Community Engagement Framework

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INTRODUCTION

This framework is intended to assist Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) decision-makers, managers, physicians and staff in better understanding the broad practice of community engagement. It offers an overview and process guidance of how engagement can assist Board members, leaders and staff in meeting their responsibility to respond to key stakeholders, community and patient needs, to improve clinical quality to assist in improving health outcomes.

DEFINITIONS

Community: Our community is those we work with and serve.

There are many definitions of community and communities. It is important to recognize that people define for themselves which communities they feel part of. There are two broad categories of community: internal and external. The Internal community consists of staff, physicians, volunteers and contracted and shared service providers. Generally external communities are thought of in several categories. These are:
- geographic communities such as municipalities or defined neighbourhoods;
- non-geographic communities of common interest based on age, gender, ethnicity, disability such as older adults, aboriginal people, new immigrants;
- communities of interest or common experience such as users of services which are patients with similar needs;
- the general public (organizations or individuals);
- communities of shared beliefs.

Community engagement: is a process that enables two-way dialogue and interaction between MAHC and the community so that community members can be informed and involved in the planning and, when appropriate, the decision-making process for health care services and policies that affect their lives. It is also a means of helping people to understand the issues confronting their community and possible solutions. Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people to enact positive action. It includes information sharing, consultation and active involvement in decision making.

Community engagement encompasses a wide variety of activities from information sharing to community empowerment. A Community Engagement Framework relates to all activities undertaken by the organization with the exception of those where statutory or legislative requirements take precedence (but the implementation of said statute or legislation should be consistent with the Community Engagement Framework).

It is very important for MAHC to set the right tone and provide the context for embarking on this commitment. Engagement must be thought of as a process that evolves over time and the organization needs to be clear of the intended outcomes of each initiative. This includes setting up processes for receiving and giving feedback so that people involved are aware of how input is utilized. It is also important that participants understand the context of policy making in health care, that it is neither rational nor linear, but a complex political process that is influenced by a multitude of factors both internal and external to the organization.

Once the framework is adopted it must be built into all key strategies of the organization and form a fundamental part of how the organization operates.

MAHC's VISION FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The context for the practice of community engagement is contained within MAHC's overarching vision of **Outstanding Care – Patient & Family Centered** and further described in the mission statement **Proudly Serving our Communities – Delivering Best Patient Outcomes with High Standards and Compassion**.

This Community Engagement Framework will support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision making and enable us to maintain and improve services to enhance quality of health care in Muskoka and East Parry Sound.

More generally, it is recognized that MAHC, like all health care organizations, is operating in an environment of constant change, growing financial uncertainty and increasing demands and expectations from internal and external communities. The Framework does not mandate specific community engagement formats to be used at specific times. Each situation demands its own approach and process. Rather, the Framework seeks to institute a strategic approach to every community engagement process hosted by MAHC. The Framework will not address all of the challenges of managing the complex issues of community engagement, yet by introducing a consistent, strategic approach it will equip MAHC with the tools needed to move towards more meaningful, inclusive and effective public involvement.

A sound Community Engagement Framework to support MAHC in successfully responding to these multiple challenges is of paramount importance.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MAHC is committed to ongoing engagement with stakeholders that have a stake in, or will be impacted by, its actions. MAHC's 2015-18 Strategic Plan continues to regard Engagement as a core value, and it more specifically defines our promise as "working together with commitment, honesty and integrity." To this end the following principles will guide all of MAHC's activities:

Effective *Engage early enough to make a difference; resource it properly; monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.*	**Timely** *Participants will know how long an engagement is expected to last and when feedback will occur.*
Inclusive *Ensure that a cross section of the community is invited to the engagement activity.*	**Appropriate** *Endeavour to utilize levels and methods of engagement that are appropriate to the purpose, leveraging existing structures where they exist.*
Transparent *Engage with stakeholders in an open process, with transparent purpose, goals, expectations and constraints. Be open about how the engagement will be used in decision-making.*	**Community Benefit** *Provide, clear, accessible and comprehensive information to stakeholders to facilitate involvement.*
Respectful *Be the community partner, not its master; use tools appropriate to participants; hear and listen to what people say; create realistic timelines.*	**Balanced & Accountable** *Strive to balance the participation and influence of stakeholder groups; monitor the ongoing effectiveness of community engagement strategies.*

Further, in an effort to deliver outstanding, patient- and family-centered care, we will encourage input from patients and families, as their experiences can shape how we can better fulfil this vision.

GOALS AND CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement can be used to achieve a wide range of goals, which imply different levels of public involvement. The appropriate goal for a community engagement process will depend on what you set out to achieve. The goal must be clear and transparent to all stakeholders to avoid misunderstanding or the creation of unrealistic expectations.

The ultimate goal of community engagement for MAHC is to impact conditions that influence health in our communities and contribute to maintaining safe, high quality health care services. The purpose of community engagement is to inform, educate, consult, involve, and empower stakeholders in both health care or health service planning and decision-making processes to improve the health care system. Effective community engagement:

- Improves the quality of decisions by bringing multiple perspectives to the table.
- Facilitates understanding and relationship-building with the community.
- Facilitates a clear definition and rationale of the problem/issue.
- Enhances community ownership of decisions and the outcomes.
- Builds credibility and satisfies community needs, wants and aspirations.

More participants, less active
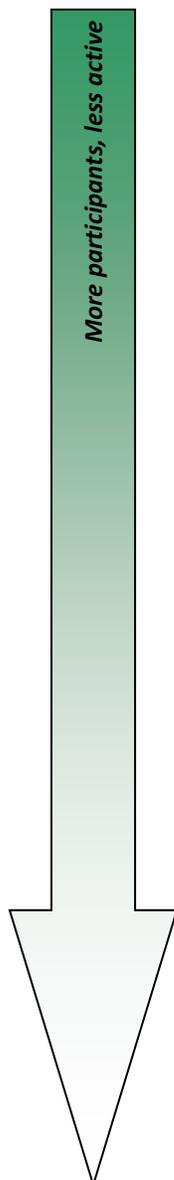
Goal/Level	When To Use	Tools & Techniques
Inform	Supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed to assist in creating an understanding of the issues, options and opportunities.	Publications, newsletters and press releases, advertising, public forums, fact sheets, websites, open houses.
Consult	Consulting is used to gather information and feedback from a variety of stakeholders that MAHC will use in making its decision. Feedback will be provided on how public input influenced the decision.	Patient and family advisory groups, surveys or opinion polls, focus groups, planning projects and teams. Open public forums, written submissions.
Involve	Active participation from the stakeholders throughout the process to ensure concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives and in developing solutions.	Community member participation on special ad hoc committees, public forums, stakeholder research, workshops, focus groups.
Collaborate	Working together in a joint process with stakeholders throughout the decision-making process, incorporating recommendations into the decision, and assisting in carrying them out.	Community Advisory Committees, consensus building, participatory decision making, one-on-one consultations.
Empower	Actively supporting stakeholders in developing their own processes and structures necessary to identify issues and to implement solutions. MAHC may be in a position to support external groups, but has no greater voice in decision making than any of the other stakeholders.	Provide skills, training or leadership, resources and tools for projects and initiatives, one-on-one consultations.

STRUCTURE AND FRAMING OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Structuring the community engagement activity is an important step in the process as it will help outline who to include in the process, how participants view the issue, the scope of the discussion and the range of potential solutions that are being considered. When used appropriately, the structure can help to set up a discussion that generates a more complete understanding of a problem, and helps stakeholders to come together to support a solution.

To that end, Appendix A of this document contains a series of community engagement worksheets to assist in developing a comprehensive and inclusive process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

Evaluation of community engagement processes is important to understand the techniques and tools that were effective, what could have been improved and the lessons learned. This information will be used to improve future community engagement processes. The following outlines examples of indicators and measures that may be used in evaluation:

- o   The number of people who attended the activity
- o   The demographic distribution of people that attended the activity
- o   The number of information resources distributed
- o   Percentage of population participating
- o   Participants' satisfaction with the facilitation of the activity
- o   Participants' satisfaction with their opportunity to express their opinions and proposals
- o   How much participants felt they gained from the activity
- o   How decision-makers felt that feedback received affected the project/program outcomes
- o   Stakeholders' satisfaction with the quality of activities
- o   Stakeholders' reported findings from activities
- o   Evidence of new, beneficial relationships and partnerships
- o   Knowledge of how to become involved with MAHC
- o   Perception of confidence in MAHC
- o   Improved personal knowledge of MAHC
- o   % of the population who consider they have adequate opportunity to participate in MAHC decision-making

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This framework is intended to provide a clear process, tools and resources to support an effective community engagement framework.

MAHC commits to incorporating community participation into identified initiatives where appropriate.

MAHC will endeavour to employ appropriate tactics that will enable stakeholders to share relevant information with MAHC.

This framework and community engagement initiatives will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

MAHC is committed to ongoing engagement with all stakeholders that have a stake in, or will be impacted by, its actions. The following community engagement approaches will be incorporated into the annual Corporate Communication Strategy:

Audience/Stakeholder	Tool	Goal/Purpose	Summary
External – All	MAHC Website	Inform/Educate Gather Input	To share messaging with stakeholders and garner feedback through electronic surveying
External – All	Board of Directors Meetings	Inform/Educate	Monthly meetings open to the public and advertised on website
Community Groups	Public presentations and speeches (Speakers Bureau)	Inform/Educate Consult	Mass mailing in Fall to community groups inviting requests for presentations
External – All	Annual General Meeting	Inform/Educate	Opportunity to enhance positive messaging, presentation of Board Award of Excellence
External Community & Health Care Partners	Participation in external committees	Inform Collaborate Empower	Staff participate on various committees in community and healthcare sector to increase interaction and enhance two-way communication
External – All	Paid Advertising	Inform Involve	Board member recruitment, announce AGM. Use limited due to cost, but will be considered for other uses on an as-need basis.
External – All	Report to the Community/Annual Report	Inform Consult Involve	Document produced to provide annual update to stakeholders along with financial information.
External – All	Fact/Information Sheets	Inform	Document that provides basic service and program information
External – All	Ad-hoc Committees with Community involvement	Involve Consult Collaborate	As required, community members may be invited to participate on committee such as Audit, Strategic Planning
External – All	Public Meet & Greet with Board Chair/ CEO/Senior Team	Inform Consult Involve	Invite members of the public to an informal open forum; proactively lead the health care discussion
Physicians	Open Forum	Involve Consult Collaborate	Regular forums between MAHC Senior Admin, physicians and Board Executive
Politicians	Municipal Leaders Updates/Council Updates	Involve Consult	Present to local politicians in open forum to keep them apprised of MAHC's activities

APPENDIX A

Community Engagement Worksheets

This section provides worksheets to assist in the overall planning of the community engagement regardless of size and complexity. The worksheets are sequential in that they may be used to work through the process of planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation of a specific community engagement framework.

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Step 1 Deciding Whether to Engage the Public

Step 2 Planning the Engagement Framework
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- ▶ Worksheet 2.2 - Stakeholders Identification
- ▶ Worksheet 2.3 – Community Engagement Tools
- ▶ Worksheet 2.4 – Communication Plan
- ▶ Worksheet 2.5 - Resource Strategies

Step 3 Reporting Back

Step 4 Evaluation Strategy

Project:
Description:
Timelines:
Project Leader(s):

Step 1
Deciding to Engage the Community

This will assist in clarifying whether you are asking the right questions and gathering the right type and amount of information.

Framing Questions	Notes:
Is the proposed project or issue likely to directly affect quality of life of residents?	
Is there a legal or administrative trigger that requires public involvement?	
Does the decision have long-term, large-scale or otherwise significant social, environmental and/or economic impacts for one or more stakeholder groups	

If the answer if yes to any of the above, community engagement is recommended.

Driving Questions	Notes:
What is your goal with the community engagement: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate or Empower	
What other principles, commitments or values need to be considered?	

Step 2.1
Planning the Engagement – Project Definition

This will define the scope of the project and key event linked to timelines

Questions	Notes:
Description of Project	
Project timelines and milestones (key events)	
What are the key decision points	
What are key times in the project when community engagement will be sought?	
How will community input impact the project?	
Are there historical factors or previous decisions that will affect this project?	
At what points are reports or notifications required by the Senior Team and/or Board of Directors?	

Step 2.2
Planning the Engagement – Stakeholder Identification

This will assist in identifying both internal and external stakeholders.

Questions			
Stakeholder Group	**What issues or matters will interest this group?**	**What information do they need from us?**	**What do we need from them?**
Internal: Staff			
Physicians			
Volunteers			
Students			
Other			
External:			

Step 2.3
Planning the Engagement – Community Engagement Tools

This will assist in determining the appropriate tool(s) to engage the appropriate stakeholder group (refer to page 3 of framework for tools).

Stakeholder Group	Size of group	Question Being Asked	Suggested Tool
Internal: Staff			
Physicians			
Volunteers			
Students			
Other			
External:			

Step 2.4
Planning the Engagement – Communications Plan

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

-

KEY AUDIENCES

-

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

-

KEY MESSAGES

1.

Timeline/ Date	Audience	Tool	Deliverable/Method	Responsibility	Status
			•		
			•		
			•		
			•		
			•		
			•		

Step 2.5
Planning the Engagement – Resource Strategies

This will assist in determining the resources that are required for the community engagement activity.

Questions	Notes:
What technical information and materials do we need?	
What communications tools will be utilized?	
What are the logistics for implementing this strategy?	
Are any participant expenses associated with this strategy (mileage, catering)?	

Step 3
Reporting Back

This will assist in planning for a method of reporting back to stakeholders that their input/concerns were considered.

Questions	Notes:
To whom and when will written reports be required?	
When does the community require feedback? (i.e. after each activity)	
How will you communicate that the community information gathered was considered?	
Will you need to include a historical outline of all community engagement activities undertaken throughout the project?	
Have you included a statement of any additional steps to be undertaken and information on evaluation outcomes?	
Is formal newspaper notification required?	
Is ongoing communication required?	

Step 4
Evaluation Strategy

This will assist in determining the successes and areas for changes or if further community engagement is needed.

Questions	Notes:
What are the indicators/measures that will be used (see page 4 of framework)	
What method of evaluation will be used? (survey, questionnaire)	
How will the evaluation results be communicated?	
Where will the information be stored, recorded and tracked?	