

Eighteen Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

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1. *Distinguishing between community engagement and communication*

THIS MEANS: Making a clear distinction between the work of public relations, communication and marketing personnel and those undertaking community engagement processes and not allowing a “PR” approach to dominate the approach.

2. *Reaching and engaging hard-to-reach groups and individuals*

THIS MEANS: Developing specific approaches to target hard-to-reach and marginalised groups (older people, people with a disability, Indigenous people, young people, members of CaLD [culturally and linguistically diverse] communities, isolated and/or rural residents....) and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of those approaches.

3. *Encouraging the sustainability debate (to counteract NIMBY responses)*

THIS MEANS: Actively pursuing community education options so that local people are offered genuine opportunities to explore the implications of the sustainability agenda for sustainable developments and develop an interest in exploring options they might not have previously considered. This will require a much richer model of community engagement than has been used on some development projects.

4. *Capacity strengthening: developing and strengthening community knowledgeability and literacy about complex technical and environmental issues*

THIS MEANS:

- Helping local people understand the implications of the discourses about complex issues such as sustainability, climate change and growth; and
- Building community capacity to help people select among options.

5. *Beyond identifiable stakeholders (the “usual suspects”)*

THIS MEANS: Reaching much more deeply into communities and using a much wider range of approaches than is usually employed with identifiable stakeholder groups. This principle has significant resource implications.

6. *Addressing issues of cultural diversity by actively engaging culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities*

THIS MEANS: Finding ways to target non-English-speaking and other cultural groups and to build bridges between and among cultural groups to open up a community conversation about development options. This has significant resource implications in terms of translation and interpretation of all processes. It will be essential that processes employed with non-English speakers are not seen as abbreviated or lesser than processes for English-speaking community members.

7. *Intergenerational participation: fully involving children and young people*

THIS MEANS:

- Developing discrete, creative, tested and appropriate ways to engage children (up to 18 years) and young people (up to mid-twenties) and incorporating the results of those

engagement processes into reports. Addressing this principle will require a deep understanding of the field of engagement with children and young people; and

- Helping adults understand the wisdom of children and young people and ensuring that their contributions are treated with respect are key considerations.

8. *Influence: ensuring that community engagement outcomes are actually fed into the planning and design processes*

THIS MEANS: An integrated design for the planning and design processes that clearly indicates when and how community information and opinions will be considered to ***influence*** decisions at key target dates and deadlines. Feedback loops must be established so that the community can see how decision makers take their views into account in the refinement of the approaches taken.

9. *Representativeness and tracking of community engagement activities and successes*

THIS MEANS: Ensuring that participants in community engagement processes are representative of the wider community; developing and using deliberative democracy and other emerging processes that enhance representativeness; regular monitoring of representativeness issues and including ways to increase representativeness.

10. *Relationships between and among various advisory groups and the servicing of these groups*

THIS MEANS: Depending on the size of the project, developing clear draft terms of reference for an advisory, accountability or reference group, including draft working protocols, assisting groups in refining these terms of reference and protocols and establishing clear reporting and liaison relationships between those groups and the project management, the ongoing community engagement strategy, as well as between those groups.

11. *Skills and experience of engagement personnel, including experience with complex projects*

THIS MEANS: Ensuring the personnel are selected and/or engaged on your team who have a wide range of relevant successful experience and that senior personnel are employed, so that the community engagement function is not seen as a “poor relation” with little real power to influence outcomes.

12. *A wide range of engagement approaches to be used (not simply a few old-fashioned approaches)*

THIS MEANS: Community engagement processes should reflect the wide range of available approaches and not be limited to the traditional modes (often limited to public meetings, open houses, focus groups and exhibitions). Engagement approaches should be selected for their relevance to the task at hand and the stage of the process, as well as the degree of community empowerment and partnership envisaged. A wide understanding of available methods should be demonstrated.

13. *How reports from community engagement personnel will be presented and how they will depict qualitative data and the emphasis participants place on issues*

THIS MEANS:

- Employing sophisticated ways of analysing qualitative information so that it does not get treated as inferior to so-called “hard” data from engagement (or other) processes; and

- Including the raw information for all community engagement processes so that participants can easily track how the material they provided was reported.

14. Opportunities for creativity, where local people can become engaged at a deep level

THIS MEANS:

- Using appropriate and tested creative approaches from community cultural development realms, community visioning and creative visualization, and refining approaches to ensure that they are fully inclusionary; and
- Using these approaches with discretion so that those familiar with more traditional approaches are not inadvertently excluded.

15. Paying careful attention to tempo and pace

THIS MEANS: Finding ways to maintain community interest and involvement over a long period, perhaps by tying processes to established community events and activities. Whatever the processes are that are used to maintain pace and tempo, they must not smack of “tokenism” and must be related to real target dates and deliverables.

16. Links to specific community engagement plans/protocols and successful modes of operation

THIS MEANS: A full inspection of each community’s or municipality’s preferred ways of operating and reference to local and State Government engagement protocols, as appropriate. In each locality, emerging and refined community engagement policies and processes must be thoroughly reviewed for their relevance to the proposed development, project or process.

17. Electronic means of engagement: selecting the methods that are likely to work best and be appropriate and feasible for this project

THIS MEANS:

- Working with the relevant departments and agencies at all levels of government, as well as other online engagement specialists and advisors, to develop appropriate electronic community engagement methods; and
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of any selected methods or techniques.

18. Evaluation of community engagement processes

THIS MEANS: Creation and maintenance of clear evaluation frameworks for the community engagement. In particular:

- Using both *formative* (as you go) and *summative* (at the end of a process or project) approaches to evaluation;
- Regular summaries of evaluation outcomes to enable ongoing monitoring; and
- Clear processes for responding to the results of evaluation processes.

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