



BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit

Part 2: Why engage with stakeholders?

Consultation draft 2013

BiodivERsA is a network of national funding organisations promoting pan-European research that offers innovative opportunities for the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.

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Objectives: Define why you wish to undertake stakeholder engagement and what outcomes you need to achieve. Begin outlining the scope of the engagement and the context.

The first, and perhaps the most critical, step in the stakeholder engagement process is to identify why the engagement activity is necessary, what outcomes are hoped to be achieved, and the scope and context of the engagement (AccountAbility, 2011). No stakeholder engagement strategy can be devised without considering the reasons for the engagement, and what is being sought from the process (AccountAbility *et al*, 2005; EDIT, 2007; REVIT, 2007; Gardner *et al*, 2009; Jeffrey, 2009; Anderberg, 2010; AccountAbility, 2011; Morris and Baddache, 2012). This initial step is defined as the 'preliminary' or 'scoping' phase because the scope and extent of engagement is defined at this point (INVOLVE, 2005; REVIT, 2007),

Case Study: European Beech Forests for the Future (BeFoFu) Project

The European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is deemed to be of fundamental importance for European biodiversity as a diverse array of organisms depend upon it. Beech forests are found only in a small proportion of their former range and the viability of these remaining forests are threatened by changing environmental and socio-economic conditions.

The European Beech Forest for the Future (BeFoFu) project evaluates the ecological and institutional background for Beech forest conservation and management in Europe, taking into account the additional challenges arising from global change.

Besides various national and sub-national activities at the European level, Beech forest conservation is predominantly addressed by the Natura 2000 network. However, this network does not necessarily safeguard Beech forest biodiversity at the local level. Across the EU, the implementation process of Natura 2000 has been impaired by conflicts and diverging stakeholder interests regarding forest management. The financing of Natura 2000 protected areas, particularly on privately owned land, remains a particularly crucial issue.

The BeFoFu team were approached to provide some information about the scoping process that was undertaken. Their answers are as follows:

Why was stakeholder engagement important?

BeFoFu deals with a politically relevant and controversial topic – the implementation of Natura 2000 in Beech forests. Hence, the results of the research being undertaken are of high interest for policy stakeholders. In the political science context, BeFoFu depends on the willingness of stakeholders to share their knowledge with BeFoFu researchers. There is a mutual interest (from stakeholders and the project team) to engage in a dialogue process.

Perceived benefits of stakeholder engagement to the research

The major benefits of the stakeholder engagement are:

- Provides a very good overview about the current “political environment” the project is embedded in and how it can contribute to better knowledge.
- An update about on-going policy processes related to Natura 2000 and forests.
- Identifying possible avenues for communicating project results

What has been or will be the impact of the research?

The long-term impact and legacy will be:

- A better understanding the likely effect of different (local) policies and management strategies on beech forest biodiversity.
- Revealing the likely impacts of climate change

- Greater knowledge on the effects of EU biodiversity policy at different levels.
- Results will be used to contribute to the discussion on the development of EU biodiversity policy beyond 2010.

Suggested activity:

In order to complete the first step of engaging stakeholders it is necessary to consider:

- The reasons why engagement is required (the purpose)
- What the project wants to achieve (the desired outcomes, or aims, and outputs)
- The extent and context of the engagement

The information gathered in this first step helps to provide the background to the engagement, set clear boundaries, and define the desired outcomes (INVOLVE, 2005; REVIT, 2007). In addition, this information can be made available to potential stakeholders, in an appropriate format, to provide them with some clarity surrounding why the engagement is being carried out and what it hopes to achieve. This will enable stakeholders to make an informed choice about whether or not they want to become involved with the consultation process.

This information is also of use in the final 'review' phase of the project when it will be necessary to considering whether the desired outcomes have been achieved. The project's success criteria can be defined from the original objectives defined from the original scoping activities.

The purpose and desired outcome of the engagement

A good reason, or purpose, for stakeholder engagement is essential and the reasons for engagement should be used to drive the desired outcomes and outputs. Outputs define the tangible products that are produced in order to achieve desired outcomes; such as reports, websites, newsletters, or data.

A good purpose will be focused, clearly defined, easily understood, with clear aims and objectives (INVOLVE, 2005; REVIT, 2007). Some reasons for undertaking stakeholder engagement, and desired outcomes, are provided in Table 2.1 below (INVOLVE, 2005; REVIT, 2007; Tompkins *et al.* 2008; Anderberg, 2010; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011):

Table 2.1 *Reasons for stakeholder engagement.*

- To gain trust and improve working relationships, form new partnerships, create new networks, and galvanize external support.
- Gain access to resources or to obtain information data.
- Encourage ownership of the project by those likely to benefit, be affected by, or interested in, research outcomes.
- Providing equal rights and access to scientific knowledge 'democratizing science'.
- To create new (or improved) communication channels and identify effective dissemination avenues.

- Improved clarification of language.
- Explore issues, share ideas and best practice, generate ideas and identify and raise better awareness of emerging issues.
- Co-designing projects with stakeholders may assist with clearer definition of desired outcomes.
- Provide people with an opportunity for personal development through engagement activities.
- Taking a broad spectrum of ideas and thoughts on board enables a more holistic approach to be adopted.
- Provide a clearer understanding of the benefits of the research.
- Assist in the decision-making process.
- Better policy decision made based upon stakeholder views.
- To better inform stakeholders and general public.
- Fully comprehend 'societal' wants and 'needs'.
- Obtain endorsement of, or agreement on, resulting decisions.
- Broaden the knowledge base, identify knowledge gaps and address information needs.
- Improve the relevance, value and depth of the research.
- Reduce conflict and overcome barriers between science, policy makers and society.
- Create better opportunities to link research more directly to policy and practice.
- Potential to reduce costs.
- Improved risk management.
- Enables researchers to identify cross-cutting issues and ascertain where research may be applied to other areas.

Identifying and clarifying desired outcomes is an important part of the planning process and helps to ensure that focus on achieving aims is not lost sight of as the project progresses (REVIT, 2007). The following table shows some of the information required in the first step; including reasons for engagement, desired outputs, and desired outcomes.

Suggested activity:

Draw up a table for your project, including its objectives, and list reasons for SHE, desired outputs and outcomes from the engagement

Objective of the project	Reason for engagement	Desired outputs	Desired outcomes
	To obtain further information.	Project report Website Data	A better quality product, with more information and endorsement and support from the stakeholders which clearly defines policy relevance.

Scope and context

In addition to establishing the purpose of the engagement, and its desired outcomes, it is also important to determine the scope, or extent, of the engagement and its context.

Scope

The 'scope' of the engagement determines where the boundaries of the engagement lie and assist in defining achievable outcomes from engagement activities. The scope considers what the engagement can realistically achieve, what impact it may have, and whether it will contribute anything to the project aims. If the proposed engagement presents no benefit to the project then it may be the case that participation is not appropriate or necessary (Fish *et al*, 2011). Scoping exercises helps identify stakeholders who might wish to become involved and ascertains whether adequate resources are available for engagement to be conducted (REVIT, 2007). The costs, both in terms of time and resources, of stakeholder engagement should not be underestimated at the scoping stage (AccountAbility *et al*, 2005; Gardner *et al*, 2009). Furthermore, risks associated with undertaking engagement need to be assessed and taken into consideration to ensure they are managed effectively.

Suggested activity:

With specific projects objectives in mind, identify responses to the following questions to consider the scope of engagement.

- What can the engagement realistically achieve?
- What are the limitations and how can these be clearly set?
- What likely impact may the engagement activity have?
- How might stakeholders potentially benefit or be affected by the project?
- How are stakeholders to be involved - are they to be kept informed throughout the project lifecycle, asked for their opinions, or involved fully in the decision making process?
- What types of information will need to be gathered (quantitative versus qualitative)?
- What additional resources might be required to facilitate effective engagement (staff training, external contractors, trans-disciplinary collaboration)?
- What will be the cost of engaging (both financial and other resources [e.g. staff time, cost of external contractors, and cost of training for staff])?
- What are the potential risks associated with stakeholder engagement activities?
- What are the potential risks if no stakeholder engagement is undertaken?
- How are the outcomes of the engagement going to be implemented?
- How and when will the outcomes be communicated back to the stakeholders?
- How will the success of the engagement be measured?

The extent of the engagement may, to some degree, be driven by resources availability. Considering the potential costs of engaging early on in project cycle will ensure sufficient funds can be made available to enable engagement activities to be comprehensive, fit-for-purpose, and beneficial to all parties involved.

Context

The scoping phase needs to consider the context of the engagement - the background to the subject being addressed by the engagement process. Every research project is unique and is shaped by the issues under consideration, the people involved, any historical activities, relevant wider decision-making processes; amongst other factors. These issues may affect what can, and cannot, be done within the engagement process and are likely to dictate which activities will be appropriate to adopt. Understanding the context also helps to ensure that the engagement process is built upon previous experience and incorporates lessons learnt;

rather than simply duplicating previous efforts. Defining context also makes certain that the engagement is of relevance to the potential stakeholders (Gardner *et al*, 2009).

Suggested activity:

With specific projects objectives in mind, identify responses to the following series of questions to consider the background and context for engagement.

- (i) What similar projects have been undertaken previously?
- (ii) How successful were the projects and what the key elements in achieving or failing objectives were?
- (iii) What stakeholders, or stakeholder groups, have been engaged in the past?
- (iv) What is the historical context to the project and how has this come about?
- (v) What wider decision-making processes which may affect the project need to be considered?
- (vi) Do existing networks exist and if so how can these be utilised?
- (vii) What is the relationships status with stakeholders or potential stakeholders?
- (viii) What are the potential issues that need to be considered?
- (ix) Are there any relevant activities, events or communication channels that could be made use of to engage with stakeholders?

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