

# Understanding the Factors of Participant Engagement in the Design and Implementation of Public Programs

*Lessons from Cash & Counseling*

**Home and Community Based Services Conference**

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington, VA

Tuesday, September 10, 2013

4:00pm-5:15 pm

# Session Purpose

- Summarize the findings of a 3 state in-depth study on participant engagement within Cash & Counseling programs.
- Reflect on research findings from three lenses: program participant, state employee, and national policy leader.
- Facilitate an active audience discussion pertaining to the research findings and what they mean moving forward.

# Session Panelists

## **Erin McGaffigan (Moderator)**

Researcher and Consultant, Boston, MA

## **Christina Battista**

President, National Participant Network

## **Candace Ricard**

Chief, Medicaid Wavier Compliance Section,  
Louisiana Bureau of Health Services Financing

## **Kevin J. Mahoney**

Center Director, National Resource Center for Participant  
Direction, Boston College Graduate School of Social Work

# Context

- Many new initiatives require engagement, but face difficulties getting and keeping people involved
- Some feel pressure since they know it is “the right thing to do” --- but get little direction on how to do it well
- There is very little research on the ingredients for making engagement work
- This research provides a foundation for implementing meaningful and effective engagement practices for a broad range of public programs and policies

# Research Approach

## Research Focus:

- Cash & Counseling programs, 3 original and 12 replication states
- Programs diverse in length of existence, size, population(s) served
- Involvement of program participants (and advocates) in the design and improvement of programs

## Research Questions:

- 1) What did engagement look like?
- 2) What were the ingredients for success (or failure)?
- 3) What were the outcomes (perceived and real)?

# Research Methods

- Web-based survey (11 of 15 states)
- Key informant interviews (3 national leaders)
- In-depth qualitative interviews (23 interviews, 3 states)
- Record review and direct observation
- 2 comparison programs= 5 total programs
- Confidentiality of states and interviewees
- Eye for broader application of findings

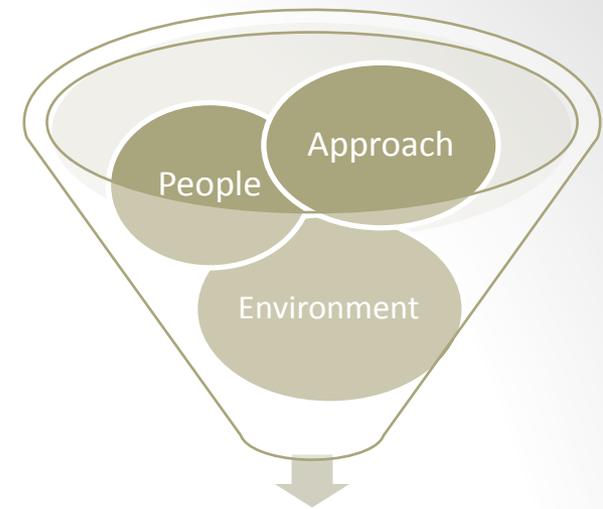
## **Lenses**

Participant (7)

Advocate (5)

State Employee (11)

# FACTORS TO ENGAGEMENT... “PAE” ATTENTION!!!



**PEOPLE**--- Program participants, advocates, and state employees come with personal values, beliefs, and experiences, and this influences how they **APPROACH** (or partake in) engagement.

**APPROACH**--- How engagement is “tackled,” such as the focus and how people are involved, is influenced by **PEOPLE** and **ENVIRONMENT**.

**ENVIRONMENT**--- Our surroundings will influence our perception of how important engagement is, the time and resources we devote to the process, and our buy-in. So, the **ENVIRONMENT** can also influence the **PEOPLE**, the **APPROACH**, and the **OUTCOMES**!

We need to **PAE ATTENTION** to these factors, how they influence each other, and how they impact our outcomes as well as perceived success.

# “PAE” Attention: The People

## Policy/ Program Leaders

### Characteristics for Effective Engagement

- ✓ Strong and transparent communicators
- ✓ Clearly demonstrate respect for participants
- ✓ Pro-actively and constructively address conflict
- ✓ Emphasizes teamwork and de-emphasize personal control
- ✓ Comfort and/or personal experience with disability

## Program Participants

### Characteristics for Effective Engagement

- ✓ Well-informed of program goals and related policies
- ✓ Strong communicators
- ✓ Strong advocates, yet reasonable and ready to partner
- ✓ Confident
- ✓ Able to devote time and effort

# “PAE” Attention: The People

## An Advocate who has a Disability

I have been to different stakeholders meetings where [the State staff] are set on what they are going to do. Sometimes you have to be tough and not let people walk over you. When you tell me to come and speak, that is what I am going to do... I am going to tell you the truth [or] I am going to move onto the next project.

...they have to understand that they are dealing with people who have human feelings just like they do, and sometimes if you push some people too hard you are going to back them into a corner and you are never going to get them to do what you want them to do. We saw that happen the last time the [federal] grants became available. There were a couple of people who pushed the envelope too hard and really kind of pushed the [State] into a corner...

**A State Leader from a High Engagement Program**

# “PAE” Attention: The Approach

- ✓ Clear purpose, moving beyond individual services
- ✓ Mix of stakeholders, emphasizing those receiving services and advocates
- ✓ Match meeting frequency with opportunities to influence
- ✓ Real time and accessible information to inform discussions
- ✓ Clear/ effective ways to identify and address accessibility
- ✓ Transparent, two-way communication protocols for timely updates and discussions
- ✓ Facilitation strategies that allow for respectful debate
- ✓ Transparent decision-making strategies that strive for consensus
- ✓ Dedicated person (or people) to make engagement successful

# “PAE” Attention: The Approach

...if you want me to be a part of [improvement], I need to know a little bit more about it so I can represent us...

**A Program Participant from a Low Engagement Program**

**A State Leader from a High Engagement Program**

I give them the data so they can come to their own conclusions.

# “PAE” Attention: The Environment

- ✓ Government climate that encourages transparency and collaborative decision making
- ✓ A desire for change from those within government and external stakeholders
- ✓ A culture in which the definition of “expert” includes those with lived experience
- ✓ Allocation of staff and financial resources to make engagement happen

# “PAE” Attention: The Environment

## An Executive from a High Engagement Program

I expect partnership... that is where it boils down... Let's work on this together and take responsibility together to develop and implement policies for quality services.

## A State Manager from a High Engagement Program

Cultures don't always permit... if you've got a really professional oriented culture, the professionals know best, you're not going to listen to what consumers and families have to say.

[A] challenging day, I would say and it's just an expression, the 'tail wagging the dog' and not the 'dog wagging the tail' and that is the consumer population trying to escalate things to our leadership that incites and invokes that emotional tug.

## A State Manager from a Low Engagement Program

# Addressing Representation

## A Complicated MIX of PEOPLE, APPROACH, and ENVIRONMENT

### Representation and Its Challenges

- Participant selection methods often don't match the intended goal for broader representation
- Participants often wear many hats
- Expectations for representation are not always well communicated or understood

### Communication Feedback Loop

- Often non-existent
- Internal group conflicts create barriers
- Lack of resources for formal organization

**A Manager from a High Engagement Program**

They say they're leaders, but I don't know who they're leaders of, and so, there's not really a structure within to actually allow for them to glean information from other participants.

# Addressing Trust

A Complicated MIX of PEOPLE, APPROACH, and ENVIRONMENT

Influenced by Previous Experiences...

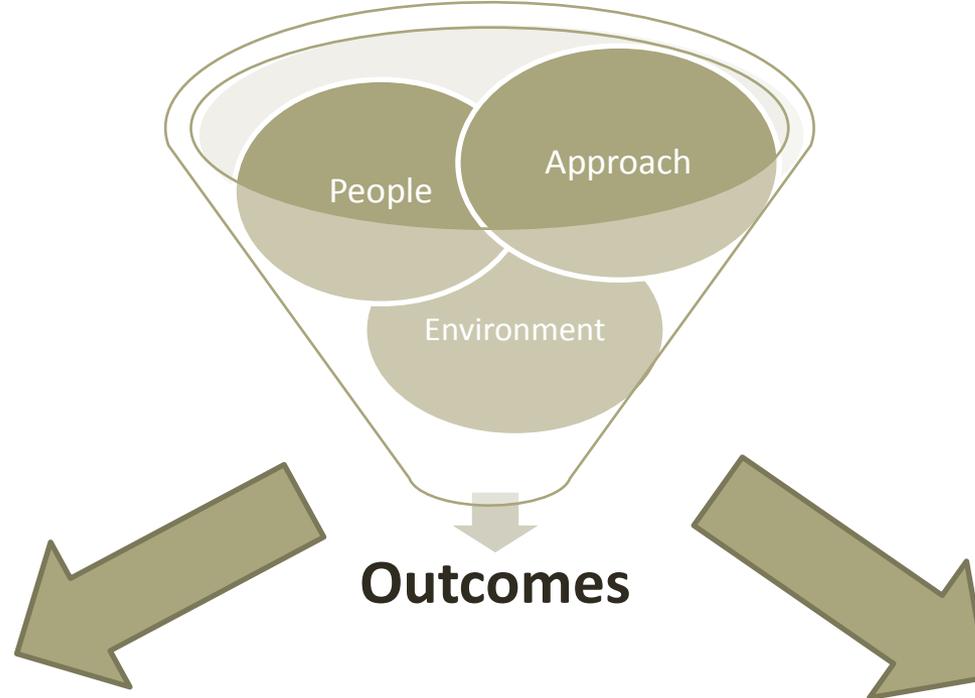
## An Advocate from a Low Engagement Program

[the process] included 40 to 50 people, some folks with disabilities, provider agencies, the universities, disability [advocates]—[and we met in] five hour meetings, told [the State] what we thought, and then they basically wrote... a plan and presented it to us and didn't ask for our opinion... it was pretty much reams upon reams of paper of what they're already doing...

...it's hard for them to understand the complexities that exist in a large bureaucracy and so many times they're frustrated with 'why can't you do this...?' ...there was this sort of essential tension all the time like somehow I could [do it] if I wanted to; I just didn't want to. And I kept saying to them; it's a finite amount of money. I can't spend more than is appropriated to the program.

## A State Manager from a Low Engagement Program

...Built overtime through consistent communication, follow through, and progress



### **Possible Positive Outcomes**

- ✓ Improved program design
- ✓ Increased knowledge (state employees and program participants)
- ✓ Program participant empowerment
- ✓ Advocacy for funding and sustainability
- ✓ Relationship building; stronger public relations
- ✓ Program participant satisfaction

### **Possible Negative Outcomes**

- ✓ No impact or unsuccessful
- ✓ Significant time and resources
- ✓ Frustration and Conflict

# Understanding Outcomes

## A Program Participant on Time Well Spent

...when involvement has worked well, it's not a burden to the individual who is involved... it may be time consuming, but it's not a burden.

## An Advocate on Relationship Building

...there's a momentum and an excitement that is felt that you're achieving something... You're doing this, you're saying that, but all at once, [you say], 'hey, we're really on a roll here.' ... and it is; it's exciting and it makes you feel like, 'hey it's all been worth it.'

## A State Manager on Advocacy for Sustainability and Participant Empowerment

...they've communicated with us; they've gone out and done public testimony. They've sought out facts and figures that they could use when they went to the legislature around the budget cut situation... they took an active interest in the program... they understood how [the program] made a difference in their lives...

# Panel Reflection

# Recommendations

- Be informed of the P AE Attention Model as you move forward with participant/ stakeholder engagement
- Consider what you are doing for representation: your goal(s), process for selecting representatives, roles of representatives, and expectations for broader communication
- Take time to learn about one another, daily challenges, responsibilities, etc. This will increase personal knowledge, improve approach, and build trust
- Recognize that trust takes time to build, but far less time to break
- Be aware of the benefits of constructive conflict, ways to proactively minimize conflict, and effective resolution strategies

# Be Intentional About Process...

## Process Factors

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Communication</b>
individual, program, systems level; internally, externally driven	transparent, diverse, simple, synthesis, boundaries, options, results
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Decision-Making</b>
participants, representatives, advocates, providers, state staff, other; ratios	internal, external; consensus building; conflict management/ resolution
<b>Access to Information</b>	<b>Accommodations</b>
program elements; prior to meetings; informed decision making	communication, physical, financial
<b>Facilitation</b>	<b>Meeting Frequency</b>
state, participant, collaborative; formal, informal; clarity	pre-determined intervals; at critical decision making points
	<b>Time and Resources</b>
	dedicated staff; dedicated budget

# For More Information...

McGaffigan, Erin E., "It's Not So Simple: Understanding Participant Involvement in the Design, Implementation, and Improvement of Cash & Counseling Programs" (2011).  
Graduate Doctoral Dissertations. Paper 55.

Full Research Findings...

[http://www.hcbs.org/files/219/10908/Participant\\_Engagement.pdf](http://www.hcbs.org/files/219/10908/Participant_Engagement.pdf)

Short Issue Brief...

[http://scholarworks.umb.edu/doctoral\\_dissertations/55](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/doctoral_dissertations/55)

Thank you!