

KEY QUESTIONS TO GUIDE ENGAGEMENT

There has been much dialogue about the importance of societal engagement for gene editing. The good news is that there are examples and learning to build from in gene editing and other fields. To move from discussion to action, start with the following key questions.

THE BASICS

There are basic questions and considerations that should guide any societal engagement effort. Check out these questions below. The design - including the scale, scope, mechanisms and duration/iteration - of engagement can differ significantly depending on the answers to these questions.

To dive deeper, check out the [Collaborative Action Toolkit - Keystone Policy Center](#) for a step-by-step process of inquiry that guides you through these questions to help determine the right level and form of engagement for your needs.

WHY? Why are you seeking to engage?

- What's your objective and the problem you are trying to solve?
- What are your goals?
- Are you looking to inform? To be informed? To collaborate?
To empower others to make decisions?
- Does engagement have the potential to change your decisions? Which decisions?
What constraints do you have?
- How much value does your organization place on engagement? Are you willing to hear and incorporate critical feedback? Will you move forward with your plans regardless?
- What are the benefits of engagement?
 - What would happen if you did nothing/did not engage?
What might be the potential business and societal costs of failing to earn social acceptance?
 - Why might others want (or not want) to participate in your engagement?
 - What incentives or benefits do individuals or groups need in order to participate?
 - What might they expect to get out of participation, whether immediately or over the longer-term?
 - What relationships and influence might they build through participation?
 - How can they expect their input to be used?

WHEN? When should engagement occur?

- When will engagement of other perspectives be most impactful to your decisions?
- What are the benefits and tradeoffs of engagement at different phases of your decision process, for example:
 - Early scoping for information and frame issues and problems, when there may be a wider decision-making space, but less information may be available for participants' response
 - Later engagement for responses to draft plans, when the options or 'decision space' are clearer but also potentially narrower
 - Iterative engagement at multiple phases of a decision process

WHO? Who will be involved in engagement?

- Who within your team or organization will be involved in engagement? What diversity of perspectives and skills do they bring? What license do they have internally to respond substantially to external feedback?
- Who from outside your organization will support the engagement? Would you benefit from a third party process expert to facilitate the exchange?
- Who are the stakeholders, community members, and/or publics that you will engage?
 - Who is most impacted by the potential decisions you are making?
 - Who brings additional expertise, perspectives, authority, etc.?
 - Whose views have been previously underrepresented in your decisions?
 - Who is willing and able to engage? What supports are needed to enable them to engage?

WHAT/HOW? What is your engagement plan and how will engagement be conducted?

- How will you reach out to participants and invite them to the table?
- What culturally relevant practices, protocols, and rules need to be followed? What other cross-cultural considerations and sensibilities will you embed into your efforts?
- What modes of engagement?
 - What are the preferred modes of engagement of those participating?
 - What is most 'fit for purpose' for this effort?
 - How might the following be incorporated: Networks, listening sessions, joint fact finding, advisory groups, partnership, coalitions/dialogues? Group meetings vs. individual interviews and conversations; one time engagement vs. multiple sessions; in person vs. online?
- What information will you provide and what questions will you ask? How will information be provided in an accessible manner?
- What kinds of structures will uphold a respectful conversation? What guidelines, charters, agreements, etc. need to be in place?
- Will you/how will you allow participants to inform and/or co-create the process or the product? How can you use the process to build capacity for those that you are engaging or partnering with?
- What financial, human, and other resources do you need/have to conduct the engagement and build the relationships that are important to success?

FOLLOW-UP? How will you demonstrate how the engagement affected decisions?

- How will you bring information back to your internal organization and incorporate it into decisions?
- How will you assess the impacts, successes, and learnings from engagement?
- What's the plan for reporting back findings and results to participants on how their feedback was used?
- How will access and benefit-sharing be addressed as a result of participation, in recognition of the value of contributions of capacity, knowledge, and expertise?