

Engagement Strategies for California's Local Control Funding Formula

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In 2013 California adopted historic legislation to change how K-12 public education is funded. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), based on principles of equity, flexibility and transparency, allows educators and partners to be more responsive to the needs of students in their community. Along with this increase in flexibility and local control, local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to prepare Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), which describe how agencies intend to meet annual goals for all pupils. The LCAP is a three-year plan that must be updated annually, and requires the school district to engage parents, students and community members.

As school districts and county offices of education evaluate the first “learning year” of developing and approving district LCAPs, staff and community members have an opportunity to examine what went well and what more can be achieved. This publication suggests public engagement strategies and practices to enhance and deepen the principles called for in the development of the multi-year LCAPs.

Why Does Public Engagement Matter?

LCFF has brought about sweeping changes in law and policy related to how California funds K-12 education and gives local educational agencies, including school districts, charter schools and county offices of education, new autonomy. The process to identify, engage and establish ongoing communication mechanisms with the multiple stakeholders (see “Who Needs to Be Engaged?” on Page 2) is an opportunity for school districts to:

- Understand the values and beliefs of a broader spectrum of community members;
- Facilitate more effective decision-making that is better informed by the community's needs and resources;
- Inform students, parents, guardians and community members about education-related issues and challenges;
- Generate community buy-in and support; and
- Foster greater trust and confidence from the public.

More information on the benefits of public engagement see [Why Engage the Public?](#)

LCFF's Public Engagement Challenges

The Local Control Funding Formula's requirements to ensure inclusive, informed, transparent and effective public engagement present several key challenges:

- The initial fast-paced implementation timeline limited exploration of effective tools and long-term planning;
- Among the lowest spending per pupil nationally and historic budget constraints diminishing administrative capacity of school districts across the state;
- Limited staff with appropriate training;
- Limited resources to ensure participant groups understand the new law and ways that they can effectively participate to ensure successful outcomes for all students;
- Limited awareness about the current level of school funding and the impact of [Proposition 30](#); and
- Simultaneous implementation of the new financing system and the adaptation of the Common Core Standards.

These challenges highlight the importance of creating an inclusive public engagement effort that reaches California's diverse population. This process provides local agencies an opportunity to engage community members, including English-learners, low-income families and foster youth, who may not regularly participate in public meetings.

Who Needs to be Engaged?

The LCAP Template identifies the following stakeholders:

- Teachers,
- Principals,
- Administrators,
- Other school staff,
- Local bargaining units,
- Parents and guardians (specifically those of students who are low income, English learners or foster youth),
- Students including foster youth,
- County child welfare agencies,
- County offices of education,
- Foster youth services programs,
- Court-appointed special advocates,
- Education rights holders,
- Other foster youth stakeholders, and
- Community organizations representing English learners.

Collaborative efforts between cities, counties and schools can:

- ▶ Result in stronger LCAPs based on a more comprehensive understanding of the needs and resources of students, specially students in need that may be accessing services from multiple local agencies;
- ▶ Promote and encourage ongoing coordination and integration; and
- ▶ Enhance efficiency of local services and joint facilities.

For more information visit the Cities Counties Schools Partnership website at www.ccspartnership.org.

The LCAPs may also benefit from the knowledge and expertise of before and after school program providers, public health professionals, city and county recreation and parks staff, congregational representatives, community elders and other non-formal community leaders.

As schools and communities prepare to adapt the LCAPs in 2014-2015 it is critical to build on the stakeholder engagement from the first LCAP, see who is still missing from the process and reach out to community members who were not able to participate during the initial year.

Public Engagement Strategies and Approaches to Consider

The greatest LCFF public engagement successes may come about for school districts with communication and engagement-related capacity building strategies that extend beyond LCFF-related activities. All efforts should aim to inform all stakeholders and community experts about the new LCFF funding framework and actively solicit their involvement. Additionally, efforts should prepare community members with the information and confidence they need to participate, and offer avenues for engagement that are language, culture, time and location appropriate.

Below are some tips for effective and inclusive public engagement:

Assess the Landscape

1. Know your stakeholders and understand their issues and concerns

Use demographic data, personal conversations, surveys and meetings to enhance and build relationships with the stakeholders to understand their educational priorities and concerns.

2. Consider the broader community with your outreach strategy

In addition to parents and students, reach out to local community, service and business organizations. Develop relationships with these organizations, provide them access to information and to school administrators and board members, and engage them as partners in developing effective outreach to generate broader public involvement. For more information see [Collaborating with Community-Based Organizations](#).

Given the [California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning](#)'s recent recommendations for a new approach to civic learning to "enable all students to mature and participate in our democracy," local educational agencies may consider connecting their youth engagement efforts to the broader goals of civic learning and democratic participation. For more resources on youth engagement see [Best Practices and Resources to Engage Youth](#).

Outreach and Communications

3. Develop and implement a strategic communications plan

An [effective strategic communications](#) effort can aid transparency, public trust building and multiply the positive results of engagement efforts. Early communications may help educate community members about the purposes of an upcoming public engagement activity and help recruit participants. Communicating on progress during the engagement process can support community knowledge and encourage buy-in. At the end of the engagement process, communicating engagement outcomes, explaining how decision-makers used public views and recommendations, and acknowledging the contributions of all participants helps build public trust in, and support for the LCAP.

4. Use effective and appropriate media

Make community, ethnic and social media an integral component of your communication strategy. For more information see [Working with Media](#) and [Building Relationships with Ethnic Media](#).

5. Ensure language access

Public engagement efforts should seek to ensure that every participant:

- Is prepared to take part,
- Will be understood, and
- Will understand what others are saying.

Outreach and background materials should be translated as appropriate for your communities. Language interpretation equipment and services should be available when possible. Outreach for public engagement events should mention interpretation services when they are available. Ensure that the translation of materials is done by native speakers or by individuals completely fluent so that readers understand translations. For more information see [Providing Language Access](#).

Match Process to Participants

6. Ensure accessibility

Take into account the work, family, religious and community obligations of the stakeholders to determine engagement meeting locations and times. Also consider childcare, food and transportation needs to maximize turnout. Be mindful of varied accessibility issues for people with disabilities and consider including a statement on outreach materials such as: *"If you have a disability and require accommodation(s) to fully participate in this event, please contact [name] before [event date] via email [email address] or telephone [number] to discuss your accessibility needs."* If you are not sure, do not make assumptions and do not hesitate to ask trusted community members to ensure accessibility throughout the public engagement process.

7. Make meeting design and processes appropriate

An important aspect of public engagement planning entails making choices about the strategies, processes and overall design that best respond to the participation needs of each identified stakeholder group. LCFF requires that at least one public hearing be held to solicit recommendations and comments from the public. However, such hearings are not typically effective forums for thoughtful consideration of alternative plan or policy elements. Seek input from trusted, knowledgeable leaders and organizations on recruitment and meeting processes. Prior to and during the public engagement process clearly communicate meeting purposes, processes and how public input will impact decision-making. In addition to meetings, consider the appropriate use of online polls or surveys if the target participants have online access. For more information about public engagement choices see [Technology, Tools and Techniques to Reach Your Community](#).

Capacity Building

8. Build LCFF-related knowledge

In addition to ensuring information-building and sharing on issues relating to LCAP implementation and public engagement, it is important to continue to build a solid understanding of the purposes, processes and ongoing changes in the LCFF guidelines. This is true for LCAP planning partners and constituencies as well as for the broader public. It is also important to consider the varying levels of knowledge among groups including students, parents with a history of involvement in the schools, parents with limited knowledge or engagement with the schools, parents of high need students, advocates for foster youth and foster youth themselves. All materials should be straightforward and translated as appropriate. Making this a part of each local educational agencies' communications goals and strategies will help make the next round of planning easier and likely more effective.

9. Enhance administrative capacity to engage diverse stakeholders

Skilled staff with the time and ability to develop relationships with diverse stakeholder groups can help create and manage effective ongoing engagement. Build these capacities into staff hiring and training as appropriate. Ensure that all staff and volunteers, especially those with the most frequent contact with parents and guardians, are informed of current LCAP planning efforts.

10. Use public engagement consultants effectively

Some local educational agencies may choose to hire consultants to assist with public engagement-related design, outreach and/or facilitation. If so, make sure consultant(s) qualifications and experiences match both the intended public engagement purposes and the participant categories. It is also important to communicate the distinct roles of the local educational agency and the consultant early in the process. A consultant with sufficient knowledge of LCFF and LCAP requirements who is viewed by the public as an impartial facilitator can often help ensure public trust in the process. For more information see [Working Effectively with Public Engagement Consultants: Tips for Local Officials](#).

Evaluation

11. Plan, implement and evaluate collaboratively

Involve stakeholder groups early and often and be prepared to learn and adapt as you go. Given the recurring nature of LCFF and LCAP it is important to provide public engagement participants the opportunity to share what has worked and not worked for them in terms of process, goals and activities. It is also helpful to gather feedback about how they view the information/preparation and other communications they received about LCFF and their participation in the LCAP planning process. For more information see [Assessing Public Engagement Effectiveness](#).

Additional Resources

- ▶ [American Civil Liberties Union, Southern California](#)
- ▶ [Association of California School Administrators' Resources for School Administrators](#)
- ▶ [California Department of Education: Local Control Funding Formula](#)
- ▶ [The California Endowment's LCFF Resources](#)
- ▶ [California School Board Associations' LCFF Resources](#) and [LCFF Toolkit](#)
- ▶ Children Now's [What is LCFF?](#) and [Fact Sheet](#)
- ▶ EdSource's [Local Control Funding Formula Guide](#)
- ▶ Ed Trust West's [LCAP Watch](#)
- ▶ Families in Schools' [Reimagining Parent Engagement in California: Moving from 1.0 to 2.0](#)
- ▶ WestED's [PDFs, Video, Audio resources on LCFF](#)

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