



Australian Government  
Land & Water Australia

Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts

# Community Engagement in NRM

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## Engagement & Planning Tool

### When to use

In developing regional plans, planning the commencement or implementation of a program or project, or at any stage where engagement with the community is sought.

### Other tools for similar situations

Stakeholder identification & segmentation  
Stakeholder attitude & influence analysis  
Socio-economic profiling

### Companion Tools

NRM practice change planning framework  
NRM program logic

## Description

Community engagement (CE) is essential to the success of most natural resource management (NRM) activities. In various ways, it is important at the planning, understanding, implementation and review stages. This tool is designed to assist with planning and improving community engagement activities. It has four parts:

- 1) Stocktake of existing approaches
- 2) Clarifying the purpose and context for community engagement
- 3) Understanding stakeholders and participation
- 4) Planning community engagement.

## Benefits

The process and checklists in this tool assist a structured, simplified approach. Starting with a stocktake allows you to learn from past activities, and understand who has not been engaged in the past, who has been, and how. Clarifying the purpose provides essential information for planning the best approach.

## Limitations

The stocktake requires knowledge of past activities. Assumptions and existing perceptions can influence judgement and need to be carefully considered.

## What is required?

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| ✓✓ Skills     | Key skills are the ability to understand and interact with community members, and an understanding of the sectors and groups. Skills in facilitation and planning are also needed |
| ✓ Resources   | Knowledge of past activities will be valuable. Templates in editable formats are available from the project website.  |
| ✓ Information | Information is needed about past activities, community sectors, program goals and external requirements.  |

✓ = LOW LEVEL

✓✓ = MEDIUM LEVEL

✓✓✓ = HIGH LEVEL



CLIENTS|PEOPLE|PERFORMANCE

GHD Hassall

Making Successful Investments in NRM Practice Change

A RESEARCH PROJECT FUNDED BY LAND & WATER AUSTRALIA, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATING REGIONAL NRM BODIES

# Stocktake Existing CE Approaches

This tool is most relevant when considering one program or project at a time, rather than community engagement activities across an organisation as a whole. This is because the engagement needs, approaches and stakeholders vary for different issues.

The stocktake process is presented as a series of questions in the matrix below, considering each type of community engagement activity in turn. You may find it useful to work through the matrix with some of your colleagues – or work through it individually as a first step, and then discuss with your colleagues to fill in the gaps and confirm your understanding.

## Key steps

- 1 Think about the activities that you have done where you have 'engaged' the community. Brainstorm and make a list. Write each of these into a separate column in Row A (you will likely have many activities and will need multiple copies of the template).
- 2 For each activity, work your way down the stocktake template, filling in details for rows B-F.
- 3 Now consider what your organisation learnt from the activity and what has subsequently been done (Row G). Then do a 'rapid assessment' of how effective the activity was (Rows H & I). In this step you may wish to consult more widely to gain input from other team members or participants.

	Key Question	Details	Community Engagement Activities <i>(use multiple pages to allow more columns for each type of community engagement activity)</i>
A	What do we currently do?	List the different types of activities that you did.	
B	Who was responsible for it?	Name or position.	
C	How was the activity planned? Who was involved in planning?	What information did you draw on to plan the activity? Who helped inform the activity?	
D	What was the objective or purpose of the engagement?	Was the purpose clearly articulated? If so, document this down.	
E	At what stage of activity was the engagement targeted? *	Planning Understanding people Considering implications Implementation and / or Review	
F	Who did we engage with in this activity?	List the audiences that participated and estimate the number of people you interacted with.	
G	Did the results or lessons learned from the activity feed into other processes, activities or decisions? How?	Did this interaction help inform what you or others did? How?	
H	How effective was the activity in meeting its purpose or objective?	Apply an effectiveness rating # Add comments why	
I	How effective was the activity in interacting with the target audience?	Apply an effectiveness rating # Add comments why	

\* Refer to the NRM Practice Change Planning Framework to identify the relevant stage.

# Effectiveness Ratings: Highly effective, Moderately effective, Less effective, Not effective

# Clarify the Purpose and Context

## Purpose

Being clear about the purpose of any engagement activity will help to determine how you go about that engagement and who is involved. It will also help to ensure that you make best use of community members' time and your organisational resources. 'Engaging for the sake of engaging' has a real risk of being hollow and not leading to change within your organisation – which may demotivate community members in the longer term. As community engagement may take many different tangents and directions, it is important to remain focused on the purpose/s. If the purpose changes over time, cross-check that this is aligned with key goals and is suitable. Working through the questions of the NRM Practice Change Planning Framework will help you to identify why you are engaging with your community and what you aim to achieve.

For each stage of planning, implementation and review it can be valuable to engage with the community. Who, how and why you engage will vary for the stage and purpose. For example you may engage:

- ▶ To prioritise the NRM assets for investment
- ▶ To understand the opportunities and barriers for NRM practice change
- ▶ To inform the design of a program or plan
- ▶ To test a program, by seeking feedback from stakeholders/participants
- ▶ For participation in implementation (eg on-ground action).
- ▶ To review the success of a program and opportunities for the future.

Using the template below, clearly articulate the need (major / minor / no) and objectives for community interaction at each of these stages.

## Context

Internal and external factors (as listed below) influence the design, conduct and success of engagement activities. In some cases, a community engagement plan and / or prescribed engagement activities may be required as part of a funding of legislative process. Clearly identifying all the internal and external factors is a key step in gathering background understanding that can help to improve the suitability of engagement activities.

Contextual factors **within** the organisation that may influence community engagement include:

- ▶ Existing relationships between staff and community (positive and negative)
- ▶ Knowledge of the community and issues
- ▶ Resources available
- ▶ Organisational protocols and priorities for community engagement
- ▶ Organisational structure, eg is there a community engagement team?
- ▶ Opportunities to integrate community engagement with other activities.

**External factors** to consider in planning community engagement activities include:

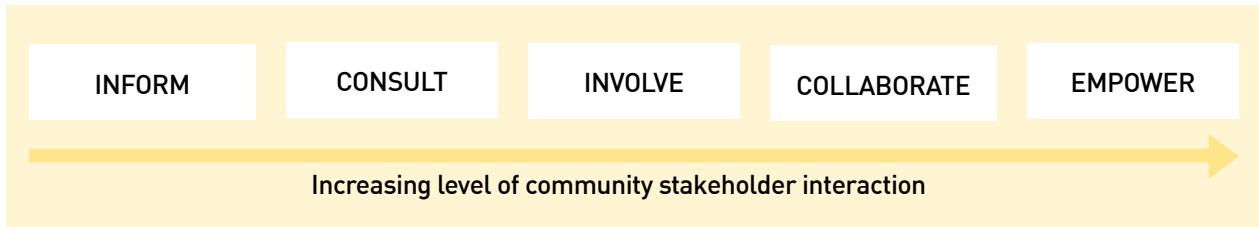
- ▶ Obligations to investors to conduct community engagement activities (these may detail specific requirements)
- ▶ Other activities that compete for time, or could be potential for collaboration
- ▶ Community (including industry) expectations
- ▶ Past history of engagement
- ▶ Existing groups (eg Landcare, industry bodies)
- ▶ Perceptions about the organisation and the issue/s.

Stage	Is community engagement needed? <i>(Major/Minor/No)</i>	Objectives	Internal factors to consider	External requirements for CE	Other external factors
PLANNING	Prioritisation				
	Understanding				
	Design				
	Pilot Test				
Implementation					
Review					

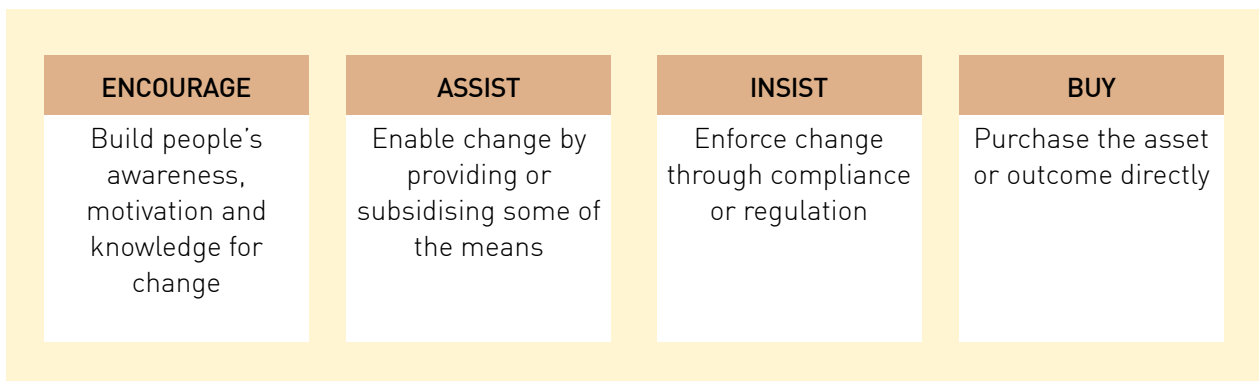
# Understand Stakeholders & Participation

## Level of participation

The purpose and context will determine the degree of interaction that is to be sought with the community. Clearly communicating the level of participation that is sought, and the degree of influence that the community may have on decisions, is important to manage expectations and avoid potential feelings of disempowerment. This is also important for designing suitable activities. The following diagram illustrates a range of participation, based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).



Community engagement will vary depending on the type of implementation strategies being used to foster NRM practice change, and whether engagement is occurring at the planning, implementation or review stage. Tools for selecting mechanisms for fostering change have been developed by this project and follow four broad approaches, as depicted below. The means and nature of community engagement, and the level of participation, will vary for each of these approaches.



## Understand and learn from community stakeholders

Who are the stakeholders and community segments to be engaged with? How might they influence the success of the program? How can they inform us? What can we learn from them?

Identifying and understanding community stakeholders is crucial for meaningful community engagement. Gaining this understanding may also be an introductory step in community engagement.

To identify and further understand stakeholders, utilise the methods and templates outlined in the NRM Practice Change

- ▶ Stakeholder identification and segmentation
- ▶ Stakeholder attitude and influence analysis
- ▶ Stakeholder profile.

# Community Engagement Action Planning

Having gathered the background understanding and clarified the purpose for the community engagement activity, it is useful to develop a plan of how the community engagement will be done. The community engagement plan may take a number of forms, the outline of which may already be established within your organisation. The plan needs to describe why you are engaging, what you will do, when and who will be involved. It is also useful to list any 'dependencies'; that is, those actions and activities that are required to take place before an activity can occur. An action plan is best regarded as a living document that will be adapted over time.

The process that you use to develop an action plan will depend entirely on individual circumstances, and the time and resources available to develop the plan. It is generally useful to involve key people who will implement the plan. The template on the next page provides an example.

## Integration into organisational activities

Community engagement is critical for fostering changes in NRM practice and needs to be integrated within the activities of the organisation and / or program. A challenge for the community engagement plan is to be sure that it is relevant to all levels of activity. Generally, an iterative process of development that combines group or team discussions about each of the background elements described in this fact sheet, followed by more detailed drafting and sharing (and approval if required) of an action plan, will assist to communicate understanding of the plan. This also helps to ensure that within an organisation, there is a common expectation about what the plan is designed to do.

When developing an action plan for a specific program, it is best to integrate the action plan development with the program plan development. This enables you to efficiently include program team members to develop shared understanding and expectations about community engagement. It will also help to ensure that the actions are aligned with program actions, and the engagement activities are shaped within the available resources (staff, funding) of the program.

## Responsibility and resourcing

It is important to clearly assign responsibility for different community engagement activities and allocate resources appropriately. In reality, most staff of a regional NRM body engage with the community to some extent, highlighting the importance of a plan that is well integrated into the organisation. There may be some broader community engagement activities that need specific resourcing. The decision of who is responsible for these will largely depend on resourcing and suitability issues.

One question to consider is whether you do it all 'in-house' or contract some of the engagement activities. For example, you may choose to contract it externally but there may be real value in having your own staff and project leaders doing the community engagement. Where time and skills are limited, or an external perspective/independence is needed, a combination of internal staff with assistance / guidance from external contractors can be highly effective to complete the community engagement in the required timeframe, gain an external 'set of eyes' and build staff skills, whilst also ensuring profile and first hand understanding of your own staff.

## Monitoring, evaluation and adaptation

Ongoing monitoring, review and adaptation of the community engagement activities and plan allow for continual improvement.

# Community Engagement Action Plan

	PLANNING				IMPLEMENTATION	REVIEW
	Prioritising	Understanding	Design	Pilot testing		
What is the message to convey or change sought?						
What level of participation is desired?						
Purpose of engagement?						
Who to engage?						
What engagement activities will be used?						
Responsibility						
Resources required						
Timing						
Dependencies						
Comments/status						
Monitoring and review processes						

# Checklist

Following is a checklist of key questions to consider, in designing a community engagement strategy, that has been drawn from the steps in this tool. This may be used to cross-check that the key elements have been considered.

## Purpose

- ▶ Why are you engaging with the community? What are you trying to achieve?
- ▶ What is the message or culture you wish to convey?
- ▶ What requirements exist? e.g. from investors, or regulatory requirements
- ▶ What is the history of, and preferences for, engaging with the communities in your region?

## Stakeholders

- ▶ Who in the community are you trying to engage?
- ▶ What key community sectors exist?
- ▶ Who influences them?
- ▶ Who do you currently engage and who else do you need to engage?
- ▶ What relationships already exist? What is the nature of these?

## Approach

- ▶ How will community engagement be done? (activities)
- ▶ Are there any critical timelines for community engagement and other planning processes?
- ▶ When are the best times to consult with different sectors of the local community?

## Resourcing

- ▶ Who in the organisation is responsible?
- ▶ Who in the organisation will engage with the community (or sectors of the community)?
- ▶ Which staff members will support and assist?
- ▶ What other resources are required?
- ▶ Where will these resources come from?

## Integration

- ▶ How will community engagement activities inform other planning processes, investment decisions and on-ground delivery?
- ▶ Why is a community engagement plan being developed?
- ▶ How will the plan be used?
- ▶ Who will use the plan?
- ▶ How can the community engagement activities be most effective in integrating with other activities in the organisation, to foster NRM in the region?

## Review

- ▶ How will you determine the effectiveness, efficiency and suitability of the community engagement strategy?
- ▶ How will you determine the community's perceptions of your organisation and willingness to engage with you?
- ▶ When will the community engagement activities be reviewed? How?.

## For further information

This fact sheet is one of a series prepared for the Making Successful Investments in NRM Practice Change project.

For further fact sheets and information visit the NRM Practice Change website:

[www.hassall.com.au/australian\\_division](http://www.hassall.com.au/australian_division)

### REFERENCES & LINKS

- ▶ IAP2 5 step process to plan community engagement [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)

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