Divisions of Family Practice
A GPSC initiative

Engagement Handbook

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British Columbia

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Introduction

Divisions of Family Practice are independent non-profit societies comprised of family physicians working together to achieve common health care goals in their communities. Each division is charged with attracting and retaining local physicians as members. A key part of retention involves ensuring the division is offering value to its members, that it is taking on projects of importance to them and facilitating beneficial change. Engaging members to become active participants or supporters of a division's work is vital to its success.

This Engagement Handbook outlines the principles, guidelines and benefits of effective engagement, how to assess what type of engagement is most appropriate and techniques for undertaking engagement activities. The main body of this handbook provides a general overview of the engagement process, with more detailed tools and information to support executive directors/coordinators and board members in executing engagement events in the appendix. As the handbook is not exhaustive in exploring engagement opportunities and techniques, it may not address every situation. Please contact the division's physician engagement lead for assistance in any matters it does not cover.

Section 1 – The Role of Engagement

What is Engagement?

Engagement is the process of actively involving an organization's stakeholders in making decisions related to its operations and is usually done when the stakeholders will be impacted by the decisions they help inform.

While divisions commonly host events as a central part of engaging local physicians, engagement spans much more than that. It includes many types of activities which, taken together, form an inclusive approach to the way an organization operates. For divisions, engagement is vital to identifying the needs, challenges, perspectives and desired solutions for everyone touched by primary care in a community.

The type and extent of engagement can vary widely depending on the situation. As member-based societies, it is particularly important for divisions to engage their membership in moving the divisions' strategic goals forward, both from a manpower perspective and to ensure the divisions are pursuing objectives that align with their members' priorities.

During the early phases of a division's development, recruitment is a key focus of the board of directors and operational staff. Engagement is the next step in that process. To be successful, divisions need more than just members. They need members who believe enough in what the division is trying to achieve that they are willing to participate in the activities it takes to get there. That participation can take many forms. Some involve very little time on the physician's part, others can be more intensive.

The common thread to all types of engagement activities is that they strive to enhance both relationships and results by inviting stakeholders to play a role in informing decision-making and supporting the division's triple aim: to enhance physician and patient satisfaction, improve the population's health outcomes and decrease overall health care costs.

Why is Engagement Important?

Bringing physicians together to works towards the health care solutions they want to see in their community is the primary goal of the Divisions of Family Practice model. While there are common issues throughout the province, each division has specific challenges and opportunities, which can only be identified and acted upon with the express participation of its members.

Engagement plays a vital role in supporting a division's:

- **Strategy** – identifying and prioritizing member and community needs
- **Sustainability** – ensuring the right people are involved and resources are used in the right way to achieve desired outcomes
- **Succession** – attracting members to the division, and to committee and board participation, by demonstrating success in achieving the division's objectives.

Engaging members and other stakeholders in division activities can help to:

- Create a culture of inclusion
- Identify risks early on
- Identify problems from multiple perspectives
- Build understanding of an issue's content, process and outcome

- Give people more opportunity to influence a direction and participate constructively
- Ensure those impacted can influence a different outcome
- Build stronger relationships
- Achieve stronger, better solutions/decisions
- Foster more knowledgeable citizens and patients.

When to use Engagement

The Divisions model is perfectly suited to the principles of engagement. So much so, that many divisions may intuitively undertake engagement activities. Engagement does not have to be difficult but it does take time and to be most effective, it should be used strategically. Not every division activity requires stakeholder participation. In some cases, a division will be best-served by the board or management's decision-making leadership. Engagement should be considered in situations where the outcome impacts the division's strategic focus and/or its members, members' patients or the community at large.

Engagement can be an effective tool when there is a:

- Decision to make
- Question to answer
- Problem to solve
- Opportunity to explore
- Relationship to build
- History to heal.

Choosing the right type of engagement activity for the situation is important for a successful outcome. Guidance on how to select and implement appropriate engagement methods is offered later in this handbook. The division's physician engagement lead can also help in determining when to use engagement and what level and activities would best contribute to achieving the division's goals in the most cost- and time-efficient way possible.

Section 2 – Exploring the Engagement Options

Strategic Questions to Ask

Engagement activities should always be undertaken with integrity. If, for example, a decision is already made, stakeholders should not be invited to offer their input to help define a solution. Opportunities to influence the outcome must be genuine to warrant engagement. That said, while engagement is a component of decision-making, divisions must still show leadership in working towards their strategic objectives. People may well express disparate opinions, and it's possible not everyone will be happy with the final outcome.

Before beginning any participatory exercise, it is important to clearly define its purpose. The following questions should be explored when defining scope:

1. *How much can change?*

   Establishing what exactly can be changed as a result of participation is an important first step, and one that should involve the ultimate decision makers.

2. *Is engagement appropriate?*

   Is the information being shared of value to the stakeholders? If active input on an issue is being pursued, that input must be able to influence the decision-making process. It does not make sense to invite participation if:
   - Nothing can change, regardless of the results of the engagement activity
   - The potential participants do not wish to become involved
   - There are not enough resources for the engagement process to work properly.

3. *What are the risks?*

   In general, the risks of engaging stakeholders are:
   - Reputation: This applies to everyone involved
   - Resources: Engagement takes money and time. Are there sufficient resources to undertake the process and take action on the ideas that emerge?
   - Failure to deliver: If decision makers refuse to accept the engagement's results, it can undermine the organization's reputation and future efforts
   - Relationships: damaging or eroding them.

If after answering these questions it is determined engagement is appropriate, then planning for participation can begin.

The Engagement Spectrum

Different types of engagement are appropriate in different situations. There are three key points along the spectrum of engagement:

- **Communicate** – inform or educate
- **Consult** –gather input (information or perspectives)
- **Collaborate** – work with others towards a shared goal.

Communicate

This is generally a one-way engagement activity and takes place when:

- Factual information is needed to describe a policy, program or process
- A decision has already been made which people need to know about
- Stakeholders need to know the results of a process

- Stakeholders need to know how a decision was made
- There is no opportunity to influence the final outcome but informing stakeholders about the outcome is important
- There is need to build for acceptance of a proposal or decision
- An emergency or crisis requires immediate action
- Information is necessary to abate concerns or prepare for involvement
- The issue is relatively simple.

Tools often used to communicate include:

- Advertising
- Annual reports
- Social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Websites – BCMA, Divisions, Division-specific
- Fact sheets/backgrounders
- Information kits – may contain a variety of pieces, including fact sheets/backgrounders, letters etc. (Samples can be obtained from the provincial Divisions office communications contact.)
- Exhibits
- Information boards in hospital doctors' lounges or clinics
- Newsletters
- Open houses
- Media relations
- Presentations and speeches
- Educational workshops

Consult

Consultation is a two-way engagement process that is used when:

- There is an opportunity to listen and really understand the issue
- Policy decisions are still being shaped and discretion is required
- There may not be a firm commitment to do anything with the views collected (in which case, participants are advised of this from the outset), but the information may be useful and the contribution may be timely
- Individuals and groups have an interest in the issue and will likely be affected by the final outcome
- There is a desire to encourage discussion among stakeholders.

Tools often used to consult include:

- Focus groups
- Community mapping – a systematic process that helps stakeholders identify a community issue, establish problem boundaries, collect data, create maps and use these maps to promote change
- Workshops
- Surveys/questionnaires
- Bilateral meetings with stakeholders
- Community or public meetings
- Advisory committees, boards or councils
- Issue conferences
- Patient journey mapping– documents a patient's experience of travelling through the health system or service stream

Collaborate
Collaboration occurs when the division wishes to work together with stakeholders to reach a decision, such as when:

- Disparate stakeholders need to talk with each other about complex, value-laden issues
- There is a capacity for participants to shape policy and program decisions that affect them
- There is an opportunity for shared agenda-setting and open time frames for deliberation on issues
- Options generated together will be respected.

Tools often used to collaborate include:

- Charrette – an intense brainstorming process that brings together essential stakeholders for a prolonged meeting to work through decision-making on an issue while all parties are present
- Retreats – stakeholders meet at a neutral, often remote locale to brainstorm
- Appreciative inquiry - commonly used to generate consensus-based conversations across disparate participants to effect positive social change (materials from provincial Divisions' team workshops on hosting appreciative inquiries can be downloaded at www.divisionsbc.ca/provincial/workshop2012)
- Open space – a self-directed meeting format that lets an unlimited number of participants design their own work groups about key issues
- Think tanks - a policy research-generated event, usually intended for advocacy
- Study circles - diverse participants engage in a solution-focused discussions
- World café – small groups move from table to table providing feedback or recommendations on specific issues (a how-to guide on hosting a world café is available from the provincial Divisions office).

Section 3 – Planning for Engagement

1. Define the Purpose of the Engagement Process

Clearly defining the purpose and outcomes of the engagement process is vital to its success. Everyone involved must understand what is being done, why and what will come out of it. Common purposes include:

- Involving stakeholders in the organization
- Exploring issues and developing ideas
- Networking
- Decision making
- Informing stakeholders
- Improving the quality of services
- Capacity building.

Defining the purpose will involve:

- Internally – clarifying what can be changed as a result of engagement and what outcomes are sought
- Externally – identifying the needs and concerns of those impacted.

Questions that should be asked while defining the purpose:

1. What do you want to have achieved at the end of this process (outcomes)?
2. What tangible products do you want to have produced during and after the engagement process (outputs)?
3. What will you have to do with the outputs to ensure you achieve the outcomes?

2. Whom to Involve

Different combinations of individuals and groups will be invited to participate in engagement activities, depending on the purpose of the engagement. In determining whom to involve, the following questions are good places to start:

1. Who is directly responsible for decisions on the issue?
2. Who will be affected by the outcome?
3. Who is influential on the issue?
4. Who could obstruct a decision if not involved?
5. Who runs organizations with relevant interests?
6. Who has been involved in this issue in the past?
7. Who has not been involved in the issue in the past but should have been?

Common participants for divisions to involve include:

Internal

- Members/prospective members working in:
  - Family practices
  - Hospitals
  - Walk-in clinics
  - Emergency
- New grads/residents
- FPs close to retirement.

External

- Specialist physicians
- Allied health professionals
- Patients/caregivers

- Hospital administration
- Frontline hospital staff
- Community groups
- Health authorities
- Local government
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Child and Family Development
- Aboriginal leaders.

Ensuring the right people are invited to take part in an engagement process is core to its success. It may also be important to pay attention to sub-categories of groups. For example, family practice doctors who have recently graduated and are just starting their careers may have different priorities than those nearing retirement. They may also prefer different ways of connecting and offering feedback, and these should be taken into account when planning for effective engagement.

3. Set Engagement Process Outcomes

Outputs and outcomes differ in that the outcome is what the division wants to get out of the engagement process.

Common outcomes include:

- Establishing, improving or refocusing relationships
- Agreement on purpose and direction of a strategy or project
- Identification of issues and opportunities
- Generation of new ideas
- Forming new partnerships; identifying complementary resources and approaches towards an issue
- Defusing conflict and addressing confusion
- Improved services for people
- Improved processes
- Policy change
- Building support for a new initiative
- Behaviour change.

Different engagement tools are used to achieve different results, which is why it is important to know what the division wants to achieve before beginning a process. Choosing an engagement tool simply because it's familiar does not mean it's the best way to obtain the desired result, so this step should be taken for each new engagement process.

4. Understand the Context and Design Engagement Appropriately

Divisions do not operate in a vacuum. In planning for engagement, be aware of the environment in which the process will take place.

Time is always at a premium, so it is beneficial to set the process up for success by exploring if:

- There are any other relevant activities going on at the same time
- It duplicates other activities and/or can effectively build on any past processes
- It responds to participant needs
- It can progress quickly and is relevant
- The process fits into decision-making systems
- There is funding available, if needed
- There is the political/administrative will/ability to take it on.

It is also valuable to be familiar with the desired participants' views, priorities and backgrounds, such as:

- Groups or individuals who are unlikely to participate
- Existing relationships between key participants
- Cultural differences between different organizations
- Diversity of experience
- Barriers to collaboration that exist.

5. Developing a Final Design

Once all the issues have been considered, the purpose identified and the decision to proceed with engagement has been made, a detailed design for the process must be developed. This plan will serve as a roadmap, so it must identify the key things necessary for engagement to be a success. That said, sometimes being overly formal or structured during engagement activities can inhibit peoples' full participation, so it is important to make the process as convenient, welcoming and open as possible to get good results.

This includes six steps:

1. Strike a planning group/identify a project lead
2. Build a project plan
3. Identify logistics
4. Develop and undertake communications
5. Follow-up on engagement activities
6. Evaluate

1. Strike a planning group

The planning group should be struck to oversee all aspects of the engagement process. It is not necessary that the people in this group actually lead any participatory activities.

If meetings of any kind will be part of the engagement mix, and if the issues are at all controversial – and even if they are not – sourcing an external facilitator can be an effective way to ensure a valuable outcome as they are neutral and enable division representative to act as participants in the process. If a facilitator is hired, it is useful to involve them in the planning process so they are familiar with goals and participants, and can advise on ways to support a successful outcome.

2. Build a project plan

A plan should be developed to outline the entire engagement process. It should include:

- Timeline
- Budget
- Key dates and actions
- Methods – options will be explored more fully in section 3 of this handbook.

3. Identify logistics

Engagement activities require a fair amount of time dedicated to making arrangements and developing materials to support it. Any activity that requires people to come together will need an appropriate venue. When it comes to putting your plan into action, securing the right venue should be done as early as possible. It is helpful to outline a list of potential dates and venues in the plan.

Any materials required for the engagement activity should be identified in the plan, as they will likely need to be researched, written, approved, printed and/or circulated. Some materials may be required by participants in advance, such as an invitation or event brief, while others would be needed for the engagement exercise itself or in follow-up.

4. Develop and undertake communications

Communications is important throughout the process, first to advise people of what the division is doing and why, then to support the process itself, and finally to report back on the outcomes to all stakeholders.

The planning group should decide what key messages the communications materials should convey. The materials themselves could span:

- Invitations
- Leaflets/flyers
- Web updates
- Surveys
- Presentations
- Media releases – in select cases only.

The Communications Department in the provincial Divisions office can offer advice or feedback on communications materials if needed.

5. Follow-up on engagement activities

The report back should outline how the results of the engagement process will be used, whether/how results will be shared with participants and other stakeholders, and if any follow-up activities will occur at a later time.

6. Evaluate

Evaluation is an important part of all engagement activities. From the planning phase, the criteria by which the success of the process will be evaluated should be identified. Generally, this will involve gauging whether or not the division was able to achieve the objectives of the exercise, if the questions were answered and sufficient input was gathered for the division to move ahead with the decision it was seeking to inform.

In cases where engagement centres on a workshop or other in-person forum, participants may be asked to complete an evaluation form, which enables them to provide their views on whether the process worked from their perspective. A sample form can be found in the appendix.

Results from the evaluation can help inform future engagement activities by showing what worked and what did not.

Section 4 – Engagement Techniques

Choosing the Right Engagement Tool

While some tools are effective as part of activities along the full spectrum of engagement, others are best suited to divisions that wish to communicate, consult or collaborate with stakeholders.

Engagement can be successful if a less than optimal technique is selected, although a division will experience best results if it chooses the tool or combination of tools that will enable it to reach the right people, in the most cost- and time-efficient way that will provide the desired inputs.

In general, when seeking only to inform stakeholders of key information, a quick one-way communication tool is best. When a division needs to gain information or input from stakeholders, tools such as surveys are quick ways to obtain data and opinions on issues at a high level. When the issue is complex, or if the division needs to work together with stakeholders to reach a decision on something, in-person collaboration is usually required. Not only does it enable all participants to hear others' views, but it provides an arena for thoughts and ideas to be raised, often enriching the value of the outcome.

Engagement in Action

Many of the most common engagement tools divisions use involve face to face meetings or events. While more time-intensive (both in terms of organization as well as conducting and following up on the meetings), face to face encounters are among the most effective ways to build relationships, identify issues and develop solutions. Three of the most popular meeting/event formats are outlined below.

Focus Group

What it is:	A means of vetting specific ideas. Representatives from key stakeholder groups are brought together to provide their feedback on the information presented.
When it is used:	When an issue or solution is defined and a division wants to know how impacted/key groups feel about it before implementation. Often used by companies for market research purposes, focus groups are effective at identifying how audiences are likely to feel about a specific action.
Where on the engagement spectrum:	Consult
Success factors:	Having the right people in the room; setting a clear objective; ensure participants have enough information to provide appropriate feedback; hold it at a time and place convenient to participants.

Open Space

What it is:	A self-directed meeting where an unlimited number of participants can create their own discussion groups around a central theme.
When it is used:	Brainstorming and priority-setting
Where on the engagement spectrum:	Collaborate
Success factors:	Set a central theme, e.g. opportunities for improving primary care in the community

Charrette

What it is:	An intense brainstorming/decision-making process that brings all essential stakeholders together to generate options and a final decision while all participants are present
When it is used:	For building consensus on decisions taken to address issues.
Where on the engagement spectrum:	Collaborate

Section 5 – Additional Resources

Physician Engagement Lead & Provincial Divisions Communications Office

This handbook provides an overview of the value of engagement and some of the activities most likely to support regional divisions' mandates. Physician engagement leads are available to support divisions with guidance on specific situations, while the provincial Divisions Communications office has a number of 'how-to' resources for the tools outlined in the Engagement Spectrum overview in Section 2.

Useful Websites

Stakeholder engagement, also known as public participation, is widely profiled for its success in supporting organizations in achieving goals which impact multiple audiences. There are a number of websites which offer excellent additional information on this subject, including:

- International Association for Public Participation
    - Main site address http://www.iap2.org
    - Engagement tools http://www.iap2.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=5

- Integrated Primary and Community Care Patients and Public Engagement Framework
    - http://www.impactbc.ca/patients-as-partners

Appendix 1 – Hosting a Collaborative Engagement Process

Guiding Principles for Leading a Collaborative Process

In-person engagement is often the most valuable, but it is also the most time consuming, has financial costs and poses certain risks if not planned and led effectively. To lead a meeting successfully, there are some general principles that should be observed:

Structure benefits everyone

Everyone is busy. Participants expect meetings to have some degree of structure appropriate to the scope and importance of the question being explored. The role of structure is to respect people's time while ensuring the exercise achieves its goals.

The participants should have some idea of the event structure in advance, and it should be addressed in detail, both via a shared agenda and by the facilitator or group leader at the beginning of the meeting. People will respect limits on question or discussion time if they understand it is necessary to ensuring all aspects of an issue are addressed. If more people wish to speak than there is time for, it may be beneficial to offer ways for them to submit their thoughts via email or other means following the meeting. Otherwise, it would be important to gain agreement from the group to extend the meeting time or to explore the possibility of meeting again to continue the discussion.

Lead the process, not the content

The facilitator/meeting leader's job is to ensure a fair and efficient process. When it comes to a consultation, where input is invited but may not necessarily dictate the outcome, then a division's meeting leader can express the division's perspective and invite comment on that.

However, when it comes to collaborative meetings, it is important the leader be impartial, so participants have confidence in the process and that their perspectives have weight. Particularly when the issue is contentious, people will lose confidence in the process if they feel they are being led in a particular direction.

Logistics

A well-planned collaborative process will flow smoothly and allow all participants to focus on the issue at hand. Successful events require detailed planning and have a number of moving parts, including:

- Inviting, confirming and hosting participants
- Securing venue & set-up
- Planning for all technology/equipment needs
- Catering
- Agenda
- Development of supporting materials.

Below is a list of things to consider when hosting an event. A checklist of these items can be found in the appendix.

Participants

- Identify prospective participants.
  - Scan all key stakeholder groups and include the right complement of those stakeholders.
- Develop an invitation list with detailed contact information.
  - Always invite more people that you need/want. Response rates will depend on the quality of the list and how close they are to the issue. Unless the invitees are intimately involved with the division and/or issue, anticipate a 20-30% response rate.
- Invite participants.
  - When possible, email is faster and less expensive.
  - Depending on the type of event, a simple message or letter may be sufficient. If it is a large process and public participation is desired, it may be helpful to advertise or send out a media release inviting participation.
  - If speakers are part of the process, they should be formally invited before the other invitations are sent if possible.
  - Invitations should be sent no less than six weeks before an event. Ideally, invite people eight to 10 weeks before, to allow follow-up and reminders closer to event day.
- Keep a detailed list of registrants. If the event is of any size, this list can be used to generate name tags for participants to wear on the day, as well as a check-in list at the meeting.

Venue

- As soon as a target number of participants is known and possible dates selected, a suitable venue should be sourced. It is never too early.
- Do a site check. It is the only sure way of knowing whether the venue will work.
- Some venues, like hotels, have onsite audio-visual people and caterers, and provide one contact to take care of all needs.
- If the venue does not have onsite catering and audio-visual people, it will be important to source these early in the process.
- Select a venue appropriate to the process. Are chairs required in a certain configuration? Are tables required so each participant can take notes?
- If possible, choose a venue that can be adapted to more or fewer participants.

Audio-Visual/Presentations

- If people will be giving presentations as part of the meeting, work with the venue or an A/V company to ensure there is a screen and projector or computer if necessary. Many people now bring presentations on a jump drive, so a single computer may be all that is required.
- Depending on the size of the room, it may be helpful to have microphones.
- Minimizing A/V needs will help keep costs down. Whatever the required set-up, test the functionality before the event begins. Allow enough time to fix small issues or revert to an alternative approach.

Catering

- Depending on the time of the engagement session, consider providing catering. Depending on time of day and the session's length, this may be a simple coffee break with baked goods, or a meal.
- Always ensure water will be readily available, along with glasses.

Agenda

- Develop and share a detailed agenda of the engagement meeting.
- Circulate the agenda in advance, or provide it at check-in.
- For truly collaborative sessions, ensure the agenda has enough time for discussion.

Supporting materials

- Any speeches or presentations should be developed well in advance of meeting day.
- If there are multiple speakers, it is important to know what they will speak to in order to avoid overlap.
- Any written materials that require review before the session should be shared at least two weeks beforehand. Otherwise, materials, if any, can be distributed at the session.
- If new materials are being developed in support of an event – any materials, including ads, flyers, reports etc. – plan for approval times, printing and circulation as appropriate.