

Quick Reference Guide:

Highlights of the Practical Guide to
Community Engagement

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WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
**Center for Sustaining Agriculture
and Natural Resources**



**INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
TRANSFORMATION
NETWORK**

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Guide layout and design by Katie Doonan.

This document is a companion to the [Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started](#). We envision researchers reading that Guide first, and then using this *Quick Reference Guide* as a refresher of the key points described there. A third companion document is the [Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Resources to Help Researchers Go Deeper](#), which provides brief descriptions of handbooks, toolkits and specific papers as a launching point for a deeper dive into existing peer reviewed and gray literature.

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Purpose of the Quick Reference Guide

This *Quick Reference Guide* is a summary of the more extensive *Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started*. The goal of the *Practical Guide* (and its companion, the *Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Resources to Help Researchers Go Deeper*) is to compile, synthesize, and curate existing resources that provide guidance and insight into the process of community engagement, with an eye to supporting researchers' efforts to engage with diverse communities in transdisciplinary or convergence research. **This Quick Reference Guide summarizes the overarching themes, principles and considerations to help guide researchers interested in engaging with different communities.** It is specifically designed to complement the *Practical Guide to Community Engagement*, so that researchers who have already read the *Practical Guide* can use this *Quick Reference Guide* as a refresher of the key points described there.

Please refer to the Purpose and Motivation for this Guide section of the *Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started* for information on its purpose and how it is organized.

Part 1: Preparing for Meaningful Community Engagement

Defining Community Engagement Across Disciplines

Community engagement has many definitions depending on the discipline, context, and engagement goals. **We broadly understand community engagement as a meaningful and respectful process that is reciprocal and has applicable benefits to the community (Glandon et al. 2017), and encourage researchers seeking to engage with communities—and communities seeking to engage with researchers—to agree on how to define community engagement in their particular context.**

Please refer to the Defining Community Engagement Across Disciplines section of the *Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started* for definitions of community engagement found in the literature.

How to Define a Community

For the purposes of engaging with a community on research, a community can be defined in various ways as well, such as by geographic location (e.g., neighborhood, watershed, region), identity (e.g., gender, race, social class), group membership (e.g., political party, occupation, industry, organization), or community of interest (e.g., a group of people who share a common goal, passion or circumstance). **Individual researchers and research teams should articulate the community they intend to engage with as best suits the research project and the context they are working in. This may be an iterative process, as researchers' understanding of the community will be informed and evolve as they build relationships and listen to how those communities define themselves.**

Please refer to the How to Define a Community section of the *Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started* for a more detailed explanation on how to define the community.

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Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

A series of key principles frame how we discuss community engagement within this Guide:

1. Community engagement is generally an iterative, messy process. Be adaptable.
2. Community engagement will most often require crossing and blurring disciplinary lines.
3. Community engagement is extremely context specific.
4. Goal alignment is a two-way street. Communicate and adapt expectations.
5. Effective community engagement is based on trust. Be honest, and consider the consequences of your actions.
6. Effective community engagement must be equitable and inclusive. Be cognizant of your positionality and consider collaborating with marginalized groups.
7. Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Please refer to the Guiding Principles in Community Engagement section of the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started for a slightly more detailed description of these principles, and some key references to consider.

Why Community Engagement?

Efforts to engage with communities in research can have both benefits and drawbacks depending on the goals, expectations, and actions of the participating parties. The potential benefits of community engagement include:

- ◆ Research that has community impacts
- ◆ Emergence of critical insights and interpretations of value to researchers
- ◆ Promotion of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
- ◆ Empowerment of underserved or underrepresented communities
- ◆ Development of successful community interventions
- ◆ More efficient participant recruitment

In addition, community-engaged projects can increase community knowledge, create local networks, generate solutions to societal problems, and increase trust between communities, researchers, universities and governments (Bassier et al. 2008). **It is important to highlight, though, that achieving any and all of these benefits results from effective engagement. Token or poorly implemented engagement practices can undermine trust and lead to failure not only of the current effort, but of future efforts by the same or other researchers (Handley et al. 2010).**

Please refer to the Why Community Engagement? section of the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started for more detailed descriptions of these benefits, the factors conducive to achieving those benefits, and case studies that exemplify the benefits of community-engaged research.



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Part 2: Understanding Types and Levels of Community Engagement

Outreach and Engagement Spectrums

Researchers can interact with communities in different ways, with differing levels of investment and contributions, achieving different outcomes. Published resources focused on community engagement have articulated these types of interactions along a spectrum.

Spectrum A: The spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) “was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process” (IAP2 2018). It is focused on participation in decision-making rather than in research, and **seeks to articulate the goal of engagement, as well as the commitment implied by this engagement.**

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

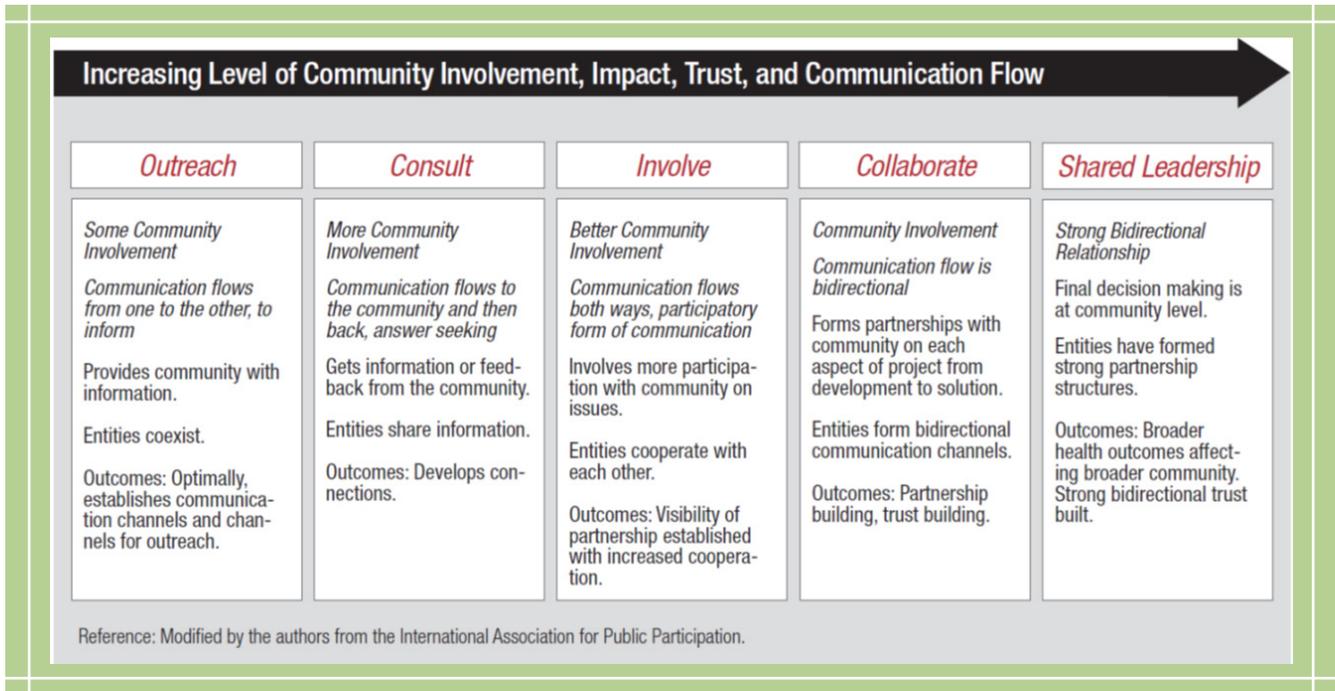
INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Spectrum A: Spectrum of community engagement produced by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), “to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process” (https://www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf; IAP2 2018).

Spectrum B: The National Institutes of Health developed their own version of the community engagement continuum (CTSAC et al. 2011). **This continuum incorporates “shared leadership,” which involves community partners and researchers making decisions together throughout the research process, therefore directly influencing the research itself.**

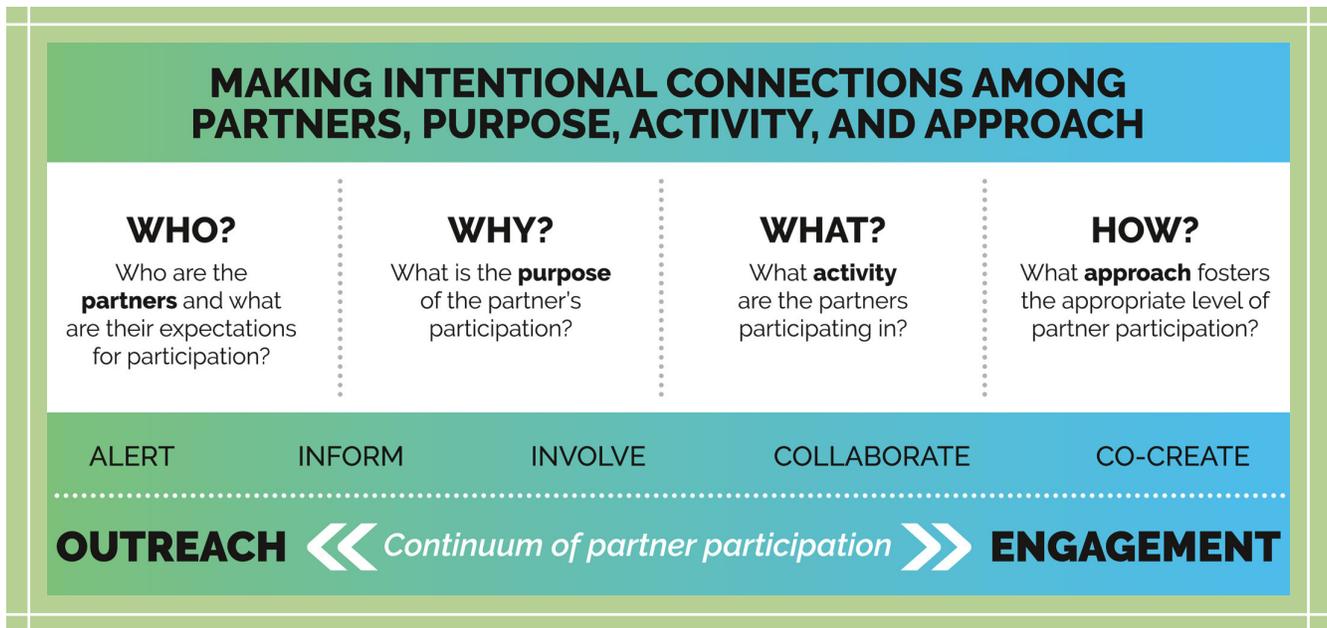


Spectrum B: Spectrum of community engagement in the CTSAC et al.’s (2011) update of the *Principles of Community Engagement*.

Spectrum C: The Environmental Protection Agency provides another variant of the IAP2 spectrum—still focused on participation in decision-making—**adding a decision tree to help users decide what level of participation to conduct based on their intended goals** (EPA 2014).

Spectrum D: A similar spectrum has been defined for clinical, social and behavioral research, ranging from investigator-driven research on one end to community-driven research at the other (Hacker 2013). **The value of this spectrum arises from (a) its direct focus on how community involvement defines different types of research, and (b) the inclusion of community-based participatory research, whose foundation in social justice and empowerment leads to a strong focus on equity.**

Spectrum E: The spectrum created for the U.S. Centers for Oceans and Human Health (Carson et al. 2022) expands on the IAP2’s guidance within the realm of environmental and human health, with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. Carson et al. (2022) include this spectrum in **a broader strategic framework to help think through what level of engagement is most appropriate for a particular research project.**



Spectrum D: Strategic community engagement framework that connects key questions when considering engaging with communities (top panel), and a community engagement spectrum (bottom panel) adapted from IAP2 spectrum. Created by Carson et al. (2022).

The levels of engagement described in each spectrum are not hierarchical. Rather, the level of engagement should be an explicit choice and commitment. **We encourage any researcher interested in addressing society's problems to consider whether the benefits and outcomes of shared leadership, co-creation of research, or collaboration are necessary to achieve their objectives.**

Please refer to the Outreach and Engagement Spectrums section of the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started for more details on the intent of each spectrum and its relevance to convergence research.



So, What Level of Community Engagement is Most Appropriate?

Considering the level of community engagement that is most appropriate should occur before critical decisions are made on the research and how it should be carried out. In addition, it is critical that **the decision on the appropriate level of community engagement be considered iterative: researchers should engage in dialog with those community partners (or potential partners) to answer this question together.**

USDA Photo by Oregon NRCS

Part 3: Selecting the Appropriate Level of Community Engagement

We developed a modified version of Carson et al.'s (2022) strategic framework, based on the idea that **considering the activities the researchers are thinking of engaging community partners in (the “what”), the community partners that the research could be useful to (the “who”), and being explicit about the purpose for engaging with those partners (the “why”) will help researchers identify and implement the appropriate level of community engagement (the “how”) (Figure 1).**

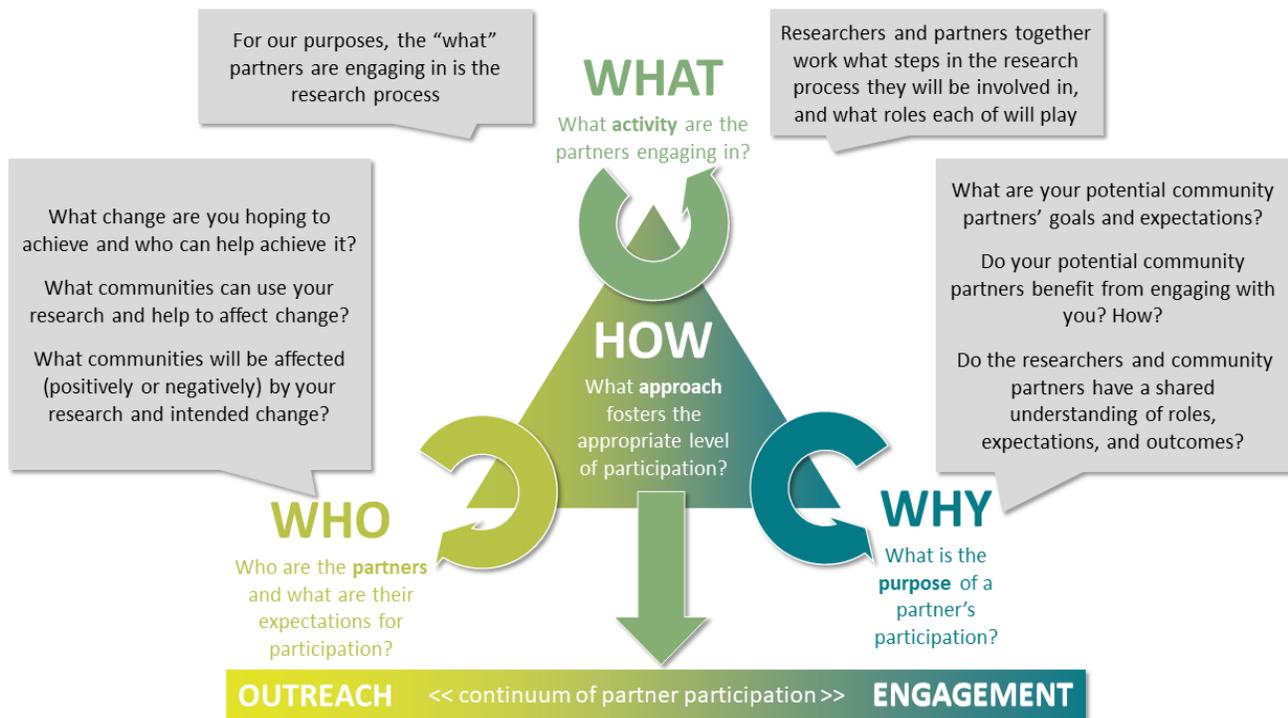


Figure 1. The four dimensions of community engagement. Modified from Carson et al. (2022) to highlight (1) the interconnected nature of these dimensions and how they inform decisions on the most appropriate level of community engagement, (2) the importance of early conversations between researchers and potential community partners to explore (and ensure) alignment between their respective goals and expectations for the research and the engagement process, and (3) the dynamic characteristic of community engagement, that requires continuous reevaluation of these dimensions and alignment between researchers and community partners.

Please refer to the Part 3: Selecting the Appropriate Level of Community Engagement section of the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started for more details on the modifications we made to the Carson et al. (2022) strategic framework, and for tips on your responsibility in community engagement processes.

The What: Community Engagement as Part of Convergence Research

The National Science Foundation defines convergence research as “a means of solving vexing research problems, especially those focusing on societal needs” (NSF 2018). Therefore, **for the purposes of supporting researchers in their efforts to engage with diverse communities in convergence research, “what” partners are engaging in is the research process, carried out through particular research projects.**

The Who and The Why: Interconnected Decisions on Community Engagement

Two inter-dependent dimensions within Carson et al.’s (2022) framework are (1) to identify *who* you, as a researcher, are hoping to engage with, and (2) articulate *why* you should engage with that community for your particular line of research, as well as the other side of the coin: why should they engage in your research? When considering the “who” and “why,” it is important to consider not only how the engagement can help you achieve your goals, but also who could have an interest in your research, because it affects them in some way. This latter perspective can help you meaningfully incorporate underrepresented viewpoints if appropriate and reciprocal.

We propose the following set of questions that can help researchers explore these two interconnected dimensions of community engagement.

- ◆ *What change are you hoping to achieve through your research and who can help achieve this change?*
- ◆ *What communities or community partners can use your research and help to affect change? Do they benefit from engaging with you? Do you share outcomes and expectations?*
- ◆ *What communities or community partners will be affected (positively or negatively) by your research and intended change?*
- ◆ *Where do you stand in relation to your community partners and those with decision-making power and authority? How might that impact the research process and how the research is perceived and used?*
- ◆ *Are you and your potential community partner(s)’s goals and expectations aligned?*
- ◆ *Can I financially compensate my community partner(s)?*
- ◆ *In summary, should community engagement play a role in my research, why or why not? And if so, at what level?*

Please refer to The Who and The Why: Interconnected Decisions on Community Engagement section of the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Approaches to Help Researchers Get Started for more details to guide your pursuit of responses to these questions, tips for first contacting potential community partners, literature on the influence of power dynamics and other challenges to community engagement, and case studies exemplifying the use of Carson et al.’s (2022) strategic framework.



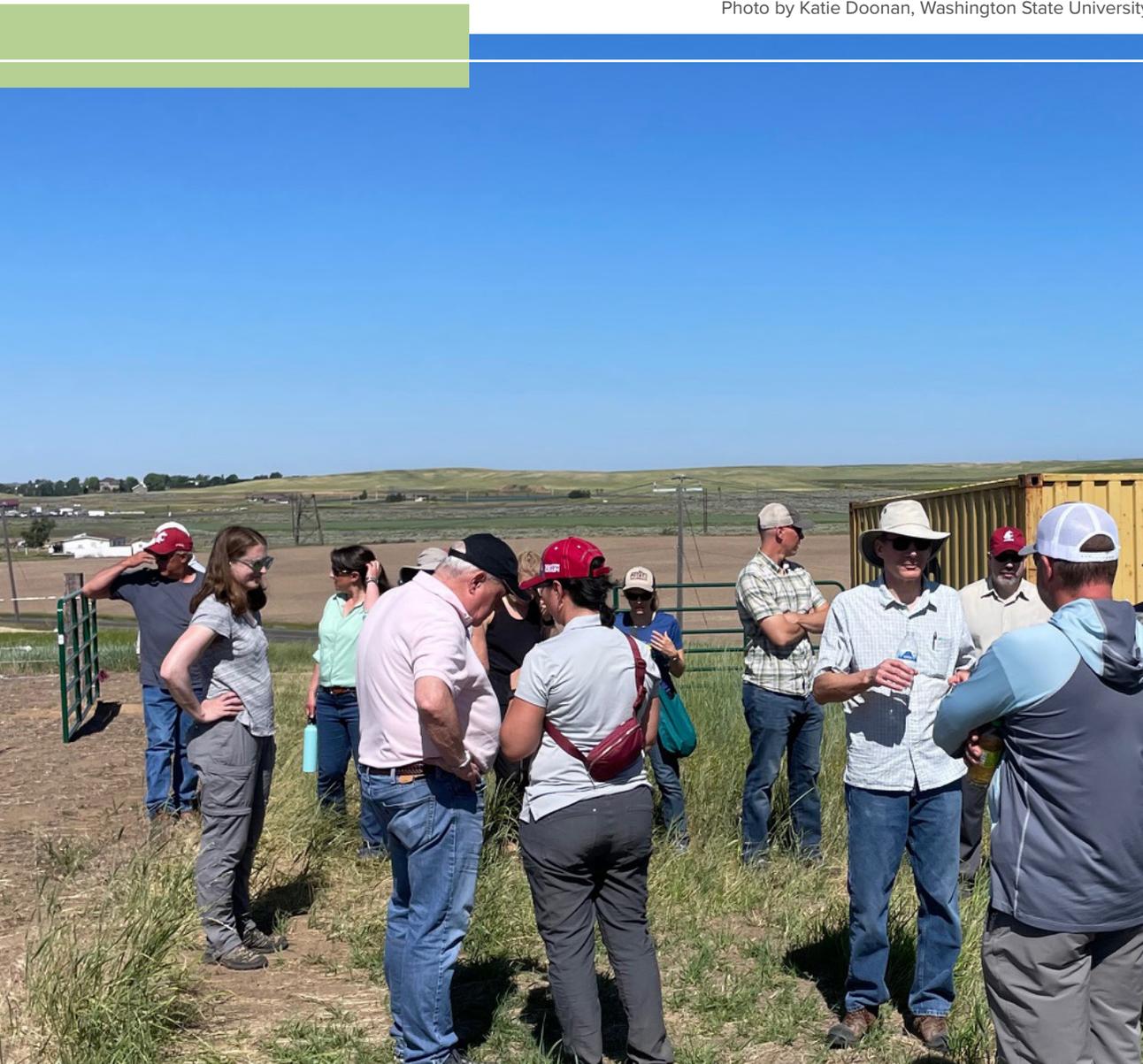
Photo by Katie Doonan, Washington State University

The How: Explicitly Articulating the Appropriate Level of Engagement

One or more of the outreach and engagement spectrums detailed in Part 2, above—whichever you find most relevant—can provide a useful reference to help you articulate the “how” of your community engagement: is it appropriate to strive for shared leadership or empowerment of the community? Should you strive for collaboration, or is consultation or involvement sufficient and appropriate? Or is community engagement not necessary, appropriate or possible? **Once you have agreed on the level of community engagement, you and your partners together can work out the specifics: what steps in the research process they will be involved in, and what roles each of you will play in the process.**

Please refer to the Practical Guide to Community Engagement: Resources to Help Researchers Go Deeper for additional literature, published decision trees and tools to help you further explore how to most effectively engage with communities in convergence research.

Photo by Katie Doonan, Washington State University



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