Stakeholder Involvement Strategies
A guide for Topsoil Pilots

INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE

This document is intended as a 'user-friendly' guide for developing stakeholder involvement strategies within each of the Topsoil pilots, in particular if you want to involve non-technical experts or normal citizens, such as farmers or houseowners.

The objective is not to provide a prescriptive approach; more to outline a set of principles and techniques which partnerrs may wish to consider when designing their own respective approaches.

This guide is adapted from previous guidance produced for the Rivers Trust by Alex Inman consulting.

The guide is split into three sections. It is strongly recommended you read through all of the sections in the guide sequentially.

Sections 1 and 2 provide important context for the engagement techniques and practices outlined in Sections 3.

If you need any support in setting up your process, you are welcome to contact us!

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Ilke Borowski-Maaser*

PROJECT & FUNDING

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1 Context and principles to consider when engaging with stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is a term which has come to mean many different things to different people, with significant confusion regarding the role it should play in project delivery. Inappropriate use of stakeholder engagement can lead to 'stakeholder fatigue' where people are invited to be part of a dialogue which ultimately serves no purpose and fails to deliver any tangible benefits. Not surprisingly, those involved in such processes become highly disillusioned and are unlikely to take part in any further stakeholder engagement activities.
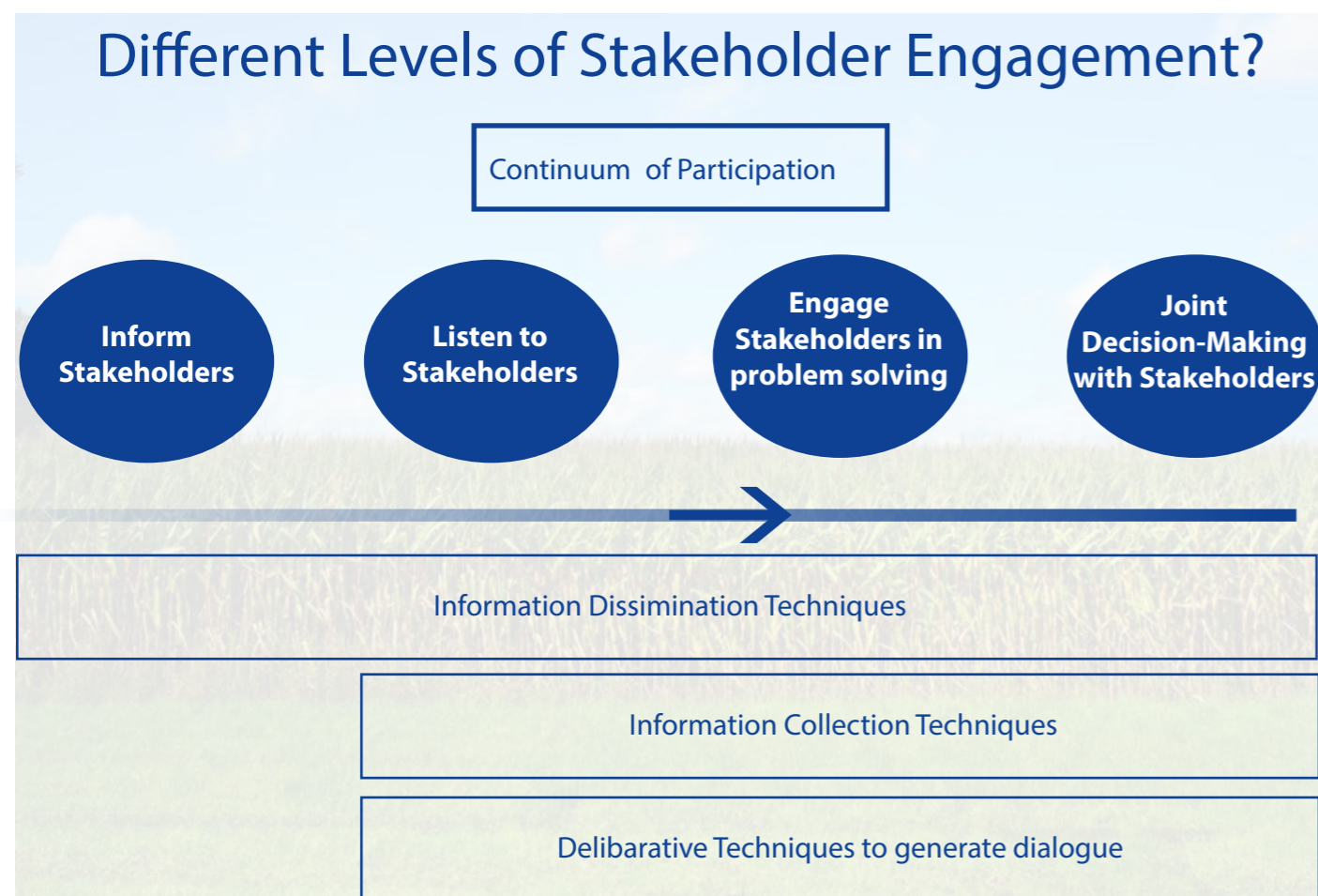
Before ploughing ahead with an engagement process, it is worth considering a number of fundamental principles which should be taken into account to help develop a good stakeholder involvement strategy and avoid pitfalls further down the line.

Establishing the most appropriate level of stakeholder engagement

It is crucially important to realise that there are different levels of stakeholder engagement. These range from informing stakeholders, right through to joint decision making. All of these approaches are perfectly legitimate, but may be more or less appropriate depending on the context of the pilot and the specific project(s) being developed.

Figure 1. Multiple Engagement Levels

Different Levels of Stakeholder Engagement?

Continuum of Participation

- Inform Stakeholders
- Listen to Stakeholders
- Engage Stakeholders in problem solving
- Joint Decision-Making with Stakeholders

Information Dissimination Techniques

Information Collection Techniques

Deliberative Techniques to generate dialogue

Adapted from Creighton JL, The Public Participation Handbook 2005

It is therefore a good idea to decide at an early stage in the project at which level of the continuum you wish to base your stakeholder involvement strategy. In effect, how involved should stakeholders be in the plan development and implementation of the pilot activities in order to help the pilot to succeed and ultimately facilitate a change in the management approach – merely informed about what is going to happen or actively involved in decision-making including designing activities? To help you decide an appropriate level of engagement, it may be helpful to ask yourself the following questions and give a score for each.

If you give a high score for several of the above questions, it is likely you will need to adopt a strategy with increased stakeholder involvement. Conversely, a high number of low scores means that an 'information only' stakeholder plan is probably more appropriate for your purposes.

How complicated are the issues being considered within the pilot?

| Not complicated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very complicated |

Do you posses sufficient knowledge and expertise to solve envisaged problems or will you need help from external stakeholders?

| No help needed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Lots of help needed |

Do you have sufficient resource to deliver solutions to identified problems or will you need help from external stakeholders?

| No help needed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Lots of help needed |

Are the issues within your pilot well defined and universally agreed by all interested parties or is there significant scientific uncertainty and a lack of consensus?

| No uncertainty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Lots of uncertainty |

Are there many different groups being impacted by the challenges being investigated within the pilot or are those being impacted limited?

| Few groups impacted | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Lots of groups impacted |

Are solutions to problems likely to involve multiple trade-offs (give and take)?

| Unlikely | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very Likely |

If you need any support in setting up your process, you are welcome to contact us!

## See stakeholder engagement and pilot delivery as an integrated package

Stakeholder engagement and involvement has historically been championed by social scientists interested in the anthropological side of natural resource management problems whilst natural scientists have concentrated on the 'hard science'. Consequently, stakeholder engagement and the technical side of the pilots are at risk of being slightly 'dislocated'.

It will be helpful for your strategies to conceive stakeholder involvement, not as a process divorced from the scientific endeavour, but as part of a "twin-track" adaptive approach involving both iterative scientific research and stakeholder participation and negotiation operating in tandem.

Deliberation with stakeholders and scientific analysis are likely to be required hand-in-hand during many phases of the pilots, albeit different phases may require a different weighting between the two elements. In particular, the scientific community might predominate during the initial problem/solution identification phase but setting goals to achieve specific action and prioritising solutions should be heavily influenced by wider stakeholder involvement.

Figure 2. Twin Track Adaptive Management Approach
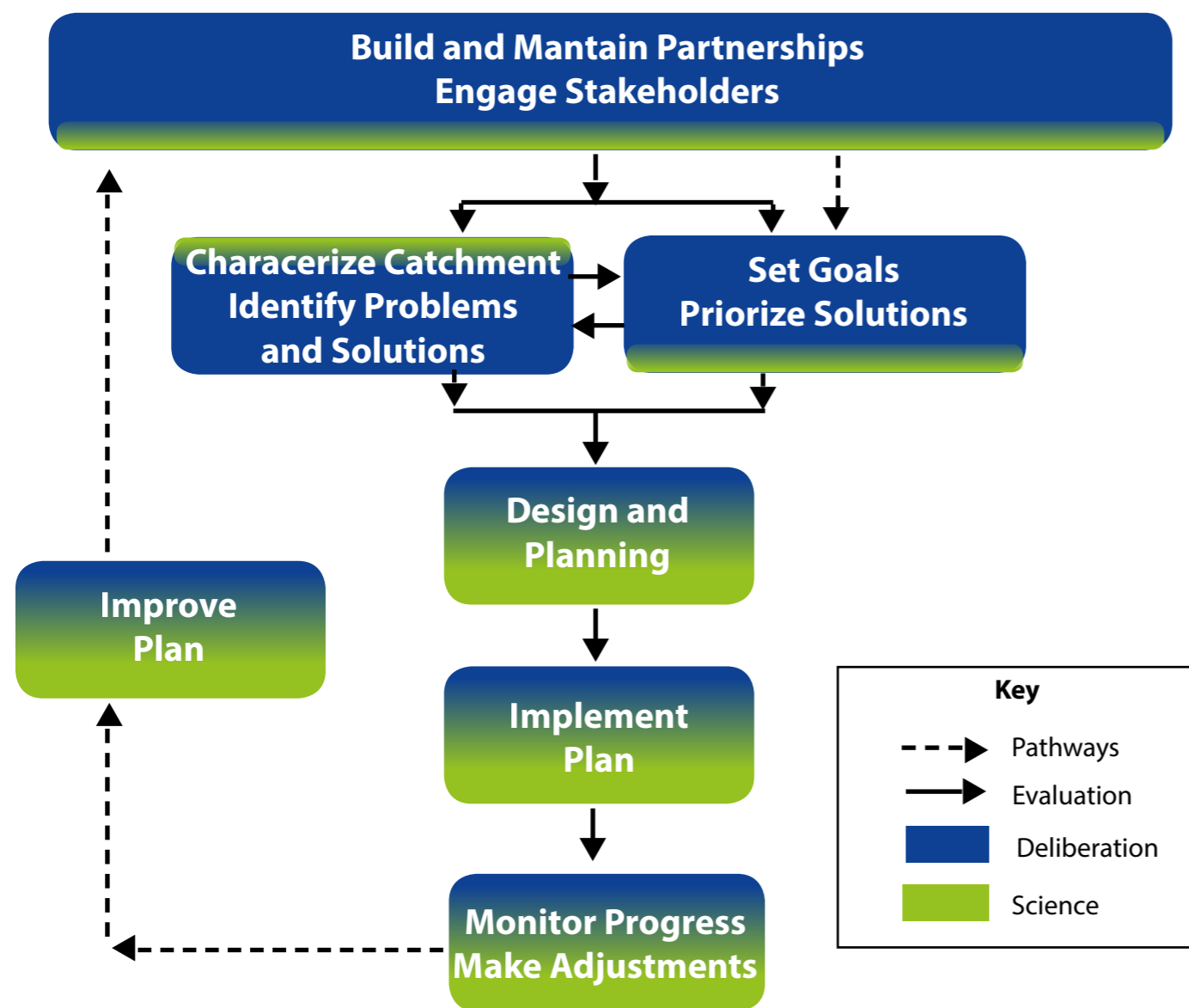
Source: RELU Research (www.relu.ac.uk)

Make sure your stakeholder engagement process is underpinned by transparent sharing of information

International experience has demonstrated time and again that a major reason for continued problems relating to the water environment (quality and quantity) is a lack of consensus over the nature, scale and extent of these problems amongst key stakeholders required to enact management change.

It is important that any stakeholder engagement process you run involves the transparent collation and sharing of data and is explicit about any uncertainties surrounding the data and current 'scientific conclusions' derived from available datasets.

Stakeholders are far more likely to take actions to rectify a problem if they fully understand and trust the scientific basis upon which the problem is defined. Great care should be taken to communicate information in a way which can be easily understood and, if necessary, scrutinised by stakeholders.

Modelling is likely be a key component of many pilots. However, model results have historically been created without stakeholder involvement, resulting in often poor levels of buy-in to model predictions. If you plan to use modelling as part of your pilot planning process, it is a good idea to involve stakeholders in model selection and development and in particular scrutinisation of data used.

Figure 3. Chain of conflicts
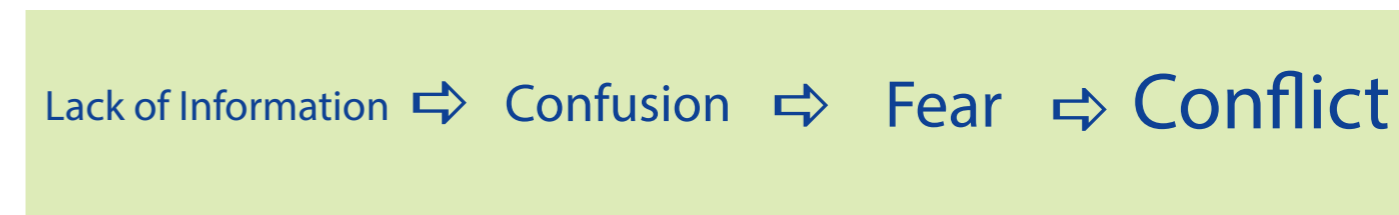
Try to identify win-win outcomes

When seeking to involve stakeholders it is useful to actively promote the objective of identifying win-wins at the beginning of your planning process. This will send a positive message to stakeholders who are likely to be less resistant to working with each other if they can see potential for mutual gain.

Don't go overboard

A common mistake made with stakeholder involvement processes is where those running the process feel they have to involve all stakeholders in all elements of the process and provide everyone with the same degree of control over the process. This is not so. In many cases it is simply not practical to involve everyone in everything and some stakeholders will naturally be more interested in getting involved in the 'nitty gritty' than others. As a rule of thumb, there will be a smaller group of individuals and active participants (Stakeholder representatives) with whom in-depth regular engagement and shared decision making will be appropriate. There will then be a much wider group of stakeholders (e.g the general community) with whom you should consult once proposals have been formulated by the smaller group but not involve them in the working up of the initial proposals per se.

Bearing this in mind, a well designed stakeholder involvement process is likely to involve communicating to some stakeholders more than communicating with them where as with other stakeholders the opposite will be true. Identifying who is who is something that should become clear during the stakeholder mapping and circuit riding stages of the process as outlined in Section 2.

Make sure you properly understand the role of facilitation

For people to buy into the idea of a new management approach, deviating from the what is currently been done, it is vital that they have faith in the technical validity of the decision-making process

used to develop the actions and goals. Perceptions regarding how decisions are made are crucial!

Trust in the process can be significantly enhanced through the use of well executed facilitation. As a guide, the following points may be useful.
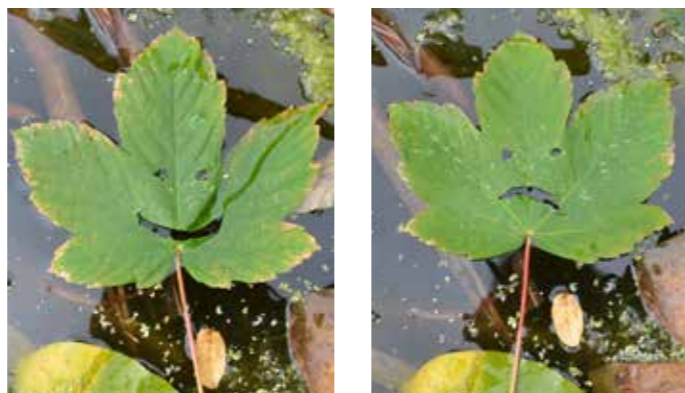
Do's

✓ Be clear on the objective of the meeting, and to manage the expectations on the outcome

✓ Allow everyone to have their say. Ensure 'quiet' participants feel able to contribute their views

✓ An ineffectual meeting leader can make the meeting seem like a waste of time, whilst an autocratic leader can result in resentment – a balance is required.

✓ Participants must feel their opinions matter (are being recorded / visualized), and that they are being treated with respect

✓ The facilitator must establish rules for meetings / workshops which are sanctioned by participants, thereby allowing the participants to own the event, not the facilitator. The facilitator should lead the process not the content. This is in particular important if the potential results of a meeting / process require commitment from the participants.

✓ Avoid symbols of authority and power e.g an entourage of assistants, expensive suits but make sure that facilitator acknowledged to have sufficient knowledge of the issue and the region

to be accepted by the participants.

✓ Test for consensus regularly – facilitators should sense where agreement is being achieved and verify this agreement with participants to avoid confusion and demonstrate progress is being made.

✓ If a stakeholder uses contentious or emotive language to make a point / ask a question, immediately paraphrase / reframe this point/question to the group in less inflammatory language (known as reframing) to reduce tension.

Dont's

× Judge or criticise ideas put forward by participants.

× Use the role of facilitator to push personal ideas.

× Make significant procedural decisions without consulting with participants.

× Taking up participants time with lengthy comments.

× Use acronyms or references which participants may not understand.

2 Designing and planning a stakeholder involvement process

The success or failure of your stakeholder involvement efforts will almost always depend on how well or otherwise you think through

a.   The fundamental reasons why you are involving stakeholders,

b.   What you hope to achieve,

c.   The resources you will need to achieve your aims and ,

d.   The particular methods you will need to employ to successfully engage with particular groups of individuals.

It cannot be overemphasised how important the design and planning stages of any stakeholder engagement activities are. To help you structure your thoughts, a step-by-step approach is provided below which outlines they key issues you may wish to consider when developing your own strategy.

Figure 4. Questions to answer for a succsessfull stakeholder involvement

Stage 1 – Clarify Objectives

It is vital to clarify scope of the pilot and the level of engagement required (see previous section).

It is also crucial to identify what stakeholders will and will not be able to influence within the pilot and proposed change in management regime. The last thing you want to do is raise peoples expectations regarding how much input they will have, only to then disappoint them at a later stage. Check with statutory authorities to determine whether there are any legal or procedural barriers to stakeholders taking a lead in making decisions or prioritising work.

Stage 2 – Institutional constraints

It is worth exploring whether there is genuine buy-in to enabling stakeholder involvement, both within your own organisation, but also within any partner organisations you may be working with. Remember that successful engagement and continued involvement may require you to be fully transparent with your data and knowledge and accept that some of the resulting ideas may not necessarily be completely in line with your/your partner organisations particular expectations.

Stage 3 – Consider resource requirements

You must identify who within your organisation needs to be involved in the design and implementation of your engagement strategy and whether you will require external assistance. It should be noted that stakeholder engagement can be an extremely human resource intensive process which inexperienced practitioners may not fully take into account. Also independent external support can guard your back so that you are free to engage fully into content related issues, and do not have to push both: your own interests as well as be impartial to all process participants.

In addition to the resources needed to manage and facilitate stakeholder interaction, stakeholder involvement processes will nearly always necessitate the collation and presentation of technical data. This is a time intensive process involving skilled scientific, GIS and data modelling personnel who will need to be fully incorporated into the engagement team and provided with sufficient support.

Stage 4 – Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping is a vital stage in the process as it defines which stakeholders you will be engaging with during the planning process. This stage involves drawing up a list of all parties who have a stake in the plan you are developing and can be divided into two categories

a) those people/organisations who may be impacted (positively and/or negatively) by the pilot activities and

b) those people/organisations who will have an influence over the actions/adoption of recommendations from a statutory, funding or delivery perspective.

Sometimes stakeholders will fall into both categories. You can list stakeholders using whichever categories you prefer but a) and b) above have been shown to be a useful starting point.

When selecting individuals within your map from a particular organisation, it is vitally important these individuals have sufficient authority to represent their particular organisation and make decisions on behalf of their respective organisation, in particular if you engage them to implement decisions. Otherwise, any actions agreed in subsequent stakeholder meetings will lack validity. Securing individuals of sufficient seniority to take part in stakeholder engagement processes can be a significant challenge and should be taken into account when considering resource requirements (see Stage 3 above).
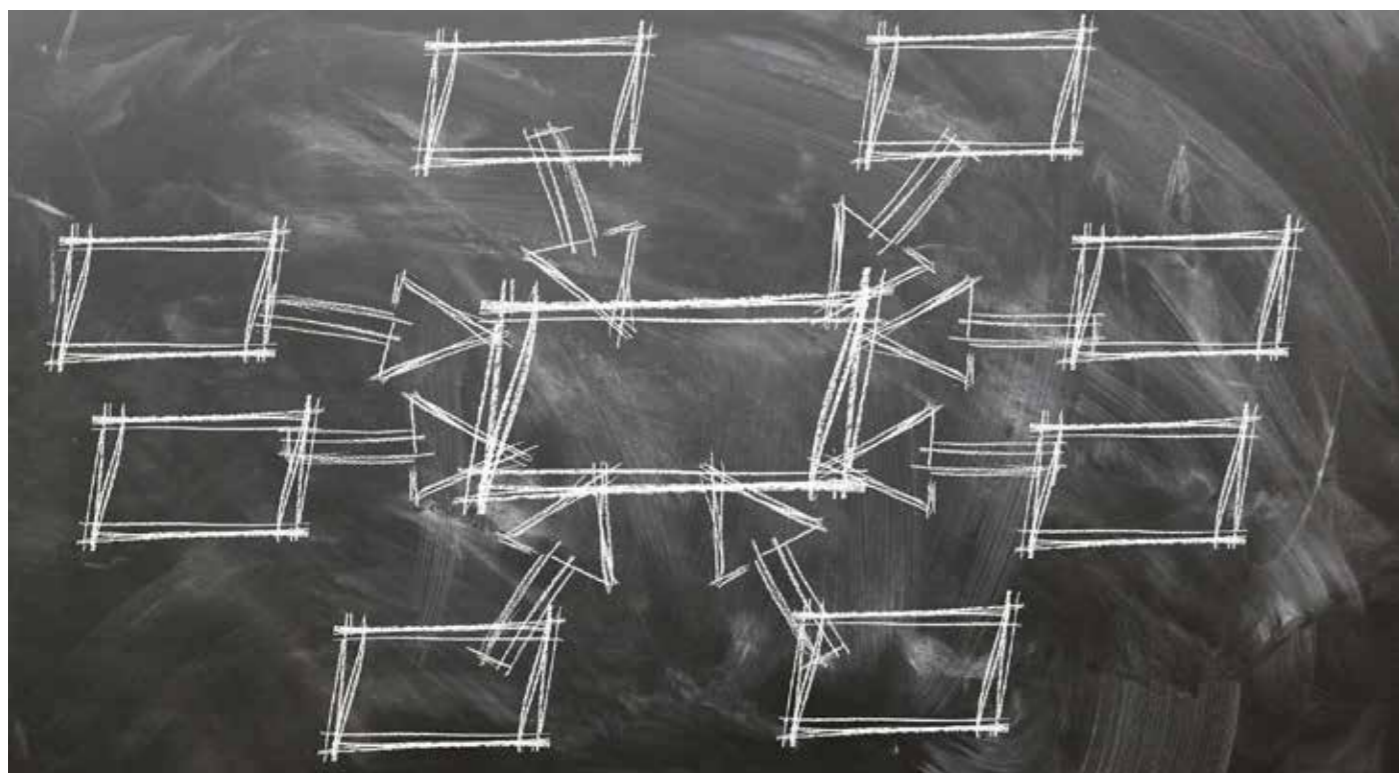
Stage 5 – Circuit riding

Having identified an initial list of stakeholders, it is very important to adequately prepare these individuals for the process they are being asked to engage with. Remember, many of these individuals may be apprehensive about attending meetings whilst some may be sceptical about the value they will derive from attendance.

International experience has demonstrated that the best way of preparing stakeholders is to make contact with them individually, either by telephone or ideally face-to-face. This provides an opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions and familiarise themselves with the details of the pilots.

Very importantly, circuit riding provides the practitioner with an opportunity to identify potential concerns and levels of controversy. Knowledge of these sensitivities is important when facilitating dialogue between stakeholders and also assists in the appropriate design of meeting and workshop formats where controversial issues are likely to be discussed.

Circuit riding also allows you to revise the initial list developed at the stakeholder mapping stage and identify additional key stakeholders through 'snowballing' i.e asking stakeholders you contact whether they are aware of other individuals who may be interested in getting involved in the process. This exercise often identifies individuals who are not readily accessible through published directories, websites etc.

Stage 6 – Select engagement techniques and prepare action plan

By the time you get to Stage 6, you should have a clear understanding of the level of engagement you wish to undertake with stakeholders, who they are and how best to communicate with them. The circuit riding exercise will have identified relative levels of knowledge across the different groups and the language they use to describe particular subject matter. All of this will help you identify which techniques will be most appropriate to use for the main stakeholder engagement exercise to follow.

Techniques for stakeholder engagement can loosely be divided into

a. Communication to stakeholders,

b. Information collection from stakeholders,

c. Dialogue with stakeholders.

There are a huge array of techniques which can be applied which are detailed in Section 3 of this guide. The important point to note is that use of these techniques is more of an art than a science with many practitioners choosing to combine techniques as they see fit within a given stakeholder engagement process.

At all times, avoid open plenary type meetings (e.g public hearing or public comment meetings) as these can often lead to speechmaking rather than dialogue and can also be hijacked by organised lobbying interests who appear more influential than they actually are. Try to make meetings as interactive as possible (e.g large group/small group meetings) and accept that you may well need to schedule a series of meetings or workshops to achieve your aims.

3 Initial stakeholder engagement techniques

Previous sections of this guide have outlined some of the key principles and planning stages worth considering when developing a stakeholder engagement plan. This section highlights a selection of specific engagement techniques which are regularly used. Please note this is in no way an exhaustive list, more a collection of some of the more popular techniques used by stakeholder engagement professionals.

Please also note it is not the intention of this guide to provide detailed instruction on using each technique, more to highlight broad strengths and weaknesses and applicability. Web links are provided to access greater detail on each technique, should the reader require more in-depth understanding.

Techniques can be classified into three main categories:

- ✓ Information dissemination techniques:

- ✓ Information collection techniques

- ✓ Deliberative techniques to generate dialogue and co-decision making

Readers should note that each given stakeholder process may utilise methods from one, two or all three of these categories depending on the scope and requirements of the process in question. There is no substitute for experience when choosing appropriate methods but we hope this guide will help you feel a little more confident when starting out in this line of work.

Please note also that the following list is a start – if you want to integrate your experience and your examples, please let us know. The list will be expanded throughout the project, and contribute to another TOPSOIL deliverable: a toolbox of stakeholder partcipation techniques.

For further reading on how to select tools and methods, the HarmoniCOP- Handbook "Learning together to manage together- Improving participation in water management" may be useful. (see HarmoniCOP –Handbook, p. 19).

If you need any support in choosing the appropriate tool, you are welcome to contact us!

3.1 Information dissemination techniques

Information about your project, the scope and the role of stakeholders there is the first step, often followed by a more or less regular update.
For choosing the right tool, you need to decide first:

- ✓ Why do you want to inform the people?
If you only want to create general awareness, without getting feedback, you may only need to get a publication into the local media. If you want enable the people to access the information, you need to create a "place" like a webspace or a maps which can be accessed again, e.g. a website.

- ✓ Do you want to get into personal contact, and stay in touch for later cooperation?

- ✓ Being there as a representative of a projects shows that you consider your audience worth spending your time with. It also puts a face to your project, and lowers the barrier to getting in contact. You can also allow for direct discussion – which may be in some cases also a bit confrontational and open.

- ✓ What is the interest and the field / level of expertise regarding the information?

- ✓ If you inform farmers about the kind of changes you intend to do to their irrigation water or their soil, the concern may be much bigger, and their agricultural expertise may not be sufficient to follow the technical aspects of a potential water management decision.

BRIEFINGS

Description
Verbal presentations at business clubs, social clubs etc

Pros

- ✓ Can reach a wide variety of individuals not usually involved on a daily basis with the subject matter you wish to talk about.

Cons

- ✗ Topic may be too technical and require much effort to make it understandable for the audience to process.

EXPERT Q AND A EVENTS

Description
Experts from different disciplines can be questioned by an audience of interested parties moderated by an independent facilitator ('Question Time' format).

Pros

- ✓ Presents opportunity for balanced discussion in the presence of a large audience.
- ✓ Provides an opportunity to clarify scientific uncertainties.
- ✓ This format is appropriate if some basic information is already spread around, and rumours or false evidence start to take over the public discussion.

Cons

- ✗ Requires significant organisation some pre-knowledge of potential concerns and issues, so that all necessary experts are available.
- ✗ Limited opportunity for audience members to interact between themselves.

INFORMATION KIOSKS

Description

A location where project information can be made available.

Pros

✓ An opportunity to reach a large number of people if placed in areas with large footfall.

✓ May be a good alternative to online tools, e.g. a website.

Cons

✗ Facility subject to damage and regular repair.

✗ Difficult to find permission to set up kiosk.

✗ May fail to attract attention unless made visually attractive.

EMAIL DISTRIBUTION LISTS

Description

Use of email circulars to disseminate project information.

Pros

✓ Inexpensive method for directly communicating with a bespoke list of stakeholders.

Cons

✗ Not all stakeholders will necessarily be email literate e.g farmers, older generation.

✗ Needs explicit agreement by each addressee to get email.

NEWSPAPER INSERTS / PRESS RELEASES

Description

Presenting project information in newspaper articles

Pros

✓ Provides access to a very broad audience.

Cons

✗ Can be difficult to generate press interest unless the plan is contentious.

WEBSITES

Description

Use of web portals to act as information repositories

Pros

✓ Potential for reaching a huge audience

✓ Relatively cheap to update information over time

Cons

✗ Not all stakeholders may be IT literate

✗ Stakeholders must be made aware of the website which can require extensive promotional effort

SOCIAL MEDIA

Description

Being present in the Social Media Networks (like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter...)

Pros

✓ Reaches well to stakeholders organized there already - check with target group.

Cons

✗ Stakeholders must be made aware of it, and needs a regular of information.

SYNTHESIS & KEY MESSAGES LINKED TO indepth resources

Description

Present Stakeholders with a syntheses of key messages, linked to further reading materials.

Pros

✓ Provides a quick overview over the main messages, and main points.

Cons

✗ Bears the risk of being too subjective, and favouring one stakeholders' perspective.

3.2 Information collection techniques

Collecting information can be central for monitoring purposes, e.g. having information on fish populations, but can also be of interest to get a better understanding about the underlying interests of the different stakeholders. In the following, three basic approaches for information collection from large groups (e.g. the general public) are introduced before the subsequent selection introduces tools for eliciting information from smaller groups.

MAPPING ACTIVITIES AT (LOCAL) MEETINGS

Description

Whether on large paper maps or using advanced GIS platforms, mapping information and activities is a common way to engage stakeholders.

Pros

✓ Engages local stakeholder and local expertise, helps to visualize e.g. "hot spots" for conflicting interests. Low budget forms can already be efficient

Cons

-

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

HarmoniCOP Handbook, p. 61

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Description

the involvement of the public in scientific research – whether community-driven research or global investigations.

Pros

✓ Combines raising awareness with generating data. If soundly set up, this may result in a broad source for additional data.

Cons

× Needs approach which is resilient to manipulation, and / or transparent in terms of data characteristics (locations,measuring approach).

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

www.climatescan.nl
An open source website for international knowledge exchange on sustainable urban drainage and spatial transformation in urban areas.

www.deltares.nl/en/software/nitrate-app/
Nitrate App for measuring nitrates and documenting results directly online.

https://freshwaterwatch.thewaterhub.org
A global community of citizen scientists to help promote freshwater sustainability.

COMMENT FORMS

Description

Forms included in bulletins, briefing packs or other literature which people can use to provide comment (free post).

Pros

✓ Can obtain input from people not likely to come to meetings or take an ongoing part in a stakeholder engagement process.

✓ Useful way of expanding stakeholder list and offering a way to stakeholders for getting in contact.

Cons

× Information collected is not statistically robust as the sample of respondents providing information will be self selected not randomly selected.

× Responses can often be very brief and lack important detail

STAKEHOLDER PANEL

Description

Panels are a much used research platform whereby a large representative sample of stakeholders are specifically recruited to provide opinion on a range of topics on a regular basis e.g monthly, quarterly. Data collection can be conducted by postal, web, telephone or face-to-face means .

Pros

✓ Can obtain input from people not likely to come to meetings or take an ongoing part in a stakeholder engagement process

✓ Can be a very useful way of tracking how opinions and views towards a topic change over time

✓ Can be a useful means of maintaining contact and developing rapport with a large group of people over an extended timeframe

Cons

× Can be expensive to set-up and maintain and members of the panel will need careful management in order to ensure continued participation

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.stakeholderpanels.net/StakeholderPanels_report.pdf

FOCUS GROUPS

Description

These involve bringing together 8-10 individuals (not more) to discuss a particular topic in detail using a 'topic-guide'. Can be undertaken online but best done face-to-face.

Pros

✓ Very useful technique for brainstorming ideas as participants within a focus group will tend to bounce ideas off each other. This dynamic atmosphere tends to stimulate creative thinking.

Cons

× Not ideal when very sensitive subjects are to be discussed as some participants may be hesitant to speak

× Needs a good design and requires a skilled facilitator. To avoid high costs, coaching the inhouse facilitator before may be an option.

× Information collected not statistically valid due to small sample of stakeholders involved

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-usability/focus-groups.shtml

http://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/pdf/2/h/How_to_Run_a_Focus_Group.pdf

http://www.focusgrouptips.com

DELPHI PROCESS

Description

Can be used to reach agreement on an issue amongst a group of people without the need to meet face-to-face. Participants are provided with an opportunity to comment on a proposal which is gradually refined over time (respondent comments compiled and sent out at each stage) until agreement is reached. Can be conducted on-line or using paper based media.

Pros

✓ Doesn't require face-to-face meetings which is convenient for many stakeholders. Very useful when stakeholders are geographically dispersed.

✓ Stakeholders can provide comments anonymously which is not possible in a face-to-face context. Can increase the frankness of responses received .

Cons

× Requires a skilled facilitator to ensure participants remain engaged in the process otherwise input can tail off significantly over time.

× Can be a time consuming process collating responses at each stage of the process, particularly when many stakeholders are involved.

Internet & Postal Surveys

Description

These usually take the form of a paper questionnaire or an email invitation to take part in a survey (respondents click on a link to a website where an online questionnaire is housed). The paper questionnaire or weblink can also be placed in any physical location or website to capture people who are not on any given postal/email list.

Pros

✓ Can obtain input from people not likely to come to meetings or take an ongoing part in a stakeholder engagement process.

✓ Can capture input from a broad cross-section of individuals not just the usual suspects.

✓ Useful way of expanding your stakeholder list

✓ In the case of online-surveys, data can be automatically collated, tabulated and put into graphs etc for quick communication to interested audiences (unlike pen and paper questionnaires where data has to be manually entered and processed)

✓ If organized as a telephone survey, the presenter may be able to respond to misunderstanding, and expand on complexer issues.

Cons

✗ Requires a skilled facilitator to ensure participants remain engaged in the process otherwise input can tail off significantly over time

✗ Can be a time consuming process collating responses at each stage of the process, particularly when many stakeholders are involved.

✗ Needs high methodological skills, else results from survey unlikely to be statistically valid as the sample of respondents is self-selecting not randomly selected.

✗ Technique only really appropriate for collecting basic quantitative information (using closed questions e.g yes/no) as respondents are unlikely to provide very detailed written responses on qualitative issues.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.surveymonkey.com

http://www.northsearegion.eu/watercog/
(see WaterCoG Survey on reasons for stakeholder involvement)

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Face-to-face Surveys

Description

This technique involves an interviewer contacting a sample of respondents and conducting a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire can be a paper version or an electronic questionnaire housed on a laptop, smart phone or other digital device. Respondents can be approached by appointment (if a list exists) or spontaneously through door to door surveys or on-street surveys.

Pros

✓ Same as for telephone surveys with the added advantage that visual prompts can be presented to respondents.

✓ Face-to-face surveys tend to yield the highest response rates out of all surveying techniques.

Cons

✗ Face-to-face surveys can be very expensive to carry out due to the human resource commitments required.

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3.3 Deliberative techniques to generate dialogue and co-decision making

The following tools and approaches may support a participatory process. They do need a clear objective, and a good design for bringing best results. In general, the offer different formats for exchange and dialogue between the stakeholders. In areas of potential conflicts, or well-established dissent they may help for generating new insights, and understanding, and, in the best case also new measures / solutions.

In a TOPSOIL pilot, where the process owner has got also a strong content-related position, the process design and implementation should be handed to an external facilitator (e.g. another colleague from another department, or a consultant).

Appreciative Inquiry

Description

Can be used to reach agreement on an issue amongst a group of people without the need to meet face-to-face. Participants are provided with an opportunity to comment on a proposal which is gradually refined over time (respondent comments compiled and sent out at each stage) until agreement is reached. Can be conducted on-line or using paper based media.

This is a systematic process which is based on understanding the best of the present and the past in order to develop and improve the future by doing more of what works well.

Typically, the Appreciative Inquiry process has four stages:

✓ Discover – work with stakeholders to inquire into the best of the past and the present.

✓ Dream – Use the findings from the first stage to create a vision for the desired future.

✓ Design – Agree the rules that will govern action from now on to reach the goal.

✓ Deliver – Gain agreement from stakeholders on what has to happen and who will do it.

Pros

✗ Generates significant buy-in from local community members if administered correctly as the process celebrates what is good about the past and present rather than focussing on problemsresponses received .

Cons

✗ Very time consuming and resource intensive on the practitioner leading the process. Community participants must be carefully supported to take ownership of the process.

✗ Process can raise expectations which may not necessarily be realised in the short term. The leader of the process must be committed for the long-term

✗ Some people view the lack of direct attention to problems as a weakness

Where applicable

✓ Can be used with all types of stakeholder although the precise format needs to be tailored depending on those involved

✓ Useful in situations when you want to build a vision of the future as well get people to work together to deliver outcomes in the short-term.

✓ It can help to deliver a shared vision and improved relationships and working together

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.appreciative-inquiry.co.uk/?idno=4

http://centerforappreciativeinquiry.net

http: // www.new-paradigm.co.uk/Appreciative.htm

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Charrettes

Description

Charrettes are a visual method of engaging people with a project which involves designing location or landscape scale features. Can involve single or multiple workshops with designers/illustrator sketching ideas as they are created by participants.

Pros

✓ Promotes collaborative problem solving.

Cons

✗ Not possible to involve large numbers of people so results may not be regarded as representative

Where applicable

✓ Can be used with all types of stakeholder to build a new or alternative vision for an area or site.

✓ Can be used at any stage in a stakeholder engagement process.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.charretteinstitute.org

Citizen Juries

Description

These involve a small panel of 'ordinary members of the public' who meet regularly over a period of time to discuss an issue, cross examine particular individuals ('witnesses') and make a recommendation at the end of the process.

Pros

✓ Very useful for enabling stakeholders to develop an in-depth knowledge of a complex issue.

✓ Helps local stakeholders scrutinise the assumptions and knowledge of recognised experts.

Cons

✗ Very resource intensive for participants and organisers.

✗ Only a few individuals are able to actively participate.

✗ Jury members often regarded as unrepresentative so outcomes of process often disputed (so selection process needs to be very transparent).

Where applicable

✓ Most appropriate for the exploration of a detailed issues rather than conceptual questions.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.partnersinsalford.org/citizens.htm

http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN04546#fullreport

Kitchen Table meetings

Description

Small meetings with members of a local community facilitated by a skilled practitioner. Often held at one of the participants homes.

Pros

✓ Non-formal setting often encourages increased dialogue from people who are not used to/comfortable with formal situations.

✓ Good way of engaging with hard to reach individuals.

Cons

✗ Can be resource intensive to set-up.

Where applicable

✓ Can be used at any stage in a stakeholder engagement process but particularly useful in the early stages of a process to gauge local opinion of specific groups

Deliberative Dialogue

Description

This involves the bringing together of people to deliberate and make choices on a set number of options, all of which are likely to cause conflict. The goal of this technique to find common ground.

Pros

✓ A very useful technique of agreeing an action plan where significant uncertainty in potential solutions is present and there is a high likelihood of polarised views.

✓ Can enable people to understand different perspectives and brake down entrenched positions on a particular subject.

Cons

✗ Requires a highly trained facilitator.

✗ Can only really accommodate up to 20 people.

✗ Considerable resource is required, particularly preparing for the process where participants need to be visited one-to-one to explain the rules of the process and gain agreement to participate in accordance with these.

Where applicable

✓ This technique is particularly useful where a stakeholder engagement process has developed a potential set of plan options which need further refinement and agreement from all key interested parties.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/dialogue.html

http://ncdd.org

Focussed Conversations

Description

This is a highly structured method of engaging people on a very difficult topic and involves a facilitator asking a series of questions in four stages:

a. Review the facts

b. Review peoples emotional response

c. Review what the issue actually means to people

d. Consider future action.

Pros

✓ A good way of people gaining a new perspective on an issue.

✓ Can lead to people learning to respect and understand others views.

Cons

✗ Resource intensive and requires a skilled facilitator.

Where applicable

✓ Can be used to quickly explore likely level of (dis)agreement on a given topicopinion of specific groups.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://flash.lakeheadu.ca/~kbrown/F2250%20Webpages/focused_conversation.html

OPEN HOUSES

Description

A technique which enables people to drop in (to a suitable location) at their leisure to discuss a range of topics at a series of bespoke information stations (each addressing a separate issue). Several people can sit in at each station.

Pros

✓ Enables interactive displays and maps to be presented.

✓ Enables people to share thoughts and learn from each other.

✓ Can obtain input from people not likely to come to meetings or take an ongoing part in a stakeholder engagement process.

✓

Cons

✗ Resource intensive as requires several moderators and support staff (need to be at each station).

✗ Can become taken over by organised lobbyists .

✗ Sometimes difficult to capture stakeholder input (need plenty of note takers and comment sheets).

Where applicable

✓ Can be used at any stage in a stakeholder engagement process to supplement deliberative (on-going) discussion with a 'core' group of stakeholders. Useful platform for testing ideas on a broad audience.

SAMOAN CIRCLES

Description

This is a meeting with participants seated in a circle within a circle with only the inner circle allowed to speak. Members of the inner circle represent the different viewpoints present. Anyone from the the the outer circle who wishes to join the conversation may do so by coming forward at any time and sitting at one of the inner circle chairs.

Pros

✓ Can accommodate up to 500 people so able to involve a large number of people in one event

✓ Can work very well with controversial issues

✓ Technique can prevent the polarising of opinions

Cons

✗ Resource intensive to arrange and facilitate (requires expert facilitator)

✗ Requires microphones and visual aids

✗ Discussions can become monopolised by organised lobbyists

Where applicable

✓ Very useful for reaching agreement on difficult issues.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.kstoolkit.org/Samoan+Circle

http://www.click4it.org/index.php/Samoan_Circle

STUDY CIRCLES

Description

A process which involves small groups of stakeholders working on particular elements of a plan and then coming together to draw the different elements together. Each group should be given a clear set of objectives.

Pros

✓ Can involve large numbers of people without all having to meet at the same place at the same time.

✓ Can lead to high levels of engagement as people have the opportunity to work on specific issues they are particularly interested in.

Cons

✗ Resource intensive to manage as can be many different groups.

✗ Can lead to a disjointed plan unless sufficient time is given for the individual groups to synthesise their findings. Requires good communication between as well as within working groups.

Where applicable

✓ Unlike focus groups which concentrate on understanding attitudes, study circles foster collaborative learning about a subject.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.sustainable.org/creating-community/civic-engagement/548-building-strong-neighborhoods-a-study-circle-guide-for-public-dialogue-and-community-problem-solving

FIELD TRIPS

Description

Can be used to provide stakeholders with first hand experience of a particular site

Pros

✓ A way of providing practical demonstrations which work better for some people than presentations.

✓ An opportunity to bring people together outside their usual territory which can produce creative thinking.

✓ Incorporation of social events within a ield trip can help to brake down barriers between disperate interest groups.

Cons

✗ Can often only accommodate a relative small number of people due to logistical considerations.Need to be linked to the context of the project.

Where applicable

✓ Particularly appropriate for situations where stakeholders need to physically experience a location pertinent to the subject matter they are considering/offering opinion on.

Description

A technique used to develop a community "vision" rather than the specifics on how to achieve the vision. Uses deliberative process to gradually refine ideas over time. The end result is typically a statement of possibilities rather than a definitive action plan.

Pros

✓ Capable of reaching a common understanding of issues and agreeing a shared vision for what is fundamentally important to respective stakeholder groups. Identifies whether any common ground exists to build in.

✓ Can help develop partnerships between different organisations.

✓ Visioning can have an education role.

Cons

✗ Can raise expectations for action which, if not met, can lead to disillusionment.

Where applicable

✓ Best use at the beginning of a stakeholder engagement process as an 'ice breaker' to bring different groups together to begin working together. This can lay solid foundations for more complex negotiations and trade-offs which may need to be made at a later date.

Further Reading / Case Studies / Examples

http://www.communityvisioning.org/overview.html

http://www.communityvisioning.org/about

Postscript

There is a vast array of literature on the topic of stakeholder engagement. This guide has been designed to highlight references to existing information sources which are considered relevant for Topsoil partners implementing project pilots. Readers are encouraged to follow up these references should they wish to explore particular topics in greater detail when developing their own plans.

Good luck with your processes!

Barry Bendall & Ilke Borowski-Maaser

Imprint

About Topsoil

The main aim of the project is to search for sustainable solutions and possibilities. The project will be working on improvement of water quality and quantity supporting environmental, financial and human benefits. The solutions will be identified within several sectors e.g agiculture, water abstraction, spatial planning. Topsoil is an Interreg project supported by the North Sea Programme of the European Regional Development Fund of the European Union.

www.topsoil.eu