

Facilitation, building shared buy-in, and supporting people-driven systems change

A critical component to ensuring success is gaining input from a broad range of stakeholders from the very beginning. Stakeholder input for planning and decision-making provides three key benefits:

Improve **quality of information** generated through collaborative input

Enhance **legitimacy of decisions** made by increasing state program manager and leader **buy-in**

Increase **capacity** of those involved to understand issues and **move solutions forward**

With any collaborative learning effort, we can expect what may be stark differences in opinions and priorities. By providing for meaningful engagement, we can surface and work through these differences to highlight many shared goals and strategies.

Freshwater has extensive experience in precisely this kind of setting. A key component to these efforts is matching the facilitated process to what results are needed from the meeting, and emphasizing methods that make sure that everyone can fully participate and allow for the emergence of new ideas. This means making sure that no one voice or perspective dominates the conversation, and that we lean into and work through discomfort and difficult topics as they arise so they don't lead to a breakdown of the effort at the end. We will use our expertise to set the framework for iterative discussions to take place, and in adjusting next steps to accommodate new ideas as needed.

Freshwater understands that to truly reach people, we have to meet people where they are and listen to their needs, rather than impose our own. To that end, we believe strongly that people who will be impacted by a decision need to be involved in naming the problem being addressed, and in crafting the solution. Our first step in working with you will be to identify your goals for the process, principles for how to engage and work with different stakeholders, list out stakeholder groups you'd like to engage, and talk through a general concept for how to proceed—all before setting a contract. That way, we can make sure to design a process that fits local needs, concerns, and ideas from the very beginning.

A note regarding adaptations as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

We have also been successfully adapting our approaches to allow for remote engagement. In person and online, our methods tend to emphasize small group discussions of one kind or another to support shared learning and discussion. While we are collecting many fewer post-it notes as a result of remote work, we are still able to facilitate that same sort of discussion through the use of a variety of virtual tools and platforms, carefully sequenced individual surveys followed by small group and then large group discussion, and remotely hosted work groups who can refine content already generated.

Let us know how we can help! If you'd like to have a conversation to discuss opportunities, please contact Jen Kader at jkader@freshwater.org.