



**COMPLETION  
BY DESIGN**

# Engaging Faculty during Student Pathways Implementation

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An engagement resource prepared by Public Agenda



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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 1. Do's &amp; Don'ts: Core Principles and Common Pitfalls</b>	<b>3</b>
Core Principles .....	3
Common Pitfalls .....	4
<b>Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Articulate the goals .....	6
2. Take the temperature .....	6
3. Develop strategies to work with categories of adopters .....	8
4. Engage authentically and strategically .....	9
5. Follow up on engagement .....	11
<b>Section 3. Critical Engagement Considerations for CbD     Project Leads During Implementation</b>	<b>12</b>

### *About This Guide*

This guide to engaging faculty in pathways implementation is for institutional leaders, Completion by Design (CbD) team members, and other stakeholders who are working hard to move the needle on student success and completion at community colleges. In developing it, Public Agenda, a CbD National Assistance Team partner, drew on lessons learned during the CbD planning year as well as our experience as Founding Partner of Achieving the Dream and Thought Partners for the Lumina Foundation's efforts to enhance college productivity work. The principles and sample practices suggested here are relevant at multiple stages in the change process. In particular, however, this guide is intended to support faculty engagement efforts as plans are put into motion and as those activities are evaluated with the aim of making midcourse corrections that keep the hard work of helping community college students complete degrees and certificates on track.

### *Why Does Faculty Engagement Matter?*

Ample experience suggests that colleges that effectively engage faculty are able to make faster progress on their student success agenda than those whose faculty engagement is limited.<sup>1</sup> For colleges involved in the CbD initiative, engagement of faculty can help with 1) improvements in pathway redesigns, 2) more effective and sustained implementation of the redesigns, 3) critical evaluation of the implementation process and outcomes, and 4) a greater chance of scaling pathways to help more students complete.

#### *The earlier the better: The value of engagement during the planning phase*

- Engaging faculty early on in change efforts makes it more likely that these critical actors will view the change as legitimate and be willing to actively support it later, when you are putting your plan into effect.
- Well-designed input by faculty will tend to improve your plans because of faculty's invaluable in-the-trenches knowledge. Such input minimizes the danger of failing to take some important variable into account as you devise your plans.
- Faculty input will give you many clues as to the best way to communicate about your work moving forward.
- Engaging faculty early on can help colleges avoid backlashes that result in significant setbacks. How many times have we seen well-meaning initiatives run up against a brick wall of resistance that could have been avoided through small, acceptable adjustments in substance or communications, had we only realized? Well-designed stakeholder engagement brings that advance intelligence to the fore.

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<sup>1</sup>Rutschow, E. Zachary et al. (2010). *Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved from <http://www.mdrc.org/publications>.

### *The value of engagement during the implementation phase*

- When done skillfully, involving faculty in implementing institutional change minimizes resistance and fosters a sense of shared ownership. It creates the distributed leadership, which complements leadership from the core CbD teams and can help maintain momentum in the face of administrative transitions and other potential derailers.
- Checking in with faculty along the way will give you intelligence about what is working and what plans may need midcourse adjustments.
- Working collaboratively to enhance student completion can be a powerful form of professional development for faculty and staff, which will in turn pay off in improved rates of student completion.

### *How to Use This Guide*

At some colleges, faculty members have already played a significant role in the development of pathway redesign plans, and the culture of engagement is both active and productive. At other colleges, however, integrating a robust faculty engagement strategy has been a challenge. This guide aims to speak to both ends of the engagement spectrum. For those with vast faculty engagement experience, this guide will support much of what you have already practiced and will provide guidance on how to work through some of the difficult challenges or missteps that may have occurred along the way.

For those with little faculty engagement experience, this document will provide a solid foundation in core principles and practices (Section 1), as well as more in-depth guidance on how to consider your institution's unique context and tailor strategies to your goals and environment (Section 2). Section 3 offers a list of guiding questions for college teams and institutional leaders to consider regarding the what, why, where, who and how as they plan for faculty engagement during pathway implementation.

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### Core Principles

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#### ***1. Keep adjuncts at the center***

Adjunct faculty members teach the majority of students at community colleges and yet have been comparatively neglected in conversations about institutional change. They teach for a variety of reasons, and some have a particular commitment to the institution and the success of its students. Therefore, we encourage colleges to find opportunities to include adjuncts in all levels of faculty engagement efforts; extend resources such as space, professional development, and classroom research rewards in order to recognize their achievements; and capitalize on their industry experience and connections to the workforce when designing pathways, curricula and degree programs.

#### ***2. Value faculty expertise and knowledge***

Though the focus of the work is on redesigning pathways and implementing transformative changes in how the college operates, it is critical to respect the good work that is already happening and the expertise and commitment that drive current contributions faculty bring to the classroom and to the institution as a whole. An important way to honor expertise and establish an atmosphere of collaboration and co-ownership of changes is to approach faculty with questions instead of answers. Seeking guidance and information from faculty—making space for them to *contribute*—demonstrates viewing faculty as resources for deepening the college's understanding of challenges, assets and opportunities.

An overt way to value expertise is to recognize full-time and adjunct faculty accomplishments in public venues such as campus gatherings or college publications. Formal recognition of achievements and efforts made to promote student success provide a boost to the champions at the college and demonstrate to others that the commitment to completion extends beyond the administration or change leaders.

#### ***3. Involve faculty as part of the college's institutional research capacity***

Given that faculty bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills to colleges, they represent a rich resource that can be used to bolster institutions' capacity to use research to inform decision making around their completion efforts. Building channels of communication and collaboration between institutional research (IR) personnel and faculty can happen at department meetings, where faculty might help to interpret, elucidate or inquire into institutional data. College leaders might also consider developing vehicles for IR to support and facilitate faculty-initiated pedagogical research, or faculty leaders might codesign or colead data presentations with IR personnel so that they are relevant to, are meaningful for, and pique the curiosity of fellow faculty.

#### ***4. Lead with a commitment to meaningful engagement***

Institutional leaders and initiative team leads set the tone for how faculty members come to pathway redesign work in the way they view, value and practice meaningful engagement. To demonstrate a true commitment to involving faculty as decision makers and collaborators in

## Section 1. Dos & Don'ts: Core Principles and Common Pitfalls

change, leaders must use a student-centered frame and speak to faculty's prevailing concerns; for instance, by consistently articulating the broad vision for change and diligently connecting the dots between various initiatives and the central vision in order to combat a sense of initiative overload or mission creep among faculty. Additional promising practices for leaders include making themselves available to faculty and giving the institution a face or personal identity, as well as demonstrating a command of institutional and student-outcomes data so that faculty feel more confident that decisions are well informed and grounded in evidence.

### ***5. Establish institutional expectation of engagement and provide appropriate vehicles and development opportunities to meet the expectation***

Institution leaders and program leads can set the tone by making engagement standard practice and creating a culture in which it is expected in institutional change efforts. This can be done by making use of regular events, such as convocations and orientations, to infuse elements of interactivity that encourage collaboration and discussion among adjunct and full-time faculty both within and across departments. Colleges can find ways to increase use of technology, multimedia, and the Internet to connect and communicate with faculty on initiatives, news, data and opportunities to engage in person.

The expectation of faculty involvement in college completion initiatives can be set as early as the hiring stages for both full-time and adjunct faculty; however, faculty must be provided with the opportunities, resources and tools to participate meaningfully once the expectations are set. Professional development opportunities are an important means of building faculty members' capacity to engage meaningfully; while faculty are subject matter experts, they may not be pedagogy experts in issues of student success. Offer high-caliber professional development opportunities that empower full-time and adjunct faculty to participate in a culture of inquiry and evidence at the college.

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## **Common Pitfalls**

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### ***1. Coming with answers instead of questions***

When all the decisions have been made and the answers determined, there is very little room for any type of discussion or engagement. Individuals are more likely to be on board with and help to implement changes if they have had a hand in developing them, and this is no different with faculty members. What is more, coming with answers or a mandate instead of questions fails to honor the expertise and experience with students that faculty bring to the table.

### ***2. Framing conversations in terms that faculty resist or with which they have negative connotations***

"Framing" communications and engagement is not shorthand for "masking" or "lying about." Rather, framing is about using language that is audience appropriate, that speaks to people's leading concerns, and that sets both a tone and an environment in which people feel that they can engage meaningfully. Terms such as *buy-in*, *productivity* and *efficiency* can be conversation stifiers or enders among faculty, and there may be many others, depending on the context and history of the institution.

### ***3. Becoming stymied by a caricature of faculty or viewing disagreement or a lack of engagement as a people problem rather than a situation problem***

It is easier to tweak conditions than it is to change how people are. Institutional leaders and senior administrators would be well served by breaking the unhelpful habit of attributing faculty resistance to fundamental character defects (e.g., laziness, aversion to change) and instead beginning by investigating the situation (including practices around workflow, habits of communication, and the organizational culture and climate) in which these faculty members operate. The latter can lead to creative solutions, while the former will likely lead to a dead end.

### ***4. Using data as a hammer rather than as a tool for engagement***

Using data to point fingers and assign blame almost always generates fear and resentment, and it can stifle the formation of a culture of inquiry that can help to drive improvements in institutional practices. Instead, take the time to show full-time and adjunct faculty how data has been collected and analyzed and what will be done with it; investing this time up front can help to build transparency and trust in the data. Providing background in a clear, concise, and nontechnical manner up front can prevent confusion and skepticism down the line.

### ***5. Depending solely on financial incentives to reward faculty engagement***

Incentives and disincentives come in many forms, and time and money do not amount to a complete picture of what motivates or prevents faculty from becoming adopters or drivers of change. While space and time to innovate or adopt changes are vital, the use of financial incentives may, in fact, be ill advised, especially when those incentives are not sustainable. A more creative approach to incentives, one that appreciates the power of intangibles such as prestige and pride, may prove more effective for cultivating a culture that supports and sustains change.



## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

Engagement of internal stakeholders like faculty can be tricky, and good intentions are not enough to guarantee success. Lack of goal clarity, poor issue framing, unskilled facilitation, and inattention to the seemingly mundane details of process can undermine trust and alienate the very people who are and could be important change agents. To help cadre team leads and co-leads overcome these challenges and common pitfalls of hastily designed efforts, this section breaks the engagement process into five basic steps.

For additional process guidance on how to engage internal college stakeholders, please also refer to the “Internal Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Toolkit” (Public Agenda for Completion by Design, 2012).

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### **1. Articulate the goals of engagement: What is the ask, and why ask faculty?**

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Careful thinking from the beginning of any engagement effort about the what and the why of engagement is a critical first step in the early planning process. It is not appropriate to engage faculty on every possible topic—neither change leaders nor faculty members have the time or capacity. What is more, faculty may not be implicated in all changes being proposed. Faculty engagement will be critical, however, on those issues or proposals that require faculty members’ participation for implementation.

Answering questions such as why faculty engagement is necessary on a particular issue, what the intended outcomes of the engagement are, and how institutions will determine if the outcomes have been achieved will help institutional leaders define the goals of faculty engagement in the implementation stage. How teams define their goals will help them choose appropriate engagement strategies and set clear and practical expectations about what engagement can do.

A clearly defined purpose and plan for engagement can make the difference between successful and disappointing faculty engagement for both the organizers as well as the faculty members. When individuals know why they are being called upon to engage and how their involvement will contribute to the greater goal, they can have more confidence in the usefulness of their participation as well as its importance or value. Further, setting out a definite and transparent process to achieve the goal can help encourage faculty to speak freely, thoughtfully and creatively without fear of backlash.

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### **2. Take the Temperature**

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To support colleges’ efforts to meaningfully engage adjunct and full-time faculty in the planning and implementation of interventions that improve student completion, a number of questions are posed below for leaders and CbD team members to consider. By discussing these questions as a team, you can uncover the strengths and areas for improvement in your colleges’ engagement strategies as well as the key actors to involve and opportunities to prioritize going forward in your work to promote completion.

## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

### *Assessing the institutional culture of engagement*

✓	What are the existing faculty engagement vehicles at our institution? Who participates?
✓	When do we engage faculty in the life of institutional interventions?
✓	How do college leaders communicate with adjunct and full-time faculty?
✓	Are faculty given public recognition for accomplishments?
✓	To what extent do faculty feel respected, heard and valued by their departments and institutional leaders (even when those leaders make unpopular decisions)?
✓	Do faculty currently meet within their departments to discuss student completion efforts?
✓	Do faculty currently meet with colleagues across departments to discuss student completion efforts?
✓	Around which types of initiatives or issues are adjunct and full-time faculty most likely to engage? How do we know this?
✓	To what extent do faculty interact with institutional data?
✓	What kinds of professional development or co-learning opportunities are available for faculty?
✓	Who are the faculty champions of institutional student completion efforts/initiatives?
✓	What are the barriers and challenges to meaningful engagement at our institution?
✓	Are there existing venues or opportunities in which to build engagement?

### *Assessing engagement at the innovation level to support uptake*

✓	How have faculty been involved in the development of the innovation?
✓	Do the faculty that helped to develop the innovation believe that it is one that can make a difference in student completion and be scaled?
✓	How have (or how will) faculty members come to learn about the existence of the innovation and gain a clear understanding of how it functions?
✓	How will faculty come to see that the chosen innovation is a good one, that it is important, and that it is important <i>now</i> ?
✓	Which faculty members do you most need to support and champion the change, and why?
✓	Who are the existing champions of the change or intervention?
✓	What actions can be taken to expand the number of faculty and staff champions of the intervention?
✓	What is the role of faculty in the implementation of the pathway? How much creative control is given to faculty to tweak the pathway?
✓	What kind of conversations and deliberations do faculty need to have in order to come to intellectual terms with the uncomfortable changes that will likely come with adopting the pathway?
✓	What kinds of conditions and supports do faculty need in order to accept and embrace the actual changes that come with adopting the pathway or other new ways of doing something?

## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

### *Identifying the stage of adoption among stakeholders*

Taking the temperature at the college also means thinking critically about the situations of different categories of faculty while resisting the perilous missteps of stereotyping them, focusing on faculty as individuals to be managed, and failing to consider their circumstances or situations. By thinking about categories in terms of stages of adoption of innovations, college change agents can develop and prioritize engagement strategies based on their goals.

Category of Adopter <sup>2</sup>	Common Characteristics
<b>Innovators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ First to adopt an innovation</li><li>➤ Driven by own convictions and curiosity</li><li>➤ Most willing to take risks</li></ul>
<b>Early Adopters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Highest degree of opinion leadership</li><li>➤ Likely to be young</li></ul>
<b>Early Majority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Significantly slower in adoption than early adopters</li><li>➤ In contact with early adopters</li></ul>
<b>Late Majority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Adopt innovation after average members of college</li><li>➤ High degree of skepticism even after adoption by early majority</li></ul>
<b>Last Adopters or Resistors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Last to adopt innovation</li><li>➤ Aversion to change agents</li><li>➤ Focused on “tradition”</li></ul>

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### 3. Develop strategies to work with categories of adopters

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The following practices demonstrate ways that college change agents can use their thinking about different categories of faculty to improve implementation, knowledge sharing, and development of stronger pathways to completion.

#### *Prioritize collaboration and dialogue among innovators, early adopters, and the early majority*

Focus on empowering the innovators and early adopters within and across institutions to collaborate and to articulate the value of the change being implemented. CbD teams can make the most of the places where these groups naturally interact to create opportunities for idea sharing and the development of a common language about the importance of the remodeled student pathway. The more meaningful, practical, and useful opportunities those participating in

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Rogers, E. M. *Diffusion of Innovations*. (2003). (5th ed). New York: Free Press.

## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

innovations have to engage in dialogue with each other about their experiences, the more likely they are to 1) serve as an incubator for the values you would like to see diffused throughout the broader faculty and 2) serve as an engine of continuous improvement in student completion.

### ***Work with innovators, early adopters, and the early majority to understand the conditions that promote engaged implementation***

Seek out the institutions and departments where there are especially large numbers of innovators, early adopters and members of the early majority, and systematically explore the incentives, supports, working relationships, communication flows and leadership practices in those environments. Engage faculty, staff and administrators operating in these “bright spots” to help account for the positive culture and climate, and create structured opportunities for them to reflect on the keys to replicating those environments. Understanding the conditions can help the institution to not only implement innovations but to evaluate them and eventually bring them to scale.

### ***Get creative with incentives and rewards***

In consultation with innovators and early adopters, discuss and refine a list of incentives and explore how different incentives might play to different types of adopters (what appeals to a member of the late majority may be different than what appeals to an early adopter or member of the early majority). Consider using short-form surveys of faculty to learn more about how best to create and deliver powerful intangible incentives (such as recognition, prestige, pride, appeal to research identity, etc.). Look across institutions for examples of creative incentive structures that have proven effective.

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## **4. Engage authentically and strategically**

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Faculty engagement can take multiple forms, and we encourage colleges to plan strategically for which formats are most appropriate for their goals, stage of change and institutional culture. Common throughout the different formats, however, should be a commitment to clear expression of the goals of engagement (the ask, as described previously), quality facilitation and follow-up on deliberations.

### ***Place a high value on quality facilitation***

Engagement occurs when faculty of all stripes are able to reflect on their experiences with both technical and adaptive elements of initiatives, interventions and innovations; such reflection can occur only in a safe space where candid conversation is encouraged and well facilitated. These safe spaces can be aimed at improving channels of communication, troubleshooting supports, identifying midcourse corrections and building trust between faculty, design teams and front-line administrators within or across institutions.

## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

No matter the exact purpose of the engagement, quality facilitation is at the center of creating the right space for candid conversations. Though they play different roles depending on the purpose and structure of the engagement, facilitators almost always serve in eight core capacities:

- Motivator
- Guide
- Questioner
- Bridge builder
- Clairvoyant
- Peacemaker
- Taskmaster
- Confidence booster

For detailed guidance on facilitation and recording skills, refer to the “Completion by Design Facilitator’s Handbook” (Public Agenda for Completion by Design, 2011).

*Use a variety of engagement vehicles to reach different faculty*

<b>Surveys</b>	As a low-touch mechanism for collecting input and feedback from a broad range of internal stakeholders, surveys can be particularly effective for reaching faculty who have busy schedules and adjunct faculty who have limited time for in-person engagement on the college campus. Surveys allow project leaders to collect information on specific questions of interest. If the survey is administered through an online tool, results can be compiled quickly, leaving more time for analysis and application of the feedback to decisions and pathway implementation.
<b>Adjunct/Full-Time Faculty Dialogues</b>	The colleges that have an easier time engaging adjunct faculty are those that think strategically about creating connections between adjuncts and full-time faculty by fostering collaborative dialogue on issues of student success and workforce development. In addition to respecting all faculty as experts in their subjects and as deeply knowledgeable about student completion, such dialogues honor adjunct faculty as having unique insights by virtue of their direct connection to the workforce. Since many adjuncts work in the industries they teach about, tapping their knowledge about the “real world” applications of classroom learning may be a valuable strategy at various points in the change process that can deepen their engagement while also strengthening completion efforts.

## Section 2. Faculty Engagement in Implementation

<b>Data Summits</b>	A large group gathering focused specifically on the meaning of student achievement data to advance the college's completion effort is a promising strategy for bringing together full-time and adjunct faculty. Data summits may be used as vehicles for bringing student services staff, administrators and faculty together in collaborative inquiry. It is important that these are designed carefully, to create an atmosphere of collaboration instead of one of blame and defensiveness.
<b>Campus Conversations</b>	Apart from engagement efforts focused on helping faculty communicate more effectively with each other, change efforts require silo-spanning efforts that extend beyond faculty themselves and help link them to staff, administration, student services, students and the broader community served by the college.
<b>Faculty-Student Dialogues</b>	When combined in carefully designed dialogue groups, both faculty and students have been shown to move more quickly beyond the kinds of defeatist attitudes and blaming of each other that are often observed when they're spoken to separately. Well-designed and -facilitated faculty-student dialogues can help shift attitudes toward each other and the institution, help solve real challenges to student learning, and help colleges gain valuable insights whether they are in the planning or the implementation stage of proposed changes.

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### 5. Follow up on engagement

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Reporting on deliberations and making use of the information gained is a crucial piece of effective stakeholder engagement. Taking care to “close the loop” means informing faculty of the ways their ideas and concerns are being incorporated into the implementation and evaluation of pathway redesigns or, more generally, of problem solving among the institution's leaders. Moreover, reporting means taking the time to explain why some ideas are not being incorporated. Doing so deepens people's understanding of the issues and fosters mutual respect.

Further, as discussed in the “Internal Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Toolkit,” faculty who participate in the workshops should be encouraged and supported to act on their deliberations and not just wait for the organizers and institutional leaders to implement changes. Well-designed engagement will energize stakeholders and may lead many to want to roll up their sleeves and get involved in CbD work or other student success efforts. Encouraging and enabling action in response to deliberation gives internal stakeholders such as faculty a role and a way to contribute. It gives them a personal stake in the success of the work.

### Section 3. Critical Engagement Considerations for CbD Project Leads During Implementation

<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What are the components of the remodeled pathway that are being implemented?</li> <li>✓ Which among these components include actions that involve asking faculty to make changes in their practices?</li> <li>✓ Are there components that involve faculty—even tangentially—that you might have missed at first?</li> <li>✓ Which of the components will you choose as the point of departure for faculty engagement?</li> </ul>
<b>WHY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Why is this piece critical to the overall goal of completion?</li> <li>✓ What does engaging faculty on this component of the remodeled pathway seek to accomplish?</li> <li>✓ How will you know if you have successfully engaged faculty on this topic?</li> </ul>
<b>WHERE</b> <b>(the college environment)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What is the culture of faculty engagement at the college?</li> <li>✓ Are there institution-level actions that need to happen to build a stronger culture of inquiry and faculty engagement?</li> <li>✓ What is engagement of faculty like at the innovation level?</li> <li>✓ What do stakeholders know and feel about the CbD pathway redesign?</li> <li>✓ Consider the questions listed in <b>Take the Temperature</b> (page 7)</li> </ul>
<b>WHO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are there differing levels of acceptance and/or adoption of the changes among faculty?</li> <li>✓ Which groups of faculty are in which stages of adoption?</li> <li>✓ Which groups of faculty are the most critical to engage for pathway implementation?</li> </ul>
<b>HOW</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What engagement strategies will be the most productive and help us achieve our desired outcomes?</li> <li>✓ Who will facilitate the engagement?</li> <li>✓ Will engagement during implementation be incentivized, and if so, how?</li> <li>✓ Refer to the CbD resources prepared by Public Agenda: <b>Internal Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Toolkit</b> (2012) and <b>Completion by Design Facilitator's Handbook</b> (2011).</li> </ul>

### Section 3. Critical Engagement Considerations for CbD Project Leads During Implementation

<b>THEN WHAT?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ How will faculty engagement during implementation affect evaluation, decisions made about further development, scaling and sustaining of new models?</li><li>✓ How will faculty be involved in the evaluation of the pathway's implementation?</li><li>✓ What mechanisms for feedback on the pathway redesign will be available for faculty?</li><li>✓ Once implementation is under way, to what extent do faculty<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ feel a strong connection between their personal values and the goals of the pathway redesign?</li><li>▪ believe that the pathway remodel is important, important <i>now</i>, and valued by the department and institution?</li><li>▪ understand how the new pathway fits with other priorities (personal, departmental, institutional)?</li></ul></li><li>✓ How will faculty be continuously engaged during the stages following implementation and evaluation?</li></ul>
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