (See **Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion**

Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms, Part 2, at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5.)

- The note taker shares the form with the discussion facilitator to add to or modify it.
- After a series of focus-group-style discussions, the discussion facilitator compiles all forms and completes a discussion summary form. (See **Resource 5: Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback—Discussion Planning, Recording, and Summary Forms**, Part 3, at http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_5.)
- The note taker sends the discussion summary form to all participants with an explanation of how many stakeholders participated in total and what the next steps are.
- The discussion facilitator meets with other discussion facilitators; they review all of their focus-group-style discussions and prepare a formal summary for the SEA staff members developing the equitable access plan. This formal summary may be a white paper report, a presentation, or some other format.



STEP 2.5: Engaging Stakeholders in Measuring Progress and Adjusting Strategies

The fifth and final stage of engaging stakeholders is to ensure that after the plan is adopted, stakeholders will continue to be engaged with the SEA leadership through two-way communication loops. Stakeholders need to provide ongoing input over time, from their vantage point, about how the plan is playing out, so progress can be measured and strategies adjusted. Measuring progress includes not only examining the extent to which stakeholders believe improvement has occurred but also learning which interventions worked well, for whom, and why. After this evidence has been collected and analyzed, it is important to continually engage stakeholders in feedback loops to determine how they believe strategies should be adjusted to sustain momentum or how programs that have not met expectations for impact should be changed.

The following steps are adapted from the “Monitoring Progress and Adjusting Strategies” section of the *Moving Toward Equity* online tool (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/moving-toward-equity/measuring-progress-and-adjusting-strategies>).

Measuring Progress: Strategies and Resources

1. **Collaborate With Technical Assistance Providers.** It may be helpful to seek assistance from the federal technical assistance network as you work with stakeholders to measure progress. Your regional educational laboratory (REL),

regional equity assistance center, or regional comprehensive center may be able to provide assistance. See “Formats for Engaging Stakeholders” (page 20), which provides a variety of format options—such as a small-group meeting or town hall—for bringing together stakeholder groups and technical assistance providers for a collaborative process.

2. **Collect and Analyze Equitable Access Data.** Periodic review of equitable teacher and leader access data from districts across the state will provide you and stakeholder groups with evidence of the impact of implementation. In particular, the federal Office of Civil Rights data collection provides a variety of indicators about students—including enrollment; access to educational programs or services; and academic proficiency results that are disaggregated (i.e., broken out) by race, ethnicity, sex, and disability. See “The Importance of Data” (page 10) and “Considerations for Reviewing Teacher Equity Data” (page 22), which provide some strategies for engaging stakeholders in reviewing data.
3. **Regularly Analyze Access Metrics.** In addition to analyzing student indicators, analyzing teacher and leader effectiveness data across schools is another way to determine whether effective teachers and leaders are distributed equitably within and across districts and schools. You already may have data collected at the district level that will allow for this kind of analysis. “The Importance of Data” (page 10) and “Considerations for Reviewing Teacher Equity Data” (page 22) also will be helpful in implementing this strategy.
4. **Establish Benchmarks for Success.** Engaging with stakeholders to establish benchmarks for success based on the equitable access plans is another way to measure progress. The results from your root-cause analysis (see the [Moving Toward Equity Root-Cause Analysis Workbook: A Guide for State Education Agencies](http://www.gtlcenter.org/root_cause_analysis) at http://www.gtlcenter.org/root_cause_analysis) and information from the [Talent Development Framework for 21st Century Educators: Moving Toward State Policy Alignment and Coherence](http://www.gtlcenter.org/talent_development_framework) (http://www.gtlcenter.org/talent_development_framework) process may provide a useful framework for determining these benchmarks. Note that this process may bring up strong emotions in stakeholders. [Resource 7: Engaging Stakeholders in a Root-Cause Analysis](http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_7) (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_7) provides a strategy for effectively managing potentially sensitive and contentious topics.
5. **Seek Out Ideas for Best Practices From School Districts Addressing Distribution.** Throughout the process, the work being done at the LEA level by each of the stakeholder groups is an important source of information on the progress of implementing the equitable access plan. The section on “Building Communication Loops” (page 39) offers a useful method for encouraging continuous two-way communication loops between your staff and stakeholder groups at the LEA level on their work.

Adjusting Strategies: Strategies and Resources

- 1. Assess Effectiveness of Current Strategies to Address Distribution.** After implementation of the equitable access plan has begun, it is important to continuously assess the effectiveness of the plan. One way to ensure stakeholder engagement in this assessment is through strong communication (see “Building Communication Loops” on page 39), which will facilitate two-way feedback loops between your staff and the stakeholder groups on their assessment of the plan’s effectiveness. In addition, refer to “Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback Into Your Plan” (page 42), which will help ensure authentic engagement by stakeholders.
- 2. Regularly Review Data-Reporting Procedures.** Periodic requests for stakeholder feedback as to the adequacy of current data-reporting procedures may bring to light a need for adjustment. This situation may uncover any issues of excessive burden or potential systematic measurement error in the data collection requirements of a specific stakeholder group. “The Importance of Data” (page 10) may be useful in organizing this process.
- 3. Revise Policies to Address Distribution as Needed.** Based on the effective assessment of the equitable access plan through stakeholder engagement, you may need to revise some procedures and processes for identifying effective teachers and leaders. **Resource 10: Build-Your-Own State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_10) may be useful in guiding this revision process. In addition, the section “Developing a Communication Plan for Key Stakeholders and Wider Audiences” (page 39) provides a framework for effectively communicating any revisions that do take place.

Promoting the Engagement of Local Stakeholders

There also is a critical need for local-level stakeholder engagement, which is crucial at each stage of the *Moving Toward Equity* process. Refer to **Resource 12: Developing a Local Stakeholder Engagement Guidance Document for Your Local Education Agencies** (http://www.gtlcenter.org/resource_12). This resource provides guidance for SEAs to adapt the material outlined in this *Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide* to provide LEAs with guiding materials for local stakeholder engagement.

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Additional Resources

Behrstock-Sherratt, E., Rizzolo, A., Laine, S., & Friedman, W. (2013). *Everyone at the table: Engaging Teachers in Evaluation Reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book offers an approach that taps leaders from stakeholder groups (e.g., teacher leaders) to moderate structured dialogues, such as focus-group-style discussions, and to systematically report back to key decision makers the outcomes of the discussions. A moderator's guide, sample video, and other resources are available at the companion website (<http://www.EveryoneAtTheTable.org>).

The Education Trust. (2006). *Missing the mark: An Education Trust analysis of teacher-equity plans*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/TeacherEquityPlans.pdf>

An analysis of previous teacher-equity plans prepared by all 50 states and the District of Columbia finds that most states failed to properly analyze data that would determine whether poor and minority children get more than their fair share of unqualified, inexperienced, and out-of-field teachers.

Reform Support Network. (2013). *Educator evaluation communications toolkit: Tools and resources to support states in communicating about educator evaluation systems*. Fairfax, VA: ICF International. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/educator-evaluation-communications-toolkit.pdf>

This toolkit explores strategies and provides states with resources and tools to communicate effectively with their educators.

Reform Support Network. (2013). *From "inform" to "inspire": A framework for communications and engagement*. Fairfax, VA: ICF International. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/framework-communications-engagement.pdf>

This publication describes a framework for thinking about and implementing a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy to support successful implementation of state education reform. It focuses on prioritizing audiences, creating clear and compelling messages using a variety of tactics, working in coalitions and with partners to expand reach, building staff capacity to do this work, measuring the effectiveness of strategies, and using data to make any necessary adjustments.

Notes

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