

# Guidance for the Participation Compass Tool\*

## Introduction

Participation can yield important benefits in humanitarian innovation, however effective participation requires conditions and enabling factors that are often difficult to provide in complex humanitarian contexts. Different approaches to participation (consultation vs. partnership vs. leadership) can yield different benefits and require different levels of investment and enabling conditions. It is necessary to consider many factors when selecting the appropriate participation approach for humanitarian innovation projects. This frequently requires difficult tradeoffs between the desired benefits from participation and the feasibility of implementing it effectively.

The Participation Compass Tool can be used by program planners, design teams and humanitarian innovation practitioners to identify the appropriate type of participation for their project depending on the benefits they want to prioritize and the constraints they need to work within. The tool examines two main factors to be considered when engaging key stakeholders (usually the users of the innovation and/or the implementors of the project) in the process of designing and developing new solutions to humanitarian challenges:

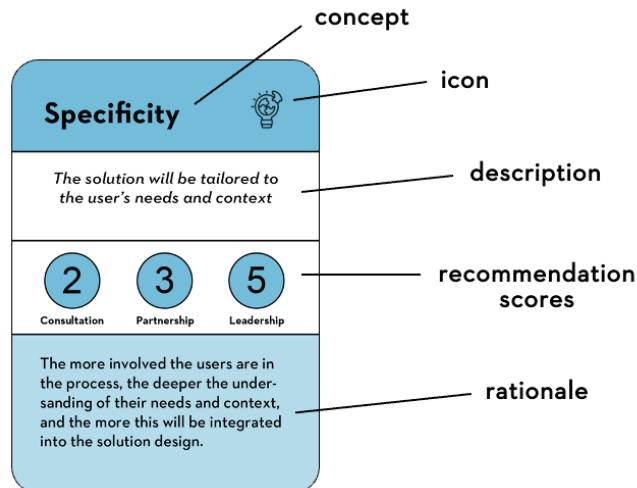
- **Participation Benefits:** Why do you want to engage users in the design process? What benefits do you want to achieve or gain from their participation? Which of these benefits are critical, “must-have” benefits for the project? Which are less important, “nice-to-have” benefits?
- **Participation Barriers:** What constraints or challenges will you face in engaging users in the innovation process? Which of these barriers can be easily lowered or addressed? Which barriers cannot be reduced or addressed?

The compass should be used in the early stages of planning when considering the overall participatory approach (consultation, partnership or leadership) to use to engage users in the innovation process. Prior to using the compass tool, practitioners need to share a common understanding of the various possible types of participation (found in the Participation Matrix) and clearly identify the groups of stakeholders for whom they intend to improve or enhance participation. Furthermore, they should agree on what stages of the innovation process they seek to involve the users. Once consensus is reached, the Participation Compass can be used to identify the most appropriate type of participation.

The Participation Compass is comprised of three sets of cards and two canvases to help the innovation team evaluate the relative importance of different benefits and barriers to their project. Each card includes the concept, an icon which clarifies the context, a brief definition, a set of scores for each type of participation and the rationale behind the scores (see Figure 1). The blue cards describe potential benefits and the yellow cards describe possible barriers.

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\* The Participation Compass was developed in collaboration with the Humanitarian Innovation Fund with the goal of helping innovation teams increase participation and bring the voice of the affected population into the innovation process. While created for the humanitarian context, it may also prove to be useful in the development context or any situation where the implementers of a project are interested in engaging with the users.



*Figure 1: Elements of a Benefit card*

The red cards describe situations in which participation is not possible or appropriate. The team discusses each set of cards and prioritizes them. The highest priority cards for benefits and barriers are then laid out on a canvas and scores for each are calculated. The scores are then combined to give an overall score for each type of participation. After identifying the most appropriate participation approach for their project, designers and humanitarian practitioners can use the Participation Matrix to further refine their plan for engaging stakeholders in the innovation process. It should be noted that while the recommendation is a valuable outcome the accompanying discussion is also very important

## Using the tool

### **Before you start:**

Review the Participation Matrix to establish a clear and common understanding of the different types of participation and the different stages of the innovation process. The Participation Compass tool can be used for identifying the appropriate type of participation for a specific stage or for the overall project. It is important for the team to be in agreement on how they are using the tool before starting.

There may be several stakeholder groups in your project, and the benefits and barriers may differ from one group to the other. In this case, apply the Participation Compass separately to each distinct group of stakeholders to identify which approach is most appropriate for each.

### **Step 1: Determine if Participation is Possible**

Review the red cards; if any of these conditions apply to your project, then it is not appropriate to move forward with a participatory process.

### **Step 2: Assess your Participation Benefits:**

Review the blue benefit cards and rate the importance of each one to your project or organization. Place them on the prioritization table found on the Participation Compass Sorting Mat. Try to be selective and limit the number of "Important" or "Very important" ratings that

you give (no more than 5), as only the most important factors should drive your decision-making. If there are benefits that are important to your project, but are not found in the deck, fill in one of the blank cards and place it on the mat.

### **Step 3: Assess your Participation Barriers:**

Review the yellow barrier cards and rate the degree to which they limit the implementation of the project or the involvement of different stakeholders or organizations. Place them on the prioritization table found on the Participation Compass Sorting Mat. Try to be selective and limit the number of "Limiting" or "Very limiting" ratings that you give (no more than 6). All barriers cannot be equally important, take your time to identify the most limiting constraints. If you are able to partially mitigate a barrier, you can change the scores on the card if that seems appropriate. If there are additional barriers that limit your project, but are not found in the deck, fill in one of the blank cards and place it on the mat.

### **Step 4: Calculate your results:**

Take the cards from the top row of each prioritization table on the sorting map and place them in the appropriate spaces on the Participation Compass Canvas. For the cards in the Very Important or Very Limiting space, look at the score for each type of participation, multiply it by 4 and write the total in the appropriate column in the Participation Calculator. For the cards in the Important or Limiting space, look at the score for each type of participation, multiply it by 3 and write it in the appropriate column. When you have finished all the cards, add up the total for each type of participation for both the benefits and the barriers. Finally, add together the results for the benefits and barriers to get the combined total.

### **Step 5: Review your results:**

Examine the combined score for each type. Does one approach present a distinctly higher score than the others? If so, the approach with the highest score is likely the most appropriate for this stage of your project. It should be noted, however, that this score should only be considered as a general recommendation; the calculations use an average weighting for each of your ratings which can sometimes misrepresent the true differences in levels of importance or limitation. Furthermore, different stages in the innovation process may require different participation approaches, so the compass recommendations may not be applicable across the entire timeline of the project. You may choose to revisit the compass tool as the project progresses.

In some cases, there is a clear choice indicated by the results while in others, the total scores are too close to distinguish a clear recommendation. In either case, you should take a closer look and separate out the results for benefits and barriers to gain additional insights.

- **Alignment across benefits and barriers, an obvious choice:** Did one type of participation dominate across both the benefit and barriers sections? This would indicate a strong recommendation for this type of participation.
- **Conflicting results between benefits versus barriers, a need to make tradeoffs:** Do you see an opposite trend of recommendations between the benefits section and the barriers section? If the totals for the benefit cards suggest one type of participation and the totals for the barrier cards suggest another, this indicates that while you might need

to implement a certain type of participation to attain your desired benefits, you are facing significant barriers in implementing that type. In this case, you will have to decide which is more important: achieving your goals or operating within your constraints. You can also be creative to think about how to mitigate some of the barriers and thus remove them from the calculations.

- **Inconclusive results within benefits or barriers, a need to prioritize:** Do you see conflicting recommendations within the benefits and/or the barrier section? Are the total scores for the different types of participation very close to each other? This would indicate that you have conflicting priorities or constraints, and you may need to prioritize them even further in order to come up with a clear recommendation.

### **Step 6: Use the Participation Matrix to refine your approach:**

After identifying the most appropriate participation type, go back to the Participation Matrix to fine tune your selection of the most appropriate level of participation. The matrix has the different types and levels of participation on the left side, and the stages of the innovation process along the top. The other cells provide a specific glimpse of what each level of participation would look like in each stage of the participation process.\*\* Choose which stages you are most interested in exploring and read the different levels within the type that was recommended by the compass. Select the highest level that is feasible for that stage.

Bear in mind that the compass tool is not infallible, and you may end up selecting a different type of participation, however it can provide a starting point from which you can decide what will be most appropriate and feasible.

### **Step 7: Capture your learnings**

Now that you have identified the level of participation, it is important to capture the learnings from the compass tool so that you can integrate them into the next steps of the process. Use the Learnings and Next Steps to document the results and the insights that came up during your discussions. After that, think about what you might do to enhance your participation strategy: can you decrease the barriers or increase the benefits? Finally, consider the key stakeholders that you will need to engage to move forward with your approach.

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\*\* Refer to the Participation Matrix Explanation and Participation Matrix Guidance documents for more details