

Developing a stakeholder engagement plan

A guide



Introduction

The information in this guide aims to provide assistance to Hort Innovation delivery partners in the development of a stakeholder engagement plan for projects that are either in the planning or an active delivery phase. A stakeholder engagement plan provides the framework for identifying existing, new and past stakeholders who can assist in contributing to project success through supporting the development of communications, collaboration and engagement initiatives. The stakeholder engagement plan can be used to complement Hort Innovation's Communications and Extension Strategy planning tools.

Objective of a stakeholder engagement plan

The objective of a Stakeholder engagement plan is to help identify and develop strong and valuable partnerships with a range of stakeholders associated with a particular project or industry value chain network. Identifying existing and potential new partnerships will help generate collaborative opportunities in project activities that help support information and knowledge sharing and the amplification of research, development and extension (RD&E) outcomes to growers and other value chain stakeholders.

Outcomes of a stakeholder engagement plan

The outreach and capacity of the project to service growers needs (and enhance communication by RD&E delivery teams) is achieved through the ability to establish long-term partnerships with a range of government and private sector organisations, researchers, consultants and advisers associated with the value chain.

The project is able to successfully define its "value proposition" statement capturing core project philosophies and outcomes. This is supported through having provided a clear statement of opportunity and benefit to both existing and potential partners.

Project activities and impact are amplified through having developed strong and enduring partnerships and is therefore able to achieve greater impact at the grower level.

A planned approach has recognised and engaged stakeholders, identifying opportunities that have strengthened relationships and enhanced collaboration and participation that in turn has contributed to overall project success.

Steps in undertaking a stakeholder engagement plan Identifying (and defining) the stakeholders is best carried out as part of a small project team that is engaged in project delivery activities linked with along relevant value chains and knowledge systems.

Learning from past project investments, research studies and Strategic Investment Plans (SIPs) is recommended.

A stakeholder engagement plan can be completed using Figure 1 and involves a 6-step process:

1. Identification of stakeholders and current relationships
2. Partnership roles and contributions
3. Overcoming partnership constraints
4. Engagement strategies and frequency
5. Identifying required resources
6. Responsibility for actions.

Step 1. Stakeholder identification and relationship status (the “who”)

Specific stakeholders listed are assigned to a range of categories in Figure 1. When undertaking this task, it is important to brainstorm all prospective organisations and key contacts that offer the potential to “add value” to project development and delivery. These include stakeholders who you may have worked with in the past (but no longer do so), and situations where there is no current relationship with a stakeholder.

The current relationship status is entered into the figure using the 4-quadrat classification system (as presented in Figure 1), relating to the current perceived value and strength. Through allocating each stakeholder to the one of the four quadrats, specific actions can be tailored to help strengthen stakeholder engagement and participation. It is also important to focus on partnerships described as having both a strong relationship and high relationship value (quadrat D) or who has the potential to transition to this category (from quadrat B).

Figure 1. Interpreting the placement of stakeholders into the four quadrats



Step 2. Partnership roles and contributions (the “value-adds”)

List briefly the specific role that the stakeholder will bring to the partnership in the table. These can be aligned to specific project activities or outputs, or the “value-adds” that the partnership is likely to contribute. This also addresses “the why” behind the engagement with the specific stakeholders.

Step 3. Overcoming partnership constraints

List the specific constraints (or barriers) to establishing and building relationships and importantly the required actions to overcome these. Examples may include a possible lack of clarity on project focus and deliverables (that could be addressed through stakeholder communication and briefing).

Step 4. Engagement strategies and frequency

The engagement strategy for each of the identified partners is undertaken through a Stakeholder

Mapping process. Stakeholders may require a range of approaches to communication and engagement as summarised in Figure 2. More effort will be required in establishing new relationships or strengthening weak ones. Specific actions may include scheduling regular catch-ups, communicating planned activities or seeking feedback on collaborative activities and events. Indicate the frequency of engagement, keeping in mind the more regular the communication, the stronger the relationships.

Figure 2. Stakeholder Mapping Process providing guidance on the approach to communicating and engaging with stakeholders



Step 5. Identifying required resources

Identify any specific resources and additional support that may be required for the engagement and communication actions. This may include the production of a regular newsletter, face to face meetings, workshops, on-line webinars, support in social media communications.

Step 6. Responsibility for actions

It is important to define the roles and responsibilities of project team members as well as project partners who are actively involved. This will help to serve as a check list to monitor activities and actions.

Other considerations

When implementing a Stakeholder Engagement Plan there are a number of factors to take into consideration:

- Why stakeholders want to be engaged
- What information stakeholders require (and need)
- How stakeholders want to receive information and how often, taking into any specific barriers to communication (language difficulties, technological barriers to accessing information)
- Who is responsible for the engagement (clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of project team members)
- Key messages and how these link to communications initiatives, including a well-planned approach to communication initiatives well in advance of actioning
- Characteristics of the audience and special considerations (e.g., engagement barriers, attitudes to risk, access to knowledge, information interests)
- Ensuring that there is sufficient resources and expertise to ensure successful stakeholder engagement and communication
- Identifying strategies for enhancing regular communication and relationship building in an efficient and effective manner
- Regularly obtain feedback from your stakeholders and partners in terms of their level of satisfaction in project communication and personal relationships.

All Hort Innovation projects must link with any industry development and communications projects for the relevant industry. These are critical engagement pathways. These projects can aid the communication of project outputs and outcomes and provide assistance with industry knowledge transfer events. Acknowledge these pathways in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan as applicable.

For further information, please contact the relevant Project Manager at Hort Innovation.



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