



INDUSTRY

Guideline for community engagement

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Foreword from the Chief Executive

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is committed to encouraging industry to meet its environmental obligations and support innovation.

Much of the EPA's success relies on the partnerships forged between communities, business and industry groups, and all sectors of government. The EPA recognises the benefit of community input into the workings of an organisation, and in particular those that have an interface with the surrounding human and ecological environment.

This guideline has been produced to assist industry to improve its community engagement practices, where community interest in an organisation's activities is high. The guideline outlines the expectations of the EPA and establishes a protocol to assist industry to manage communication and engagement when activities impact on the community, or are perceived to.

This guideline has been developed in line with the overall objectives outlined in the *EPA Partnerships and Engagement Framework 2016–18*. The EPA has a designated community engagement team who are available to provide advice and support in growing your organisation's community engagement capabilities.



Community members, EPA staff, SA Health, Department of State Development, councils and local industry in Port Augusta, 6 February 2017

Terminology

This document uses the following terms as defined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Terminology

Term	Definition
Community liaison group	A community liaison group comprises self-nominated members of the community, and invitees from relevant interest groups and other stakeholders who have previously identified with an organisation. It is established by an organisation to act as a conduit between community leaders, key individuals, interested local residents and other stakeholders. The purpose of the community liaison group is to enable information exchange, and foster open conversations regarding the activities of the organisation and the community.
Communication and engagement	Communication is the sending and receiving of information and messages from one party to another. While it usually involves informing and telling, the EPA also recommends a two-way exchange which involves listening and responding. Engagement is actively bringing community and stakeholder voices into the decisions that affect or interest them. It involves dialogue, listening, responding and building relationships. Importantly, the fundamental principal of communication is to engage with interested people.
Community engagement plan	The community engagement plan is an outline of the engagement activities to be undertaken to communicate and engage with a community affected by or interested in an organisation's activities. It lists the types of actions and events, dates and responsible staff members that will undertake the work. The community engagement plan outlines the level of influence the community can expect to have with regard to the decision-making process of a project or program, and this is to be clearly articulated early on in the process.
Stakeholder	<p>Any person, business or group who has an interest in or is affected by an organisation's activities. It includes but is not limited to local landholders, businesses, residents, special interest groups, councils, the media, and parliamentary representatives.</p> <p>Depending on the nature of the project or program, scientists, academics or researchers may be interested in being involved. In order to properly identify project stakeholders, the organisation undertaking engagement will need to identify people who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are directly involved and/or affected • are likely to be affected or impact the process • need a voice¹.

When to engage

Early engagement is best practice and should ideally occur as part of an organisation's regular business activities, in order to ensure that the information needs of the community are met. This may include providing information in letters to impacted residents, community newsletters and regularly scheduling opportunities to meet with members of staff.

Often community interests does not exist, or are not apparent until there is disruption. When this scenario occurs it is important to act swiftly to bring the community in close to the organisation – to avoid people feeling alienated and in need of a third party (such as the EPA, traditional or social media) to hear their feedback and addressed their concerns. Importantly, the community as a whole is a stakeholder with

¹ Adapted from the IAP² Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement

experiences, solutions and expertise that can contribute to the overall outcomes of a project, program or service.

Engaging effectively with the community

Where there is a high level of interest from the community into an organisation's activities, it will work to meet communication and engagement objectives such as:

- Develop and maintain positive relations with stakeholders and the community by proactively identifying and responding to issues and seeking opportunities to improve community outcomes.
- Identify and report on issues raised by stakeholders, including follow-up actions undertaken.
- Acknowledge all public enquiries promptly, and answer or advise of further action within a reasonable timeframe, including the likely timeframe for resolution.
- Develop and produce a range of information material for the community for inclusion in letterbox drops, online content, newsletters, fact sheets, advertising and personal contact².
- Undertake a demographic analysis using the Australian Bureau of Statistics community profiles, to understand predominant non-English speaking language groups and organise the translation of information materials where required.
- Ensure key personnel are available to participate in community and stakeholder events and activities.
- Provide regular reports of community and stakeholder engagement performance.

This approach is aligned with a number of principles of best practice communication and engagement and risk communication both internationally, nationally and in the South Australian Government. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has established a well-recognised and adopted framework for the various levels of stakeholder engagement.

This guideline focuses on the levels of 'inform', 'consult', 'involve' and 'collaborate' of the public participation spectrum. A fifth level of engagement, 'empower' is when the community is provided with the opportunity to be the decision makers, and is not necessarily applicable in the running of a business and the types of engagement that it can offer.

It is important not to elevate the expectations of the community as to what level of engagement it can expect to be involved in – especially with regard to the establishment of a community liaison group. Being open and transparent from the beginning will ensure a successful experience for the organisation and its community.



² Fact sheets should always follow the 'what, when, where, why and who' principle and the EPA can provide guidance.

Table 2 – Techniques for incorporating the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

	IAP2 goal	Community	IAP2 commitment	Techniques
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	General public, elected representatives, residents, businesses, landholders and local community groups	We will keep you informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular communications • Education materials • Technical summaries
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	Residents, businesses, landholders and local community groups	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community contact points • Public information sessions • Stakeholder briefings
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Residents, businesses, landholders and local community groups	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community liaison groups • Face-to-face meetings
Collaborate	To partner with the organisation in aspects of the decision making process including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions	Community liaison group	We will look to you for direct advice in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting on aspects that the community is able to influence via the community liaison group

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #1

Starting the communication and engagement process

The stages involved in the on-the-ground delivery of stakeholder engagement can be summarised as:

- Stakeholder ‘mapping’, or determining who is impacted by the works. This is likely to include internal, external and other stakeholders. Before you start your community engagement plan, you will need to study your demographic.
- Undertaking a demographic analysis utilising the Australian Bureau of Statistics [Community Profiles](#), in order to learn more about your community and determine the predominant non-English speaking language groups.
- Analysing the likely interests or issues that might be experienced by different types of stakeholders.
- Determining what level of engagement is appropriate and whether there are any existing networks or community groups that may be able to be utilised.
- Preparing of introductory communications.
- Assessing program communications and engagement.
- Case management for key stakeholders.
- Establishing a community liaison group where the level of interest in your activities is high.

Better Together

The South Australian Government’s [Better Together](#) program has established a set of guiding principles to underpin all engagement with the community. The principles align with the IAP² spectrum which is widely considered to be the international standard in the field.

The principles are:

- 1 We know why we are engaging.
- 2 We know who to engage.
- 3 We know the history.
- 4 We start together.
- 5 We are genuine.
- 6 We are relevant and engaging.

These principles seek to:

- Establish a trusted presence in the community and build relationships with stakeholders to support stronger, clearer communications.
- Be empathetic and listen to the community’s issues and concerns to understand their perceptions and what is important to them.
- Be honest and transparent – be clear about what we know, what we don’t know, and what we are doing to fill the gap.
- Use simple language and graphics to explain the science and technical information
- Develop community understanding of the site contamination assessment or remediation process, timeframes and the review of results as part of a program of community education.
- Honour commitments, and conduct all engagement and communication activities with integrity.
- Acknowledge diversity, understand that communities represent a range of interests and points of view, and give consideration to people whose first language is not English.

All relevant stakeholder groups should be identified during the development of a community engagement plan, and include groups with specific information needs including non-English speaking demographics, schools, community organisations and local elected members (see Community Engagement Tool #2).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #2:

Developing a community engagement plan

As no two communities are the same, it is important that site-specific communication and engagement strategies be developed to respond to the unique issues and stakeholders for each community. The community engagement plan should outline the basis for all ongoing activities with the community. Key elements include:

Objectives

- How an issue or event (or everyday activities) has impact on a community and determine how engagement, for example with the establishment of a community liaison group, might be an effective way of structuring the community interface with your organisation.
- Determining what role the community liaison group will play and how this will be communicated.
- To advise the community on how the organisation will work with the program going forward and in this way.

Key stakeholders

- Detailed stakeholder identification and analysis of potential concerns.
- These should be the most comprehensive and exhaustive list of all interested parties you can think of that might be interested in your organisation's work.
- The golden rule is to reach out as far and wide as you possibly can, and in doing so creating a stakeholder database of contact information.
- The information you collate will naturally refine itself into the key people that wish to be engaged in a meaningful and ongoing way.

Engagement strategies

- Overview of the proposed approach to engagement.
- Summary of proposed mitigation strategies to address issues.
- Key project outcomes to form the basis of public communications.
- Communication and engagement tools and protocols.
- Schedule for implementation and identifying engagement activities against key project milestones.
- The role the community liaison group will play.

Key messages

- These are the organisation or project specific messages you need the community to understand, for them to be able to provide informed and meaningful input.

An example of a community engagement plan has been included as [Appendix 1](#), as a guide to indicate the type of considerations that should go into its formation. Each organisation will require different elements to be considered and incorporated that are not covered in this example. This approach to developing strategies will ensure stakeholder issues are dealt with in a consistent way across all sites, regardless of the lead communicator.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #3

Structuring meetings to ensure they are a success

It is important that the scope, role and objectives of the group is clearly defined and articulated before arranging the first meeting. Using the services of an independent facilitator can provide an opportunity to reduce bias, and also to benefit from the experience of trained community engagement experts.

Key logistical considerations include scheduling the date to avoid public and school holidays. Dates and times should be offered to suit the majority of attendees such as evenings during the week after 5 pm is essential for the majority of working people – weekends often prevent parents from attending. It is best practice to be flexible and allow the community to nominate times that suit them.

The venue should be a neutral location nestled within the community concerned. It will ideally be served well by public transport if that is a method of transport utilised by attendees. A local community centre, library, church, ethnic or bowling club can usually be found in most communities and will have the required facilities (toilets, kitchen facilities, chairs and tables, and audio-visual equipment).

Once the logistics are finalised the meetings should be advertised in advance, and invitees given the opportunity to nominate preferred times and locations if the one provided is not convenient.

Agreeing on the terms of reference at the first meeting may be useful in some cases, as will the implementation of formal agendas and minutes. Depending on the demographic of the community, it might be that a less formal and more friendly, inclusive type environment be created (eg staff and members all sharing a roundtable type space). The main function of the community liaison group is to establish and build positive, trusting relationships.

Members of the community liaison group should be instructed to be respectful of each other and act professionally at all times. Asking the group members to agree on an informal code of conduct at the first meeting may be helpful in establishing a protocol that will be applicable to future meetings.

Communications and engagement should be undertaken after introductory communications have outlined the scope of the community liaison group and to continue at regular intervals throughout the program, to build and maintain relationships within the community. Other face-to-face engagement are:

- drop-in sessions and individual resident meetings
- regular briefings for key stakeholders
- for large areas with wide interest, and where a longer-term assessment program will be necessary the establishment of a community working group might be appropriate, involving the lead communicator, EPA, local residents, councils or SA Health
- mail and email updates regarding the progress of the assessment
- educational information to build community understanding, results and next steps.

Key stages in the program delivery process should be considered when determining the communication mix and schedule for delivery. This will ensure the community does not only hear from the organisation at key milestones, but maintains ongoing dialogue to build trusted relationships.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #4

Preparing introductory communications

Introductory communications are the first interaction with the community and stakeholders in the local area. These communications should be underpinned with a relationship-based approach and demonstration of empathy for the community.

Depending on the level of community impact, this may include a combination of communications such as:

- introducing the site-specific issue and how the program of works will be managed going forward
- follow-up communications to establish contact points and commence building relationships with the community
- a feedback loop, consisting of a telephone contact number and email address, and an offer to meet with the lead communicator as a minimum
- face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders such as local council, MPs and schools who have been identified during the development of the engagement plan.

In preparing the introductory communications, the following principles should be addressed:

- letter communications to remain short, and addressing issues detailed above
- use supporting materials such as maps, figures or fact sheets where appropriate to supplement the information in the letter
- keep technical terms and details to a minimum during the initial phases of communication
- offer opportunities for the community to raise questions through different avenues including face to face, public sessions, phone or email as appropriate.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #5

Establishing a community liaison group

One of the most effective tools for engaging with a community whose interest in your activities is suddenly or progressively heightened, is the establishment of a community liaison group.

A community liaison group is comprised of self-nominated members of the community, and invitees from relevant interest groups and other stakeholders that have previously identified with an organisation. It is established by the organisation to act as a conduit between community leaders, key individuals, interested local residents and other stakeholders.

One of the keys to the success of a community liaison group is to ensure that no one is left off the invite list, even if not all wish to be involved to this degree.

The formation of this group should:

- allow feedback, issues and concerns to be voiced
- allow the community to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and organisations operations
- provide an opportunity for the community to have questions answered and followed up
- allow the community input where appropriate on the future decision making undertaken by the organisation on relevant areas of interest.

The purpose of the community liaison group is to enable information exchange, and to foster open conversations regarding the activities of the organisation and the community. To establish a community liaison group, an organisation should first take a step back and form an overarching community engagement plan.

Developing a community engagement plan enables an organisation to first identify all stakeholders that may have an interest in the activities. Through the detailed stakeholder mapping exercise that will be undertaken while forming a community engagement plan, an organisation can determine who the entire pool of stakeholders is likely to be and then how each group is to be engaged.

Frequency and duration of meetings

Initially it will be important to demonstrate the organisation's willingness to be open and available to members of the community, and the frequency of meetings can be as required. For issues that are constantly changing, meetings should be held when there is information to update.

As the level of interest dies down, the members of the community group liaison should be asked for their input into when the next meeting should be and a consensus can be determined by the group. The duration of the meeting should not be long or exhaustive that either staff or members become fatigued by the agenda.

Respecting people's contribution and creating a collaborative environment

Participants must feel that their contribution is valued. While the organisation is not paying for their time, make sure refreshments are available, especially if the session could go beyond an hour. Informal opportunities for people to network and debrief is important in developing the collaborative environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL #6

Independent facilitation – meetings and community liaison groups

There are certain circumstances and events that may benefit from having an independent facilitator at meetings. Facilitation enables both or more parties to have equal say and skilfully controls the meeting to prevent any one group from dominating the agenda or flow of conversation.

To independently facilitate a meeting or community liaison group, the facilitator should not be from the company, the EPA, or any organisation or person with a 'vested interest' in the outcome or topic.

Independent facilitators are professional consultants and charge a fee for their time. They are usually skilled and trained in behavioural relationships, and know how to direct meetings and liaison groups to be the most productive they can be. South Australia has many experienced independent facilitators, several of which are utilised by organisations that are involved with or licensed by the EPA.

Appendix 1 Example of a community engagement plan

Community engagement plan	
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To communicate with residents [where] that [what impact this has on the community]. To advise how the [company/person/government department/EPA] is going to work with residents, council and other stakeholders. To advise that the [company/person/government department/EPA] is establishing a community liaison group .
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents in the area of interest/concern. Residents in any specific sub-zones that have particular impacts. Current CT landholders in the above two areas. Councils. Community groups, interest groups, local business centres, etc. Local Members of Parliament (local, state and federal). The EPA. Members of the wider public. Highly concerned stakeholders, or anyone that has previously identified with the project. Media. Local schools and child care centres in or near the area. Other public institutions in or near the area. Housing SA case managers/regional directors.
Engagement approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored letter to residents advising that the [company/person/government department/EPA] is seeking to determine whether there is sufficient interest from the community in the establishment of a community liaison group. If there is a wider public interest, media release may be prepared for The Advertiser/Messenger/local press, etc. Website update, with community portal for local residents. Good news stories, document library and how to have your say.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The [company/person/government department/EPA] is seeking to determine whether there is sufficient interest from the community in the establishment of a community liaison group. Further information is available on our website.

Once the above table has been populated with details specific to the site and situation, a detailed action plan can be developed with appropriate timeframes, budget and responsible officer allocations.

Community engagement plan – action list	
Target date	List each action required to fulfil the above objectives, together with target dates and who will be responsible for completing each item.