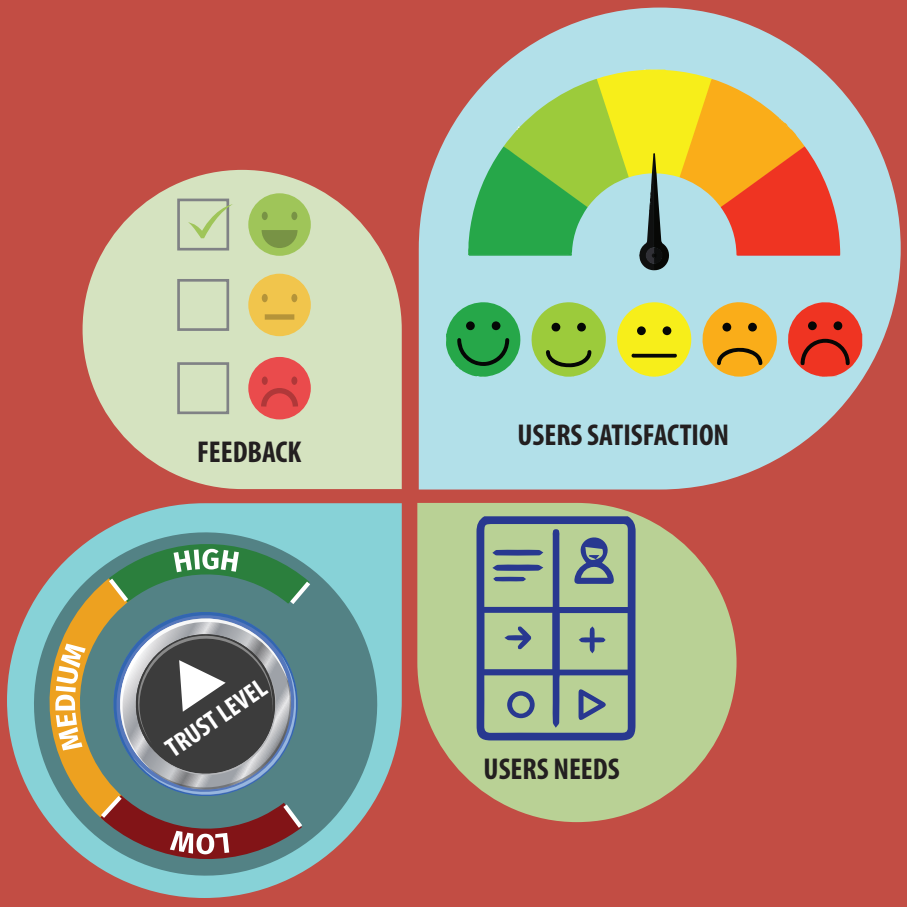
United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING

AN INTEGRATED USER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS



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Preface

As an important public good in democratic societies, official statistics have to meet the needs of users. To meet the test of practical utility, statistics must be relevant, of suitable quality and in a form that facilitates easy and correct use. The key to achieving this is maintaining an understanding of user needs. Producers of official statistics must regularly consult users using appropriate channels and means of communication because needs change and different users respond to different engagement methods.

These guidelines offer a practical mix of good and common practices, instructions, tips and background needed to conduct a dialogue with users and identify what they need and when and through what medium they need it. They provide guidance for developing robust and strategic user engagement programmes and propose sample tactics and activities for a well thought-out user engagement workplan based on the needs of typical key user groups.

It is hoped that this publication will prove a valuable resource for national statistical systems and the organizations within them, including national statistics offices, that wish to develop and strengthen their engagement with users of official statistics.

Acknowledgements

These guidelines for developing an integrated user engagement strategy were prepared under the supervision of Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) of the Economic Commission for Africa, and under the coordination of Joseph Ilboudo Tinfissi, Chief of ACS Statistical Development, Data Outreach and Dissemination Section.

Léandre Ngogang Wandji, ACS statistician, led the development of the guidelines and reviewed all outputs prepared by the consultant, Sala Elise Patterson, who drafted the publication.

Viebeke Nielsen and Sokol Vako drafted several inputs that were used to prepare these guidelines and reviewed the publication.

Executive Summary

In the context of these guidelines for national statistics offices and national statistical systems, user engagement is seen as the process of conducting a dialogue with users of official statistics in order to understand their needs and improve the products, services and operation of a statistical organization accordingly.

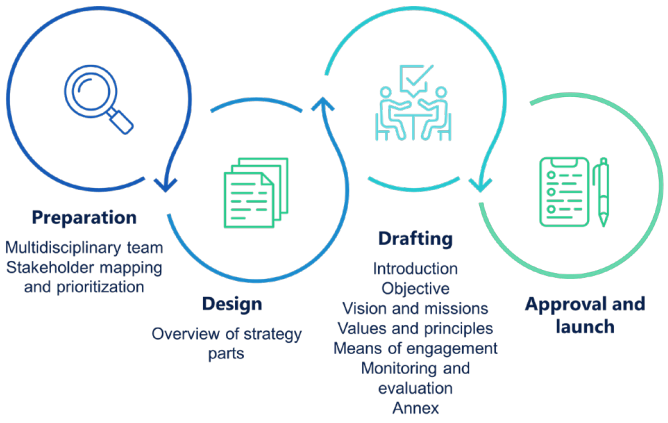
User engagement is central to the impact a national statistical system can have, if not to its very existence. When successful, it can:

- generate feedback from users that helps statistical organizations to prioritize work based on the statistics the public needs
- help ensure that statistics are produced at the right time, in a useful format and are pitched at the right technical level
- create opportunities to test experimental statistics and discuss existing statistics to uncover problems such as discrepancies in data
- enhance statistical literacy
- help build data integrity, trust and a collective sense of ownership of the generation and dissemination of statistics.

These guidelines are intended to assist national statistical systems in developing robust and strategic user engagement programmes. They consist of a practical mix of instructions, tips and background needed to conduct a dialogue with users and identify what they need and when and through what media they need it.

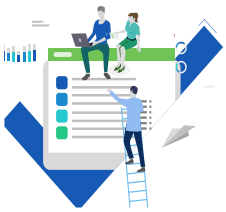
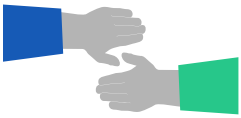
In the context of statistics agencies, a user engagement strategy is an institutional document that outlines the methods to be employed to: encourage interaction between data users and producers; establish mechanisms for feedback on statistical products, services and experiences; and guarantee that feedback is taken into consideration. The overarching purpose of a user engagement strategy is to help develop and strengthen links between data producers and users to promote open and constructive dialogue and interactions. Engagement promotes trust and maximizes public value.

The development of a user engagement strategy for establishing and maintaining quality dialogue and interactions with users can be divided into four phases: preparation, design, drafting, and approval and launch.



User engagement can and should be employed at every stage of statistical production, in a continuous process of querying, feedback and response. With practice, user engagement will become integrated into the core business of the data value chain.

Activities for engaging users can be divided by their purpose into five groups: establishing contact with users; establishing user needs; consulting users; instigating user engagement; and establishing a feedback loop and building statistical literacy.

Activities	Methods and tools
1. Establishing contact with users 	Conduct market segmentation Establish user forum by group Compile a database of external and internal users Establish and maintain external partnerships Establish data-sharing mechanisms for members of the national statistical system Service agreements
2. Establishing user needs 	Culture shift Surveys Establish an online feedback portal Google analytics and web metrics User consultations and focus groups Group discussions Develop a compendium of statistical concepts and definitions Evaluate user requests Establish an automated system to receive, process, archive and monitor user requests User research
3. Consulting users 	Internet-based forums User support groups Phone calls New media A process or coordinating body Thematic workshops Technical committees or permanent thematic working groups Advisory council or steering group Host one-on-one user dialogues
4. Instigating user engagement 	Newsletters Writing stories with data High-level representation at events Press conferences Open data portal or reporting platform Online data and information dissemination platforms Data advocates and champions Data visualization Multimedia and other creative content
5. Establishing a feedback loop 	Monitoring system Onboarding mechanism User engagement dashboard Email-based communication Develop different statistical products and services according to user groups *Building statistical literacy* Strategic partnerships Training Statistics clubs Games and competitions Cultural events and engagement with artists Public service announcements

All engagement activities are not created equal. Two key factors should be taken into account before deciding which tool to use: the specific user group to be engaged with and the stage in the statistical process when the activity is employed. In fact, each tool is appropriate at a particular stage or stages of statistical production and specific tools or approaches must be used for specific user groups.

The key points and recommendations of these guidelines are:

- **Engaging users is no longer an option.** It is essential for producers of official statistics to position themselves as indispensable, credible, relevant and responsive to users at a time when users are bombarded with information from new, non-official data producers. The best way of doing so is through engagement and dialogue with users.

- **Commit to taking a strategic approach.** To be effective, user engagement should be seen as a multi-year strategic plan that commits the national statistics office or national statistical system to implementing a series of coordinated and integrated engagement methods, chosen through a rigorous and inclusive process, and with measurable objectives.

- **Cooperation and buy-in.** The strategy development process should involve actors from within the statistical system and the national statistics office with different roles and of all levels of seniority.

- **Strategy alignment.** It is important that any user engagement strategy be incorporated into an overall communications strategy so as to ensure that the documents do not compete for resources or have contradictory objectives. With respect to the national strategy for the development of statistics, it is imperative that the user engagement strategy draw directly from any commitments made therein regarding users.

- **User engagement is a process.** User engagement is a journey that never ends. Producers are responsible for identifying user needs and then improving service and product delivery with respect to those needs. User needs are ever-changing and services and products must keep pace with them.

- **User engagement must be seen as core to the business of a national statistics office or statistical system and its operations.** To be effective, user engagement must become part of its DNA. It must be leveraged in some form at each step of the statistical process. Everyone within the organization must feel implicated in user engagement.

- **Make the mental leap.** Most organizations fall short in terms of user engagement by failing to put themselves in the place of users. Doing so requires imagining the culture, preferences, limitations, needs and modes in which a group operates, communicates or thinks. A thorough

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