Stakeholder engagement strategies for policy and programmatic uptake: Lessons from the Drivers of Food Choice Competitive Grants Program

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https://anh-academy.org/anh2020-resources
Background

Double burden = Grand challenge for LMIC decision-makers

Stakeholder engagement = Research relevance and uptake

Major challenges:
- Stakeholders = diverse
- Engagement strategies:
  - Know-how
  - Time
  - Resources
Background

• Drivers of Food Choice Competitive Grants Program
• DFC Competitive Grants Program
  • 15 projects in 10 LMICs
  • All designed and implemented stakeholder engagement strategies to promote uptake tailored to context – no standard template

The purpose of the Drivers of Food Choice program is to facilitate, synthesize and disseminate research to provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor in developing countries. DFC projects also aim to strengthen country-level leadership in nutrition and foster a global community of food choice researchers.
Objective

Derive lessons learned about designing and implementing stakeholder engagement strategies

Advance knowledge about best practices
Methods

• DFC Competitive Grants Program
  • 15 projects in 10 LMICs
  • All designed and implemented stakeholder engagement strategies to promote uptake tailored to context

• Document review
  ➢ Project proposals
  ➢ Project reports

• Semi-structured interviews with project leads (n=15)
  • Topic: experiences designing and implementing strategies, what works, recommendations for improvement

• Thematic analysis using a priori and inductive codes → thematic survey
  • Dissemination and implementation science
# Results: Overview

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uni-directional engagement strategies</th>
<th>Bi-directional engagement strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Carried out collaboratively with stakeholders</strong></td>
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<td>Researcher-driven and informational, no input from the target stakeholder</td>
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<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Produce knowledge collaboratively to enhance the immediate applicability of research.</strong></td>
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<td>Increase buy-in and generate demand for results to promote the use of evidence for decision-making.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
<td>Stakeholder mapping exercises, collaborative inception workshops, results validation exercises, collaborative development of recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emails, newsletters, meetings, press releases, technical briefs, newspaper articles, public engagement efforts</td>
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Uni-directional strategies

- Benefits
- Limitations

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Bi-directional strategies

- Benefits
- Notes on implementation
- Limitations

“...[the inception meeting] didn’t shape the research from the beginning enormously - we already had a clear idea about our aims and methods, but [...] it made us realize which of those particular elements were especially important and how we needed to focus to make it all very accessible in terms of what we find.”

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Conclusions and key takeaways

1. Tailor strategies based on goals for uptake and impact pathways specific to context:
   - mix of strategies
   - timing of engagement
   - frequency of contact

2. Use both uni- and bi-directional strategies.

3. Engage throughout, not only at dissemination.

4. Participation facilitates uptake.

“We had had experiences which were bad in the past. Researchers go ahead, design their studies, implement them, come up with findings, then bring the findings to [us] to implement. Some of the questions we would pose to the researchers - where were [we] when these ideas were hatched out?”
Recommendations

Researchers should systematically document their engagement strategies and experiences.

Funding organizations should allocate resources for these activities to advance best practices.
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