

10 Tips for Engaging Stakeholders in Your Domestic Violence Training

Stakeholder engagement is a critical yet often overlooked element of training design and delivery. By involving a wide array of professionals and their perspectives, training can better address the way your community responds to domestic violence. To engage stakeholders, you must identify who is present in your community, their roles, and build relationships with each of them. Rather than simply inviting an individual or agency to the table, this requires a demonstrated commitment towards equitable partnership. Follow these ten tips to help you engage stakeholders in your domestic violence training.

1. Assemble a working group

Planning and implementing an effective training is not a one-person process. Working groups give members a space to discuss ideas, divide tasks, and retain best practices. More importantly, working groups that draw from different professional groups and perspectives can help more accurately assess the training needs of your community.

2. Bridge existing gaps

Both community and systems-based stakeholders should be involved from the beginning phases of your training project. However, many sites experience barriers in bridging relationships between the court system and community-based agencies. A critical first step in engaging stakeholders is to identify existing gaps in collaboration and strategize how to turn those gaps into opportunities for improvement.

- **Asset Mapping** is a strengths-based and people-driven approach towards uncovering what “assets” your community and its members have to offer. Assets can include

any resources, relationships and structures that currently exist and can meaningfully contribute towards safe and healthy communities. Imagine you’ve identified a collaboration gap: community-based service providers may not fully understand what judges can and cannot order in domestic violence cases, while judges may not always account for all of the complex issues that make the court process difficult and even inaccessible for survivors. Asset mapping will help your site uncover ways existing resources can help bridge those gaps in collaboration and communication.¹

3. Listen to your community

Related to gaps in collaboration, there may be stakeholder groups that historically have not been involved in training or other systems-based initiatives around domestic violence. This may include culturally specific service providers that hold significant knowledge about the community and underserved populations, including expertise on the experiences and decision-making of survivors, people who cause harm, and their

families. To ensure a truly inclusive training experience, prioritize finding ways to build genuine collaboration with culturally specific service providers, which may include hosting focus groups, and actively participating in community events.²

- **Promoting equity.** In cases involving domestic violence, systemic racism and sexism not only deter individuals from using the legal system, but also actively undermine safety. Survivors from a variety of culturally backgrounds often turn to resources outside of the system, especially if they've had prior negative experiences and/or have faced historical oppression. Your working group can promote greater equity by facilitating a safe and welcoming space that acknowledges past harms, invites distinct perspectives, and actively practices cultural humility.
4. **Work on your messaging**
If you're having trouble drawing in stakeholders, think about the messaging they receive. Is it easy for them to identify your vision? Are they aware of any success you've had? Your training project is more likely to generate interest if it involves concrete goals that others can support. Take time to fine tune a vision statement that captures the essence of your project—and consider ways to adapt that statement for each stakeholder group. Moreover, you can use a variety of strategies to share training success stories with stakeholders, such as annual reports, blog posts, listservs, and social media updates.
 5. **Bolster local training expertise**
More likely than not, you have experts in your own community who are well-equipped to train on domestic violence. Consider enlisting local professionals as faculty for your next training. While national and international experts tend to bring in more attendees and provide a broader perspective on topics, local experts can address the specific nuances and challenges present in your community. Technical assistance providers can support the professional development of local experts

Which stakeholders are present in your community?

As you're thinking about ways to enhance collaboration, reflect on the agencies and individuals that interact with survivors of domestic violence, people who cause harm, and their families. More often than not, this list goes beyond the justice system. Consider how you can engage the following stakeholders in your next training planning process, as well as others not listed here:

- Judges and judicial officers
- Court administration and staff
- Prosecutors and defense attorneys
- Systems and community-based advocates
- Culturally specific service providers
- Civil legal aid attorneys
- Child welfare experts
- Mediators
- Law enforcement, probation, and parole
- Healthcare professionals
- Abusive partner intervention programs

by sharing resources on effective training techniques, like adult learning methods and facilitation skills. Also, be sure to invite local trainers to teach in their preferred language and provide interpreters as needed.

6. **Create accessible spaces**
Is your working group and/or training accessible to anyone who hopes to join? Accessibility is a broad concept that includes physical access, language access, trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices, among other considerations. Think about whether there might be barriers that prevent stakeholders from accessing the training project. If you're unsure, technical assistance providers can help clarify best practices around accessibility.

- One component of accessibility involves marketing: are you publicizing in ways that are tailored to the community you are hoping to reach? In some areas, a radio message or flyer is more accessible than electronic means.³
7. **Provide opportunities for leadership**
For sites that consistently have the same group of individuals planning and implementing training, consider if and how you promote opportunities for leadership. Are there people who may be interested in getting involved but don't know how? As part of your outreach to stakeholders, think about whether individuals and agencies can easily join or express interest in the planning team. Moreover, it may be helpful to implement a mentorship system where experienced trainers can support new trainers. Providing avenues for new leaders will diversify perspectives and establish confidence in your community.
 8. **Ensure accountability**
A common challenge with trainings is what happens once they're over. Oftentimes participants attend a training in hopes of learning how to improve their practice but aren't sure how to put that learning into action and enact real change in their courts and communities. Making sure that trainings "stick" can help bolster community support for your project and also generate interest from additional stakeholders.
 - **Evaluation** is an important component of accountability—understanding what participants did and did not find useful for their practice can guide you towards supporting their long-term training goals. Evaluation questions should respond to your training goals. For example, if one of the goals of the training involves "enhancing collaboration between the court and community on domestic violence cases," the evaluation should directly ask participants targeted questions on whether the training improved their capacity on this topic, and/or how it could be further improved.
 9. **Invite feedback**
If there are stakeholder groups that are consistently absent from or resistant towards trainings, resist the urge to assume the reason and instead invite honest feedback. There may be underlying causes that you and/or the working group have not anticipated. Consider developing a process for ongoing feedback, such as designating a point person for gathering feedback, sending out surveys, and/or housing an online comment box. Your goal is to understand the position of these stakeholder groups and establish commitment towards addressing their concerns.
 10. **Make a sustainable process**
Engaging stakeholders is an ongoing process that will likely meet both success and failure as your site experiences leadership changes, staff turnover, and other challenges that impact collaboration. When you do experience success, it's important to memorialize the practices that helped engage stakeholders so that staff can apply those lessons in the future. Furthermore, if and when stakeholder relationships break down, assessing what went wrong can help build alternative strategies.

One of the most significant factors in sustainability is acquiring enough funding to maintain and grow your domestic violence training initiatives. Ongoing funding can also help provide financial support to stakeholders to not only participate in your project, but also enhance their own practices. Contact your technical assistance providers to learn more about potential funding sources.
 - **Outcome Measurements:** Tracking and measuring training outcomes is a helpful strategy towards generating systems change. Sites can explore a variety of strategies to track outcomes—just be sure to focus on outcomes directly related to the goals and learning objectives of your training.⁴

For More Information

To access training, technical assistance and other resources on this topic, contact the Center for Court Innovation at dvinfo@courtinnovation.org.

To learn more about Futures Without Violence, visit futureswithoutviolence.org.

This document is supported by grant 2017-TA-AX-K021 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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2. Focusing on Family Safety: How a Family Court in Minneapolis Strengthened its Response to Domestic Violence. Center for Court Innovation. <https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/Hennepin-County-Family-Court-Project>.
3. Creating an Accessible Meeting Environment. Vera Institute of Justice. 2016.
4. Planning Domestic Violence Training Programs for Your Community. Center for Court Innovation. 2019. Page 25–26.