Department of Health

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

"… effective stakeholder engagement is increasingly contributing to organisational resilience and flexibility, to learning and innovation, to the identification of new opportunities, and ultimately to the improvement of sustainable performance."

AccountAbility.
AA1000SE Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner's Perspectives. 2005.

Australian Government
Department of Health

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Stakeholder Engagement and Health

Every day, across all of the department's activities at every level, we engage with people who have a vested interest in what we do and who are, in some way, connected to our purpose. The quality of these relationships with our stakeholders will determine how well we deliver on our vision for better health and wellbeing for all Australians, now and for future generations.

The Department of Health is committed to two-way open communication that involves listening to our stakeholders, keeping them informed and being clear about how their contributions are being used. Having clear expectations keeps the ongoing work understandable, rewarding and focused. This approach is about recognising and understanding the values, beliefs, perceptions and ideas of our stakeholders - not simply just agreeing. Developing relationships that reflect this shared understanding enables differences to be acknowledged and expressed. It provides the basis upon which real dialogue and interaction can occur.

Purpose of the Framework

The Stakeholder Engagement Framework outlines the models for engagement, our key actions, our capability improvement agenda, our approach to risk oversight and management, and our performance framework, drawing each back to our strategic priorities:

- better health outcomes and reduced inequality through greater stakeholder engagement
- affordable, accessible, efficient, and high quality health system through collaborating and partnering with others, and
- better sport outcomes.

The framework sets out a strategic approach to stakeholder engagement that includes:

- principles to guide our engagement approach
- a five step model for conducting engagement activities
- a matrix to support tailoring the level of engagement to the task, recognising that tools and strategies must be fit-for-purpose, and appropriate to the issues on which we are seeking to engage
- challenges to consider, and
- strategies for success.

The stakeholder engagement framework is supported by detailed guidance, tools and templates, together with learning and development and a stakeholder management system to support staff throughout the department in planning, designing, undertaking and evaluating stakeholder engagement activities.

Principles for engagement

The department has adopted five key principles to guide stakeholder engagement activities. The principles set the standards to which we aspire in building consistent, open and respectful working relationships and were agreed to following extensive consultation within the department.

The principles have been tested against and are consistent with current stakeholder engagement standards and practices across the public and private sectors, locally and internationally.

Purposeful - We begin every engagement with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve

- While our engagement will be driven by our strategic priorities, we must be aware of our stakeholders' objectives, environment, expertise and level of influence.
- When we know why we need to engage and we agree on what success looks like, it is easier to conduct focused and meaningful engagement.
- By planning our communication and managing expectations, we aim to build lasting goodwill with stakeholders participating in the process and develop an understanding about their capacity to engage.

Inclusive - We identify relevant stakeholders and make it easy for them to engage

- We identify and enable the participation of those people and organisations who contribute to, influence, or are affected by our work. This includes those that may be harder to reach for reasons such as language, culture, age or mobility.
- We provide our stakeholders with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way

Timely - We involve stakeholders from the start and agree on when and how to engage

- We will clearly identify and explain the engagement process, and negotiate with stakeholders, where possible, as to timelines.
- This includes meeting schedules, and response times for information requests or feedback.

Transparent - We are open and honest in our engagement and set clear expectations

- We will provide information so stakeholders can participate in a meaningful way and will foster a culture of sharing ideas.
- We will clearly identify and explain the engagement process, the role of stakeholders in the engagement process, and communicate how their input will inform the project.

Respectful - We acknowledge and respect the expertise, perspective, and needs of stakeholders
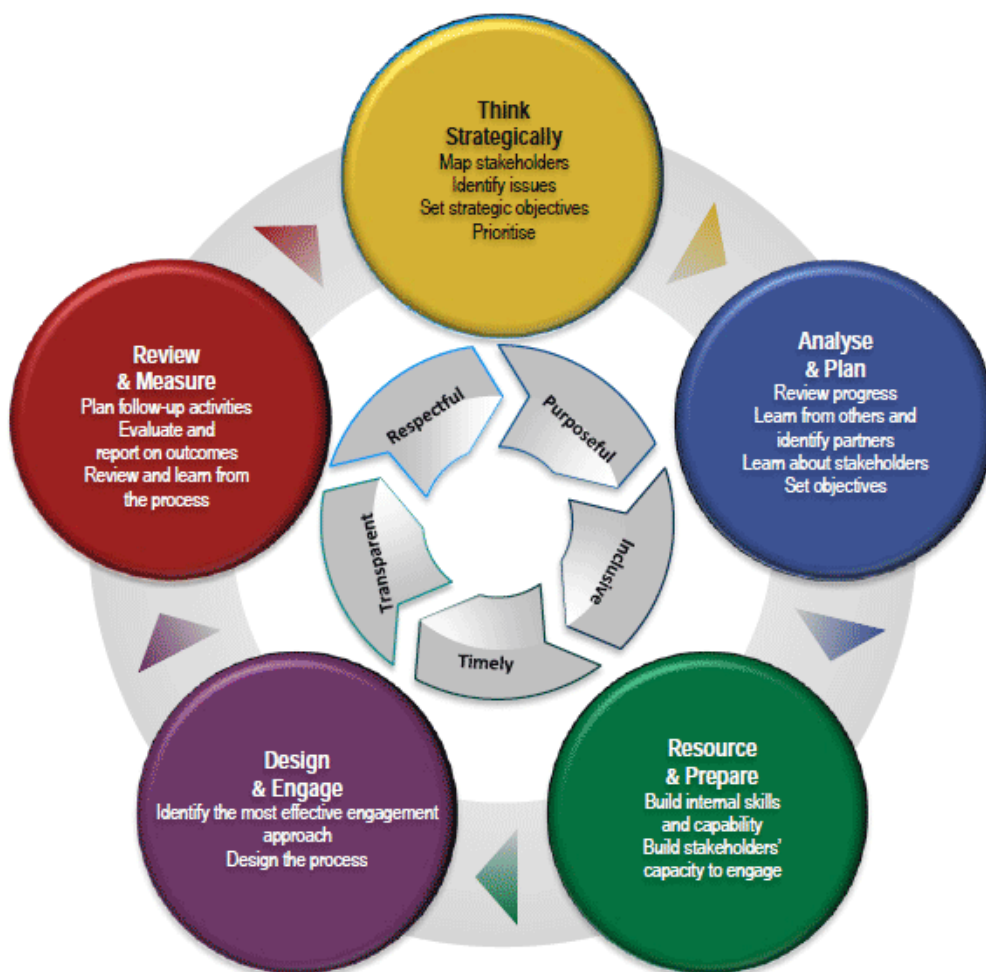
- We understand that engagement is a two-way process. We take care to be open to alternative views and to listen as well as speak.
- We respect our stakeholders' expertise and appreciate the benefits of mutual learning.
- We recognise the different communication needs and preferences of stakeholders and endeavour to meet these wherever possible.

Process for engagement

The department's model for stakeholder engagement has been adapted from the international standard developed by the Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility (2005).

The five-step process is structured to support thorough planning, preparation, action and evaluation of every engagement activity. The process is a dynamic and ongoing cycle, which supports a comprehensive approach to engagement and will, over time, build an evidence-based platform for continuous improvement.

Five step stakeholder engagement model

Step	Description
Think	We develop an overall consideration of strategic business objectives, how these relate to stakeholders and specific issues, and how you can undertake an initial prioritisation of stakeholders and issues for further analysis.
Plan	Introduce different levels of engagement, and guide the analysis of existing relationships, available resources and organisational constraints. It also helps you to learn more about specific stakeholder's representatives, and to decide on what kind of relationship you want to develop with these stakeholders.
Prepare	Address questions of internal and external competencies and capacities to engage, and how you can ensure that all parties to an engagement are able to join and take part in it effectively.
Engage	Address and outline different engagement techniques, and – building on the previous steps – design an approach that suits the needs of your specific situation and help you to reach your objectives.
Evaluate	Follow-up on the outputs of engagement, and ensure that your stakeholders feel assured regarding the quality of your efforts.

How this process is applied will be driven by the purpose, level and type of engagement undertaken. It is also important to note that the process will operate at the strategic and operational ends of stakeholder engagement activities and you may be working on more than one step in the process at any time, with different stakeholders, depending on the nature of the engagement.

Inclusive Participation

Inclusion is one of the five Stakeholder Engagement Principles that guide our engagement; we are committed to work with stakeholders who may be harder to reach for reasons such as language, culture, age or mobility. Some of the priority stakeholders for inclusion are:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

A key success factor will be to expand the capability of all staff to engage effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as they develop and deliver policies and services for Indigenous people and communities. Cultural awareness and appreciation, strong engagement skills for the development policy and programme implementation that meet cultural needs and address the social disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is important to closing the gap in health outcomes.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

We recognise that policies and services should be more responsive to the cultural needs of Australians as the population becomes more diverse. There may be a need to develop a cultural diversity plan to address the provision for culturally sensitive services and engagement strategies for communicating with these communities.

Enabling those with disabilities to participate in consultation

The Department's commitment to supporting people with disability in order to maximise their involvement and potential to participate as equal citizens of the Australian society is underpinned by the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the Department's protocol for engaging with people with disability in developing and successfully delivering the Department's business.

Levels of engagement

There is no one right stakeholder engagement method and you may choose a number of methods at different stages of the process. Thinking about and selecting the most appropriate method of stakeholder engagement and the relevant tools and techniques to facilitate the engagement process can vary according to the situation, time, skills and resources. All engagement methods have their benefits and limitations and it is important to select the right one and review to ensure the method best fits the particular environment.

The following table provides guidance on the various levels of engagement[1] and our commitment to stakeholders:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
to inform or educate stakeholders in one-way communication, there is no invitation to respond	to gain information and feedback from stakeholders to inform decisions made internally. Limited two-way communication - ask questions, stakeholder provides answers	to work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered. Two-way or multi-way communication where learning takes place on both sides	to partner with stakeholder and/or stakeholder groups for the development of mutually agreed solutions and joint plan of action. Two-way/multi-way communication where learning, negotiation and decision making on both sides. Stakeholders work together to take action	to delegate decision-making in the hands of the stakeholders on a particular issue. Stakeholders are enabled/equipped to actively contribute to the achievement of outcomes
We will keep you informed	*We will keep you informed, listen to your concerns, consider your insights, and provide feedback on our decisions*	*We will work with you so that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in alternatives developed and provide feedback on how input influenced the outcome*	*We will work together to agree on what we will implement and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the outcomes to the maximum extent possible*	*We will implement what you decide and we will support and complement your actions*

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[1] Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum (2007)

The table below provides an outline of suggested ways in which you can engage stakeholders according to each level of engagement. Our activities across the department are diverse, so it would be expected that engagement will occur at all levels.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Methods of engagement	• Fact sheets and websites • Bulletins and letters • Corporate documents (annual reports) • Speeches, conference and public presentations • Media releases and advertising	• Surveys • Focus groups • One-on-one meetings • Public meetings and workshops • On-line feedback and discussion	• Multi-stakeholder forums • Advisory panels • Consultative committees • Participatory decision making processes • Workshops	• Reference groups • Joint projects • Multi-stakeholder initiatives • Partnerships	• Integration of stakeholders into governance structure (e.g. as members or shareholders on particular committees

At lower levels, it may be determined that engagement simply means ensuring stakeholders are well informed about our processes and outcomes. At higher levels, this approach shows that for some issues we may seek more direct stakeholder input. The level of approach applied will be determined by the purpose of the engagement, our role and responsibilities, and the issue or issues being considered.

Three additional levels of engagement also exist – they are Remain Passive, Monitor and Transact as shown below. These can be viewed as not valid engagement, however they can often be the first steps in a building a relationship with stakeholders that can lead to more interactive and effective engagement.

Remain Passive	Monitor	Inform	Transact
There is no goal and no engagement at this level of participation. There is no active communication and there is no relationship. An example of this level could include the stakeholder expressed concern through protest, letters, media, websites etc. or pressure via advocacy efforts	There is one-way communication to monitor the views of stakeholders. There is no relationship. An example of this level could include media and internet tracking or monitoring or a dependency on second hand reports from other stakeholders		To work together in a contractual relationship where one partner directs the objectives and provides funding. There is limited two-way communication – setting and monitoring performance according to the terms of the contract. *We will provide the resources to enable you to do what we agreed*

What can inhibit effective engagement?

The department recommends considering the following barriers to effective engagement, as set out by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC).[2]

Potential Issue	Method for Mitigation
Unclear purpose	If the purpose of the engagement is poorly defined, all the activities that follow will be affected, including the identification of stakeholders, determining the methods to be used, and managing stakeholder expectations. You may need to involve stakeholders in defining the purpose of the engagement.
Differing capacity of stakeholders	Stakeholders can sometimes have different levels of skills and experience in engaging with government. This can affect their ability to fully participate in an initiative, as well as the quality of the information they provide. You may need to work with some stakeholders to build their capacity to contribute, or offer modified or different models of engagement.
Insufficient skills in the team	Effective stakeholder engagement requires a specific skill set. The absence of the right skills can hinder collaboration across organisational boundaries and make it hard to identify issues and opportunities. This can result in damaged relationships between government and stakeholders, and poor quality advice and information. During the planning stages, identify skills available and skills required at subsequent stages. Explore options to develop skills and/or engage external expertise.
Unfocused dialogue	Stakeholder engagement can cover a range of issues that are important to stakeholders but may be less so to the initiative. If this happens, it can distract from obtaining relevant input. The engagement plan should be clear on what issues are relevant and how to manage and respond to any ad hoc issues that are raised. Responding to ad hoc issues thoughtfully is important. For example, there may be another area in the department where those issues could be considered further.
Failure to review and evaluate	Without robust review and evaluation it is difficult to know if the approach is working and whether changes are needed. Failure to review and evaluate also reduces the ability to learn from and improve engagement. The engagement plan should include review points throughout the policy design and implementation, with flexibility to adjust the approach if needed.

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[2] Cabinet Implementation Toolkit (PMC, 2013)

Strategies for Success

- ✓ Commit to action
- ✓ Manage time and resources
- ✓ Map your stakeholders and get the right stakeholders to the table
- ✓ Agree on the rules of engagement
- ✓ Plan the engagement and manage expectations
- ✓ Ensure a coherent approach across the department
- ✓ Use a mixed or fit-for-purpose approach
- ✓ Use consistent and appropriate messages
- ✓ Act with transparency and accountability
- ✓ Learn from others
- ✓ Use the information you collect
- ✓ Be focussed and flexible
- ✓ Listen and be respectful
- ✓ Maintain the right to disagree
- ✓ Don't expect to change the world overnight!

References

- AccountAbility. 2005. Stakeholder Engagement Standard AA1000SES

AccountAbility. 2005. *AA1000SE Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner's Perspectives*

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