

# Stakeholder Engagement

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## ADAPTING TO RISING TIDES PROGRAM

### This guide helps with...

Developing an approach for engaging stakeholders as part of a working group in an adaptation planning project to ensure that the necessary expertise, values and viewpoints are included in all stages of the assessment and adaptation process to build resilience to climate change.

### Starting points...

In testing and refining approaches to adaptation planning, ART developed good practices for stakeholder engagement to augment existing knowledge on leading and engaging stakeholders in planning and policy efforts. For readers who are less familiar with stakeholder engagement best practices, recommended resources include:

*Introduction to Stakeholder Participation.* Available at NOAA Office for Coastal Management Digital Coast website:

[coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/publications/social-science-series](https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/publications/social-science-series)

*Guidance for Good Practice for Communicating with Stakeholders on the Establishment & Management of Marine Protected Areas.* Available at OSPAR website under Programmes and Measures, Agreements, Ref. No. 2008-02. [www.ospar.org](http://www.ospar.org)



Another important starting point for this ART Good Planning Guide is to understand the role of a stakeholder working group in the ART approach to designing and conducting an adaptation planning project. As the figure below shows, the ART approach relies on having a project team to lead and staff the project. The team works with a group of stakeholders who actively participate throughout the project – both in and outside of project meetings. (See figure, next page.)

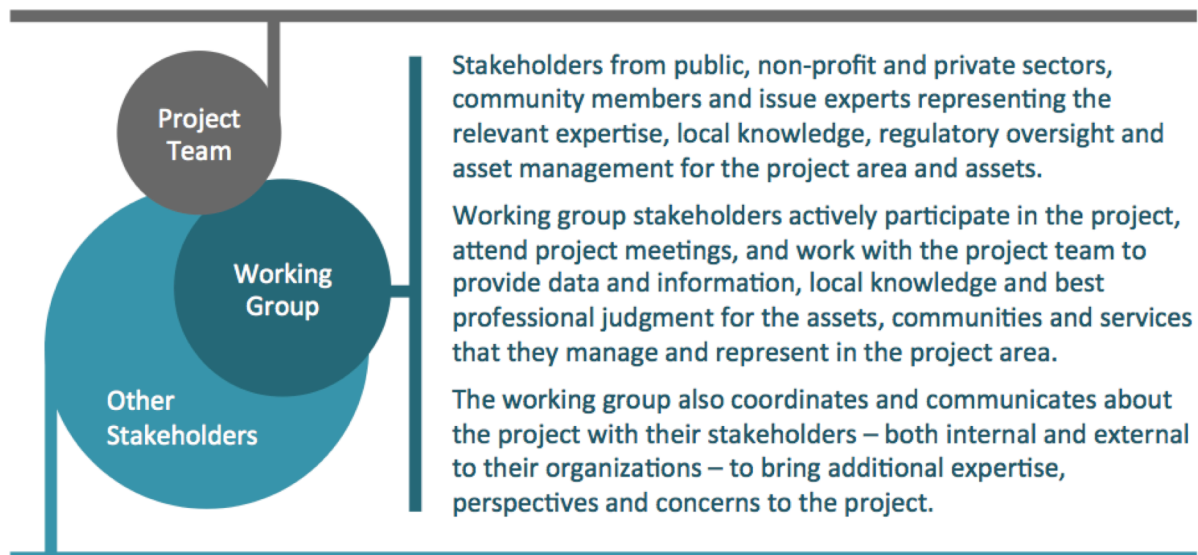
The working group members provide the local knowledge, expertise and perspectives of the agencies, organizations, communities, public and private interests in the project area that own, manage and/or are affected by assets and services that are being addressed by the project. The project team will rely on this group for information, feedback and guidance on the work products that the team prepares. Additionally, the working group helps the project communicate with a broader group of stakeholders (e.g., colleagues within the working group members' organizations, elected officials, community groups and members, etc).

The stakeholder engagement practices recommended in this guide are best applied in a project that is organized similarly to this ART approach.

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## PROJECT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE ART APPROACH

The team that leads and manages the project, engages the stakeholder working group, and completes work products including the assessment and development of adaptation responses for the project.



A wide range of organizations and individuals that have interests and perspectives that are related to the project scope, follow the progress of the project, provide feedback on draft materials, and comment on project components and outcome, but are not responsible for providing data and information. These stakeholders are not participating actively in the project.

# 1. The Long View

A key benefit of good stakeholder engagement is the development of strong inter-organizational relationships that can serve as the foundation for collaborative problem solving. This type of collaboration is essential for resolving the complex planning issues raised in adapting to climate change. Specifically, new and strengthened relationships can lead to successful knowledge sharing, coordination and cooperation among organizations that can support issue identification, prioritization, expanded funding opportunities and adaptation implementation.

Conducting a collaborative stakeholder adaptation project can also have other long-term benefits, including building capacity of the project team to lead and support a stakeholder working group in shared issue investigation and decision-making. This benefit should be weighed against potential ease of having a consultant in charge of project stakeholder engagement. A consultant might do an excellent job engaging a stakeholder working group during the project, but unless project team members are heavily involved and directly working with these stakeholders, it will be difficult for the team to gain experience and build the trust and relationships that will provide benefits for future work, including the funding and implementation of projects.

Although a less inclusive or collaborative process may be faster and easier to lead, ultimately this will limit the ability of project participants to reach a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues that extend beyond a single jurisdiction, agency or sector, and to build adaptation responses that take into account all aspects of sustainability, geographic scale, jurisdiction, and timing. If project resources are too limited for a collaborative planning effort, there may still be value to conducting a single sector or single-issue assessment with the intention of using this to build towards more complex and integrated assessments.

## TAKING ACTION

### Valuing the Collaborative Process

In developing a plan to engage a stakeholder working group in the project, consider the following:

- In scoping the project dedicate time and resources for the project team to actively engage the working group.
- If team members are not familiar with meeting planning and facilitation, seek training or assistance to build their capacity before starting the project.
- Use consultant support strategically, for example to conduct specific shoreline or economic analyses that are beyond the expertise of the project team or the working group.
- In a collaborative project, the project team will often need to develop and present content, lead interactive engagement activities, and incorporate the stakeholder working group feedback into resulting products. Plan appropriately so that the team has the time and resources to do this well.
- The project team should openly recognize and acknowledge mistakes or missteps, and learn from these by making adjustments, thereby earning the trust of the working group.

## 2. Not Just the Usual Suspects

The scale of climate impacts means there are a number of complex, inter-related issues that need to be evaluated and addressed in adaptation planning. These issues require the expertise and perspectives of stakeholders from different interests and backgrounds, many of whom have not had an opportunity to work together or understand each other's perspectives in the past.

Project staff team should, at the start of the project and on an ongoing basis, identify and involve stakeholders as part of the project working group who can responsibly represent the relevant areas of expertise, asset management responsibilities, and regulatory oversight, as well as the perspectives and concerns of the communities and organizations within the project area. The result of this is the convening of a working group of “unfamiliar” faces, which is one of the biggest benefits realized by participants and can result in moving more quickly on adaptation approaches. Other benefits include:

- Providing a setting for diverse stakeholders to coordinate, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the issues (climate-related and otherwise) contributing to vulnerability and risk.
- Preparing working group members to implement adaptation responses – particularly those that address information gaps and management challenges – that require new coordination among diverse groups.

### TAKING ACTION

#### Stakeholder Identification

Questions<sup>1</sup> to help identify stakeholders throughout the planning process.

- What assets, services and facilities exist in, cross through or are near to the project area?
- Who are the primary stakeholders that own/manage/have responsibility for these assets?
- In general, what are the consequences of the climate impacts on these stakeholders and their assets? For example would there be consequences within and/or outside the project area on:
  - public health and safety
  - people where they live, work, commute and recreate
  - the environment, e.g., services provided such as habitat or flood risk reduction
  - the economy at any number of scales (local to national)
  - current management, regulatory or funding practices

<sup>1</sup>Modified from *Guidance for Good Practice for Communicating with Stakeholders on the Establishment & Management of Marine Protected Areas*. Available at OSPAR website under Programmes and Measures, Agreements, Ref. No. 2008-02. [www.ospar.org](http://www.ospar.org)

# 3. Building Trust

Stakeholders' participation in any planning process outside their usual scope of work is challenging for many reasons, including a lack of resources, commitment from decision makers or managers, and differences in institutional processes, cultures, and regulations. Participating in adaptation planning can create additional, and sometimes unique, challenges for stakeholders. Ensuring that trust is built and maintained throughout the project is essential to keeping stakeholder interest and involvement. This trust is built by:

- Developing a clear and transparent process from the beginning
- Delivering promised work products and responding to and incorporating feedback
- Respecting the time and energy spent by the working group members
- Doing the homework necessary to understand the issues and the perspectives.

Communications – both internal and external to an adaptation planning effort – can play a significant role in building, or if poorly done, eroding stakeholder trust. Working with the stakeholder working group early on to agree on communications practices that specifically address their concerns can set a project on good footing. Determining to whom, when and how information about the project findings will be released is critical to ensuring that your working group members have time to communicate to their audiences before you do. Stakeholders involved in a project have their own stakeholders, and because many complex issues, such as climate adaptation can be sensitive, it is important not to “get out ahead” of project participants by publicizing information and outcomes prior to determining how to communicate the information most effectively. Often a better approach is to assist stakeholders in taking the lead in communicating about the project by providing translated materials, presentations, or issue statements that they can use and share. Additionally, having working group members help to shape the way information is communicated ensures that diverse perspectives and values are incorporated into the project along the way.

## TAKING ACTION

### Communicating about Communications

#### *Form a Communications Subcommittee*

Ask a subset of stakeholders to form a Communications Subcommittee that will provide additional support, feedback and guidance to the project team throughout. Begin the work of this subcommittee by developing a plan for communications practices (see below) for the project that can be shared with the larger stakeholder group.

#### *Agree on Communications Practices*

A set of communications practices and guidelines *for the project* developed jointly by the project team and stakeholders could address the following:

- Communication goals, including whether a primary focus of the project is as a communication effort
- Audiences the project may need to communicate with beyond project stakeholders
- How potentially sensitive information or project outcomes will be communicated
- Key project milestones and opportunities for information sharing with a broader audience

The trust that builds as the project team and working group adhere to the agreed upon communications practices will help the project navigate challenging steps later in the process, such as identifying priority adaptation responses for implementation.

Lastly, following through on integrating stakeholder input and feedback after it is solicited is a key contributor to building and maintaining trust. In most cases, mistakes or stumbles in the planning process are far less damaging to stakeholder trust than if the project team fails to respond to stakeholder input and ideas, even if they are framed as concerns and critiques about the project.

## TAKING ACTION

### Stakeholders as Communicators

Support stakeholders in effectively communicating about the project to their own stakeholders by providing them with materials that clearly frame the project goals, objectives and outcomes. Examples communication materials include:

- Clear project description (A project “Elevator Speech”)
- An overview slideshow or video about the project to share
- Nice handouts in easy-to-share formats
- Graphics and/or slides to add to their presentations
- Concise easy to understand summaries of assessment findings

Project staff will also need to make themselves available to respond to requests for assistance from stakeholders to help them develop customized communication materials or to make presentations to stakeholders agencies and organizations.

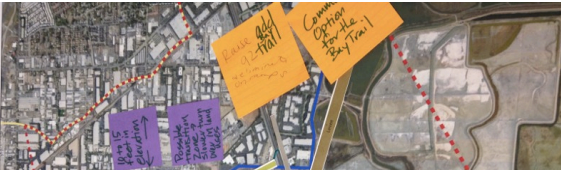




## 4. Good Meetings

Adaptation planning involves new issues, unusual complexities (e.g., long timeframes and multiple scales of analysis) as well as unfamiliar terminology. To help a stakeholders meaningfully contribute to an adaptation planning project it is important to give them multiple and diverse opportunities to hear about and ask questions concerning the content and approach to each step in the process.

Good practices that make efficient use of the working group's time before, during and after project meetings do the following:

- Preview the approach and expected outcomes of each planning process step early on in the process to reduce stakeholder unease about the outcomes and value of participating.
  - Demystify unfamiliar adaptation planning process steps by providing stakeholders mini-trainings before the project initiates these steps. In particular, ensure that the approach being used for the vulnerability assessment is accurately characterized for the project. For example, will data and information be qualitative, quantitative or both? It can also help to translate adaptation terms into those that are used within their organizations, agencies and communities.
  - Prepare information and work products that are as complete as possible and ask the working group to fill in gaps, provide corrections, and offer feedback.
  - Do your “due diligence” between meetings. Review available resources and examples from other planning efforts and look for other events that have created local or regional disruptions or disasters such as economic downturns, hazards and strikes. Because there is so much information that can be leveraged for an adaptation planning process, new studies are often unnecessary. Documents such as Housing Elements, General Plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, environmental analyses, implementation and operations plans and capital improvement plans can be used to develop draft work products, and mean that there is rarely a need to start efforts from scratch. Follow-up individually with working group members to discuss and gather specific information or input that might be needed.
  - Mix in a wide variety of approaches to present information and obtain input and feedback, such as engagement exercises, discussions, shorter presentations, poster sessions and guest speakers. This keeps the project dynamic.
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- An aerial photograph of a city grid with various planning overlays. A red dashed line runs diagonally across the map. A blue line runs horizontally. Several yellow sticky notes are placed on the map. One note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the left. Another note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A third note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A fourth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A fifth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A sixth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A seventh note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. An eighth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A ninth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right. A tenth note says 'Plan in Planning' with an arrow pointing to the right.



## TAKING ACTION

### Carrying Over Topics

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Rather than trying to complete an adaptation planning step from start-to-finish at a single meeting, carry-over topics and tasks from meeting to meeting. For example:

*First meeting* – Introduce a step in the planning process along with draft content (e.g., information about existing conditions and stressors at the start of the Assess step) developed by the project team – perhaps in an interactive format, such as a presentation followed by an exercise or discussion in small groups.

*Between meetings* – Write up and send out detailed meeting notes ASAP. Revise content and analyses based upon stakeholders' responses, critiques and questions during the meeting, as well as follow-up conversations with individual stakeholders. Send out revised work products to stakeholders at least a week in advance of the next meeting.

*Second meeting* – Walk stakeholders through the revised content (because most will not have had time to review these materials on their own) and then facilitate discussion and feedback. Set a deadline (usually a week or two later) for providing additional feedback by phone or email.

*After second meeting* – Write and send out detailed meeting notes ASAP and remind about the feedback deadline. Integrate additional feedback into a more finalized work product (e.g., climate impacts list, summary of existing conditions, asset vulnerability and risk profile sheets, etc) and share with stakeholders.