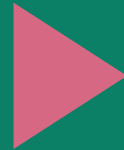# Reciprocal Collaboration and Professional Communication with Stakeholders

Start here

How it works

This module is presented as an interactive PDF, providing you with a seamless navigation experience. You can easily move to different topics by simply clicking on them. In addition to the visible navigation buttons on the side of each page, you will also find clickable sections within the module. These clickable sections are identified within the text.

You also have the option to view this PDF in a continuous scrolling mode if you prefer.
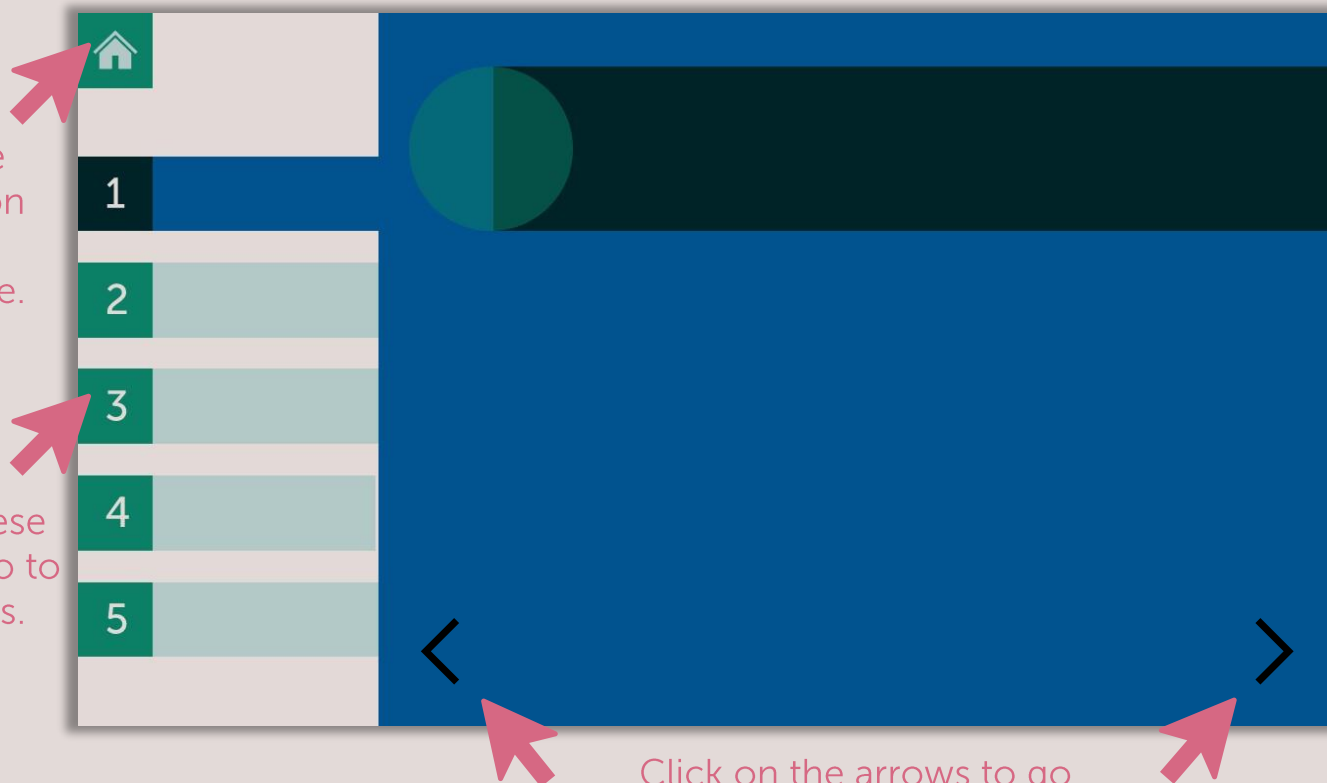
Click on the home button to return to the first slide.

Click on these blocks to go to the chapters.

Click on the arrows to go to the previous or next page in a chapter

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, you can:

1 Explain the importance of **establishing reciprocal collaborations** with stakeholders

2 Recognize **important communication skills** for successful collaboration with stakeholders

3 Identify the **key guiding values** for a successful and reciprocal collaboration with stakeholders

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1. HOW TO INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS

Introduction

Working together with various stakeholders, including societal organizations in education, offers an exciting opportunity **for tackling real-world challenges** and gaining knowledge in the process.

In this university-society partnership, it is important to cultivate a reciprocal and respectful collaboration.
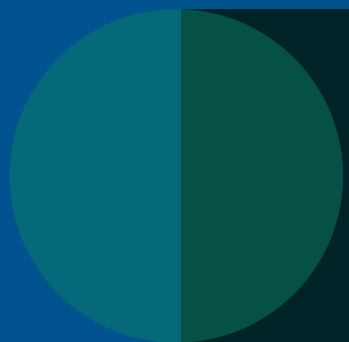
Introduction

What do we mean by reciprocal?

Reciprocity in impact-driven education means creating a strong relationship with your collaborating partner that ensures mutual benefits, deep respect for one another, ongoing communication and power equality.

" *Give without remembering and receive without forgetting* "

HOW TO INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS

When involving stakeholders in a project, **continuous reflection plays a crucial role**. Taking a step back to critically analyse the collaboration process, both during and after its implementation, will help you make better decisions and gain deeper lessons and insights. This will also contribute to a smooth and fruitful collaboration with the stakeholders involved. This reflection can focus on **three main aspects**.

How to involve stakeholders

Collaboration process

Social impact

Personal development
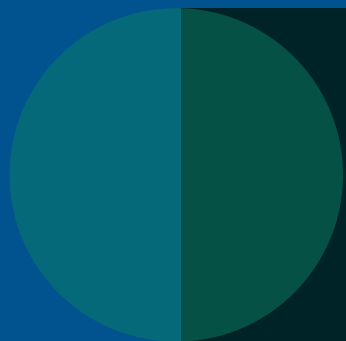
Click on one of the three main aspects to learn about these aspects.
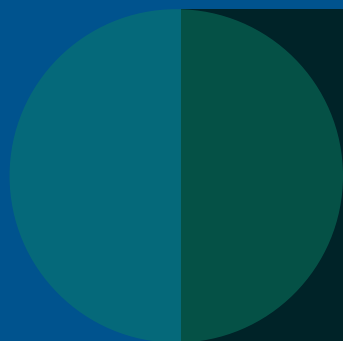
How to involve stakeholders

Collaboration process

Reflecting on the process entails **evaluating the strategies and methods** implemented to engage stakeholders, analyzing the frequency and quality of communication, and identifying areas for improvement. It is essential to understand how participants perceive the knowledge co-production process.

Back to overview

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Click here for reflective questions about the process

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How to involve stakeholders

Collaboration process

It is helpful to have a **set of questions for reflection**. Here are a few examples to reflect on the collaboration process:

- *Was the process truly inclusive, incorporating diverse perspectives and marginalized voices?*

- *Was effective communication achieved with the stakeholders during the process?*

- *What were the critical factors that contributed to successful collaboration and positive outcomes?*

- *What were the primary obstacles encountered throughout the process?*

- *How can we use these insights to improve future engagement endeavors?*

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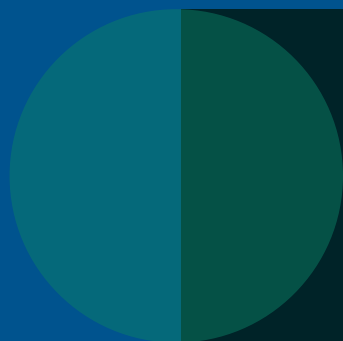
Social impact

Evaluating the impact of the project on the organization or community is critical to **ensure alignment with their needs and values**. This includes assessing whether the co-designed product or advice accurately reflects their input and adds value in addressing the problem at hand. Gathering stakeholder feedback on the process and outcomes provides insights into their experiences and concerns.

Back to overview

Click here for reflective questions about the impact on society

How to involve stakeholders

It is helpful to have a **set of questions for reflection**. Here are a few examples of questions covering the societal impact of the project.

- *Were the results of the project aligned with the needs and aspirations of the organization or community?*

- *How did we positively contribute to the issue they presented us with?*

- *What additional measures can we implement to guarantee the longevity of this positive contribution within the organization or community, as well as to enhance its impact?*

Social impact

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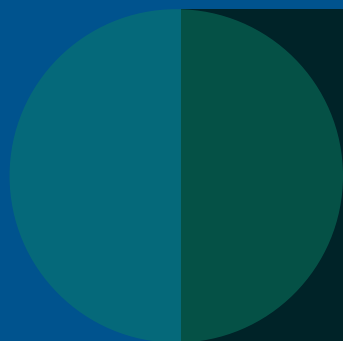
How to involve stakeholders

Personal development

Acknowledging personal biases and blind spots is an ethical responsibility for researchers and professionals. **Reflecting on your experience** during the collaboration can help you recognize growth and identify areas for improvement.

Additionally, reflecting on your experience collaborating with an organization or community can help shape the role you aspire to have in society and the positive impact you wish to make during your professional career.

Click here for reflective questions about personal impact

How to involve stakeholders

Personal impact

It is helpful to have a **set of questions for reflection**. Here are a few examples of questions about personal development:

- *What was my specific role and contribution to the group, and what implications does this have for my personal and professional identity?*

- *What did I learn from my classmates, colleagues, and external stakeholders?*

- *How does this experience inspire me to seek out future learning opportunities, pursue new projects, and work towards my professional aspirations?*

2. WHY IS A RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

WHY IS A RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

Establishing reciprocal collaboration with stakeholders, including societal organizations, is crucial for several reasons.

Foster trust and engagement

Ethical responsibility and societal impact

Sustaining long-term partnerships

Click on one of the reasons to learn more about each of them

WHY IS A RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

Foster trust and engagement

Building a reciprocal collaboration cultivates trust by ensuring that stakeholders feel **heard, valued, and respected**. By working together in decision-making processes and taking their perspectives into account, you **establish inclusivity and shared ownership**. This leads to stronger partnerships and a greater willingness to collaborate and co-create solutions in your project.

WHY IS A RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

Ethical responsibility and societal impact

Building respectful and reciprocal collaboration with stakeholders reflects our **ethical responsibility to ensure a positive social impact**. Remember that stakeholders invest time and effort in engaging with us. We should approach them with humility, respect, and curiosity, respecting cultural differences and valuing their time and interests.

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WHY IS A RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

Sustaining long-term partnerships

When stakeholders feel appreciated and respected, they are more inclined to **continue their engagement beyond the initial collaboration**. These sustained partnerships can result in ongoing collaborations, joint research projects, internships, and other mutually beneficial activities. Long-term partnerships contribute to the institution's reputation and positive impact in the community.

3. WHAT ARE THE VALUES OF A SUCCESSFUL AND RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION?
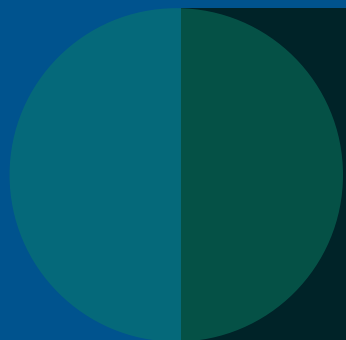
WHAT ARE THE VALUES OF A SUCCESSFUL AND RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION?

To cultivate a successful and reciprocal collaboration with stakeholders, it is important to follow certain **guiding values.** These values serve as a framework for how we engage with stakeholders, but they are not fixed rules. The extent to which each value is relevant depends on the circumstances, partnership, and available resources.
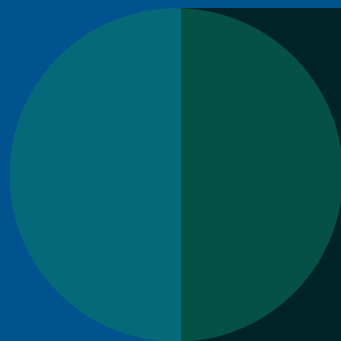
Guiding values

Relevance

Design initiatives and projects that directly address the needs and priorities identified by the collaborating partner. Take your time to empathize and engage in meaningful dialogue to understand their pressing concerns, ensuring that your work aligns with their values and goals. This means going beyond how the problem is initially presented, digging deeper towards the root cause of the issue at hand.

Click here for an example

Guiding values

Example

During a Health Psychology course, the societal partner involved wanted to better understand why some people comply to a smoke free zone and some people don't. They wanted to draw some initial ideas to promote compliance. To really dig dip into this issue, the students of the course asked questions such as:

" *What is your current understanding of these reasons? How did you gain these insights?*

What measures did you consider and/ or implement already to promote the smoke-free zone? "

Asking this deep questions really helped the students to better understand the starting point of the collaborating partner and what additional insights could be relevant and feasible for them to explore.

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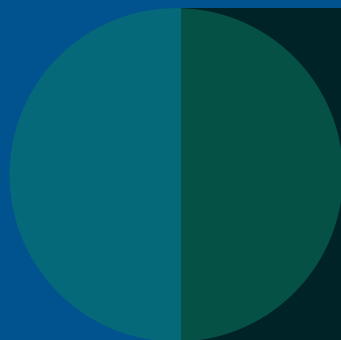
Guiding values

Humbleness

Embrace curiosity and acknowledge the limits of your knowledge. Avoid feeling superior or like a savior; approach the learning process with humility and be open to learning from the expertise and experience of those involved. Be comfortable with not knowing at various points in the process: in a learning community, everyone is exploring and growing together! It's all about the journey.
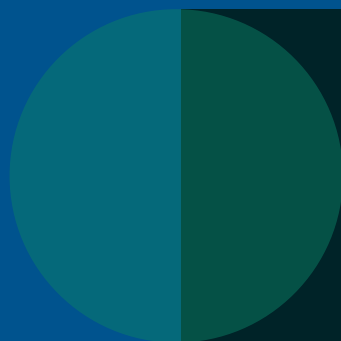
Guiding values

Cultural sensitivity

Foster an inclusive and respectful environment that appreciates different cultural backgrounds and makes everyone feel welcomed and valued, considering race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status and/or physical disability. Challenge stereotypes and biases, recognizing the immense value of collaborating with people with different perspectives, experiences, and knowledge. Communicate in a way that is accessible and inclusive for everyone, regardless of their background or prior knowledge.
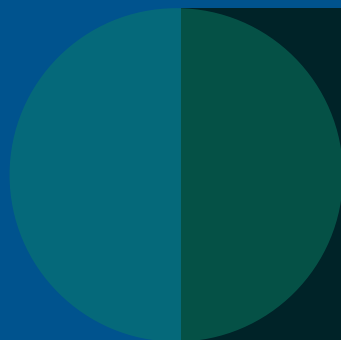
Guiding values

Collaboration

Prioritize collaborative decision-making and co-creation of knowledge and solutions. As much as possible, try to set goals together, have design sessions together, and evaluate results together to cultivate a sense of shared ownership of the collaborative effort. It's a two-way street. On the one hand, be sure to include their valuable feedback at every step. On the other hand, be confident in what you bring to the table. True collaboration is about creating something of greater value together than either party could have done alone.
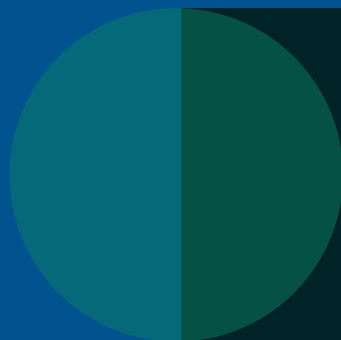
Guiding values

Meaningfulness

Working on a relevant problem is a great start, but you must also ensure that your project ends with a tangible and meaningful contribution that the partner organization can use. The value lies in the positive change you bring that is recognized by the community that benefits from your work. Pay special attention to how you will disseminate your solution or results, using a language and medium that will maximize the usability of your contribution.

4. HOW DOES COMMUNICATION PLAY A ROLE IN SUCCESSFUL AND RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION?

HOW DOES COMMUNICATION PLAY A ROLE?

How does communication play a role in successful and reciprocal collaboration?

In addition to adhering to the guiding values, cultivating successful and reciprocal collaborations with stakeholders requires **professional communication skills:** Time management, expectation management and agreements, communication, accountability, and transparency.
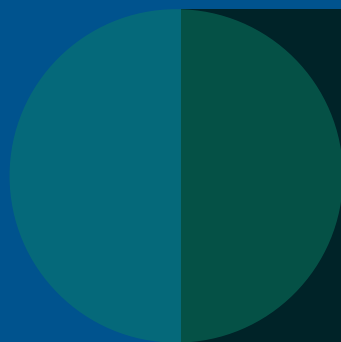
HOW DOES COMMUNICATION PLAY A ROLE?

Time management

Expectation management and agreements

Communication

Accountability and transparency

Click on the icons to receive practical tips

Click for the next chapter

Practical tips

Time management

1. Be punctual and respect others' time: Punctuality is essential. Ensure to arrive on time for scheduled meetings and appointments. If you anticipate any delays, promptly communicate this and apologize for any inconvenience caused.

Practical tips

Time management

2. Follow up and respond promptly: Maintain contact and respond quickly. Provide timely and efficient answers to stakeholders' queries, requests, or complaints. Keep them informed about project advancement and provide regular updates to demonstrate your dedication to addressing their concerns and needs.

Practical tips

Time management

3. Allow ample time for collaborating partners to respond and take action: when it comes to getting answers from your collaborating partner, consider their busy agendas and multiple responsibilities. This means you cannot expect an answer or follow-up action of a collaborating partner within a day. This requires good planning from your side, being able to anticipate what you will need from your collaborating partner and when.

return

Practical tips

Expectation management and agreements

1. Manage expectations: Establish clear and reasonable expectations with your stakeholders. Provide clear communication regarding timelines, responsibilities and outcomes. Be open about any limitations or potential challenges and offer alternative solutions if necessary.

Practical tips

Expectation management and agreements

2. Make agreements explicit: It is recommended to document the agreed-upon expectations and agreements in some way, for example in a document or e-mail. It is important to ensure that both parties fully understand and consent to these agreements before starting the project. This provides a clear structure and aids in preventing any misunderstandings.

return

Practical tips

Communication

1. Listen carefully and ask questions: Demonstrate a genuine interest in the stakeholders' needs and desires. Actively listen to what they say and prepare probing questions to better understand their expectations.

Practical tips

Communication

2. Be proactive: You are now an active collaborating partner. This means you have to take the initiative in getting the information you need, explaining your process and progress, etc. It's up to you!

Practical tips

Communication

3. Be prepared: Be prepared before meetings, know your project from A to Z. Anticipate what questions your collaborating partner might have and prepare your answers. Showing that you know what you are talking about will not only help to validate yourselves with your partners, but it will also increase your confidence.

Practical tips

Communication

4. Communicate clearly and concisely: Strive for clear and concise communication with stakeholders. Avoid using jargon and abbreviations unless you are certain they are familiar with them. Adapt your style of communication to both the background of your stakeholder and your own style. Being authentic is crucial for building a strong relationship.

Practical tips

Communication

5. Always be polite and respectful: Show respect for the opinion and viewpoints of your stakeholders, even if you disagree with them. Communicate in a polite manner, whether in personal meetings or written correspondence. Remember to introduce yourselves when you enter the meeting, always thank the partner for their time and say farewell when you leave.

Click here for an example

Practical tips

Communication example

Collaborating with societal partners in education provides an excellent chance to explore **your professional communication style**.

o What to do you believe are your communication strengths?

o What skills would you like to develop?

A helpful tip: Attending networking events in person is a great way to practice your small talk and presentation skills in preparation for a pitch or meeting with stakeholders.

Click here to go back
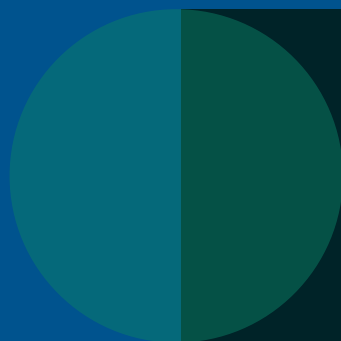
Practical tips

Communication

6. Overcome language barriers: The first step is to explore your collaborators' preferences and explain the language situation in your group. Your priority is to make them feel comfortable while exploring what adjustments can be made so that everyone in the group can participate and learn.

Practical tips

Communication

It may be that the stakeholders are only comfortable communicating in Dutch, while you or your classmates are only comfortable communicating in English. In such a scenario, it is important to make sure that everyone can participate. For example, a Dutch-speaking classmate can lead a meeting and then immediately explain what happened in detail to the rest of the group. Or, in some scenarios, partners may be willing to switch to English. Take time with your group to find a way that's inclusive for everyone, and come to agreements with your partners. Dealing with language differences requires patience and respect.

Practical tips

Communication

Finally, it is important to consider possible language barriers when it comes to sharing your results with your partners. A translated version (e.g. from English to Dutch) might be more useful for them. If that's the case, make the effort to create this version and see how you can balance the workload in your team.

return

Practical tips

Accountability and transparancy

1. Be honest and transparent: Provide truthful and open information to stakeholders- throughout the process. Clearly state any limitations or challenges that may arise. This approach helps establish trust and credibility. It's better to be honest about what you can deliver or the challenges that you are going through, you can always find adjustments and new agreements.

Practical tips

Accountability and transparancy

2. Honor your commitments: Ensure that you fulfill all the agreements and promises you have made. Be reliable and deliver what you have committed to within the agreed timelines. This demonstrates professionalism and dedication.

5. FINAL STEPS

About this e-module

AUTHORS

The content of this module was developed by Dr. Crystal Smit, Assistant Professor at ESSB (project lead), Denise Levy, Learning Innovator at Impact at the Core, André Hendrikse and Moon Fung Fong, Knowledge Brokers at Impact at the Core, and Dr. Marieke Hartman, Senior Lecturer at EUC, all from Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The content of this module was last updated on March 26, 2024

CONTEXT
This e-module is intended to be used in impact-driven courses where students collaborate with external stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, municipalities, health institutions, youth initiatives, schools, and others.

DESIGN
The instructional design of this e-module was developed by Akke van der Laan, Learning & Development Expert at L&D talents. The graphic design is done by Risbo.

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