

Guidance on stakeholder engagement for working groups and meeting organizers

The information below is intended to provide some guidance and inspiration to working group leaders or meeting organizers around stakeholder engagement. Much of the information is drawn from BiodivERsA's *Stakeholder Engagement Handbook* (<http://www.biodiversa.org/702>), which was designed to inform scientists working on biodiversity projects.

At the outset:

- Consider the reasons for the engagement. What are your aims and objectives?
- Clarify the expectations around the outcomes of the engagement and be realistic.
- Identify the benefits for both sides.
- Identify the available resources and limitations.

Identifying your stakeholders

Stage 1: Who are your stakeholders?

Consider all of the people or groups affected by, or who can influence, or may have an interest in the research. It may help to work through sectors of the economy or groups of relevance e.g. academics, public sector, private sector etc., or consider specific roles or functions e.g. data users, funders, policy makers etc.

Example categories could include:

- Government departments, politicians, policy makers and advisers (local, national, international); other national or international policy makers or policy groups (e.g. European institutions, environment agencies)
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Business and industry
- Landowners and managers
- Scientists and researchers working in relevant disciplines and scientists and researchers working across different disciplines
- The media
- The general public

Other useful methods for identifying stakeholders include asking one stakeholder to identify others, brainstorming with team members, consulting with colleagues, using media articles or historical records, using government data, or using existing lists of organizations that represent specific groups and forums.

Stage 2: Assess, analyze and prioritize stakeholders

Prioritize your list of stakeholders in relation to the necessity of the engagement, and their importance to and influence over the work. Not every stakeholder may

Stage 3: Understand your stakeholders

Seek information about your stakeholders' knowledge and attitude toward the research, their willingness and capacity, any relationships they have with other stakeholders, and how best to communicate with them.

When to engage

Levels of stakeholder engagement are likely to vary at different times throughout the working group or project's lifecycle. Consider when each stakeholder might make the most appropriate contribution. The most important stages for stakeholder engagement are shown in bold in the simplified project lifecycle diagram below.



(Adapted from Figure 4.1. BiodivERSA, 2014)

Ways to engage with stakeholders

The methods used to engage with stakeholders depend on the objectives, the required level of engagement, the timing, and the expected role of the stakeholder. Engagement can be participatory (two way) or informative (one way).

The most common methods of engaging include:

1. **Opening out:** This may involve opening up a dialogue and gathering information with stakeholders and can be useful in the initial phases. Opening out techniques include brainstorming, venn diagrams, and lists.
2. **Exploring:** You evaluate and analyze the preliminary findings with your stakeholders. This stage can provide ideas on how to proceed, refine, and check assumptions. Exploring techniques include categorization, mind-mapping, SWOT analysis, and timelines.
3. **Deciding:** You decide on actions based on the research findings. This can help prioritize the findings and areas for further research. Deciding techniques include ranking, prioritization, and multi-criteria evaluation.

Other engagement methods include interviews, surveys, informal contact, workshops, talks, demonstrations, citizen science approaches to monitoring, newsletters, and small steering groups. There are a number of practical method notes with guidance on how to implement some of the techniques listed above at: <http://www.biodiversa.org/577>

As a next step you could match the engagement method to the particular types of stakeholders as shown in the table below:

Examples of stakeholders and methods, based on appropriate levels of engagement⁹

Level of engagement	→	Inform		Consult	Involve		Collaborate
Method of engagement	→	Website	Newsletters	Questionnaire	Workshop	One-to-one meeting	Steering Group
Stakeholders	↓						
Govt advisors			x		x	x	x
Landowners			x	x	x	x	
Local Business			x	x	x		
Media		x	x	x			

(Table 5.2 BiodivERsA 2014)

Planning the engagement – The practicalities

In addition to the timing and methods of engagement, you might also consider who is responsible for the engagement at your end, any costs, whether any stakeholders will need to travel, and whether they will get reimbursed.

When working internationally it's also important to consider how the local culture might affect or restrict the engagement process, whether a local contact is necessary, and whether the timeframes are realistic.