

CREATING SHARED VISION

A Tip Sheet from REvolutionizing engineering and computer science Departments (RED) Participatory Action Research

Shared vision is a foundation for transformational and sustainable change. Shared vision brings a group of people into alignment as a coalition and force for change. Shared vision is inclusive and empowering. Rather than focus on buy-in, successful change agents create opportunities for the coalition to develop goals and plans together. This tip sheet presents approaches used to create successful partnerships, using research findings resulting from focus group discussions and conference calls with NSF's RED grantees. The quotes from research participants highlight these findings. For more information, contact us at redpar@rose-hulman.edu.

Whom Do Change Agents Engage?

Successful change agents engage a broad array of stakeholders, including faculty and instructors of all stripes, students, staff, advisory boards, local professionals, support offices, administrations, alumni, and more. The effort it takes to engage these stakeholders early in the change process is repaid through better ideas, increased engagement, and both tacit and explicit support.

► **TIP:** During a team meeting, create a master list of every member's professional relationships, with both people and groups, being as specific as possible. In other words, name names. Thinking broadly, identify which of these people and groups are stakeholders in the change effort or could otherwise participate in the vision process. Make a schedule to reach out to these stakeholders on a regular basis.

“I just want everyone to think about long lasting organizational change, you have to hear the voice of every person in that environment, the staff, the TAs, the administration, so while faculty are the drivers of the change, it will only be sustainable if everyone is on board.”

“What we call the naysayers are a critical part of our social network, we want them to be naysayers. When we were writing the proposal they would come forward and criticize and help us find any potential drawbacks so we can improve them together. They may resist change, but they're part of the intended structures. We want them there, we want them to speak up, we want to hear them so we can see the problem from various angles.”

Why Should Stakeholders Participate in Shared Vision?

Change agents can build a broad coalition for change by understanding the reasons individuals have for engaging in your change effort. Nontraditional incentives, the opportunity to engage in an open and participatory process, support from institutional leadership, and compelling evidence of the need for change all contribute to the desire for stakeholders to participate in developing shared vision. Change agents can highlight different benefits of participation as stakeholders reveal their interests.

► **TIP:** Create a living document that captures stakeholders, their needs and interests, and benefits resulting from the shared vision process. Be specific and bold in developing this list. Listen carefully and ask for clarification when stakeholders identify a new need or a new benefit.

“In my department, I made sure the first time I evaluated everyone I carefully considered their teaching evaluations. It is clear that success in teaching is important for their advancement in their career and will be part of their evaluation. Most people welcome that and said they like that we pay attention to teaching evaluations. We are also accounting for these activities in their workload. Changing the teaching style now counts as a new course.”

What Does Shared Vision Look Like?

Change agents embrace a broad conception of shared vision, including common language, shared expectations, shared sense-making, meaningful roles for all participants, and shared products. By speaking about issues with the same terms, identifying how all can contribute, and sharing the credit for impacts and outputs, change agents can shepherd the vision development process.

► **TIP:** Allow team members to specify what they expect, what they can offer, and what they need to be successful.

Put all those cards on the table. When people see the entire picture of the team context, they are more apt to be creative and inclusive about solutions and promoting the team's interests. Continue these conversations so that people's roles and contributions can evolve if outside commitments change.

"I think we've all learned a lot about what those words mean. We used social justice, humanitarian, sustainability, peace, in the proposal, but we didn't have a common understanding of what those words meant. I'm not sure any of us had an understanding of what that would really look like in engineering. We've spent some time around trying to discuss now what we think those terms mean. Certainly my understanding of them is different now...I think some of that has also influenced what we think success looks like or what the kinds of things are that we're going to do."

"Some research-interested faculty got involved in thinking about this change as a research problem: How do you make prep work better? When is the in-class time? What sessions can you develop to test this? So turning the teaching into a research problem has gotten some of the faculty interested."

What Strategies Encourage Shared Vision?

The work needed to create shared vision is significant in time invested, scope, mental effort, and impactful on the other work of change agents. Given that fact, specific, ongoing effort is needed to implement the strategies that promote shared vision. Consider brainstorming sessions, regular co-working times, collaborative management, and communication efforts as opportunities for shared vision development.

► **TIP:** Few professionals respond to being told what they should think, while many respond to telling others what they think. Facilitate scenarios that allow for opportunities to share thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Even skeptics can participate in a change effort when change agents cheerfully request "tell me what you think," followed by solution generation and opt-in ways to continue the engagement.

"What I remember from our retreat, it was the first time the team's vision was shared with a larger group. I was surprised with how many people gave us feedback that it wasn't revolutionary enough. There were more boundaries to push. So, some ideas came out of the retreat that weren't part of the initial plan."

"I think that having everyone in the room, and having everyone feel included, really helped gain traction and gain momentum more so than we would have in other ways."

For more information on creating shared vision, see *Developing a Shared Vision for Change: Moving toward Inclusive Empowerment* (preprint manuscript) at <https://osf.io/f7jgn>. For more information on the RED program, see *Making Academic Change Happen* at academicchange.org.

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