1 Community engagement framework

Introduction

There is an increasing awareness in DEWNR that communities need to be more ‘engaged’ in our work. However, there is lack of clarity and consistency among staff about the following:

- **what** community engagement is
- **why** we engage communities
- **who** in DEWNR is responsible for leading our community engagement or providing advice and support
- **how** we should go about engaging communities in a strategic and effective manner.

The purpose of this framework is to provide staff with a clear, consistent approach to community engagement, including an understanding of the different forms of engagement and an awareness of the policies, procedures, guidelines and other resources that are available for each.

This is important in supporting the vision of the Premier, the Hon. Jay Weatherill, who has made a strong commitment to putting community engagement at the heart of how his government works. He has encouraged all South Australian government agencies to become more ‘citizen centric’ and move from a culture of ‘announce and defend’ to one of ‘debate and decide’. To assist this change in culture, in March 2013 the Department of the Premier and Cabinet launched Better Together: Principles of Engagement, a guide for South Australian government agencies to engaging people in decisions. Better Together details six principles that agencies should follow when developing and implementing strategies for people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and giving them a genuine role in making such decisions.

In August 2015, the Hon. Jay Weatherill launched the Reforming Democracy: Deciding, Designing and Delivering Together Policy, committing the State Government to explore and trial ways that build on the start that has already been made in democratic reform.

Many DEWNR staff already know that engaging communities is critical to conserving and managing the use of our environment, water and other natural resources effectively. This is not only because people have the right to be made aware of and participate in decisions about matters that affect or interest them, but also because we know that we can’t achieve our desired outcomes without community support and participation. When done well, engagement can result in greater community awareness, better decisions, outcomes that are aligned with community needs and values, and shared responsibility for and effort in getting things done.

Community engagement is a central component of DEWNR’s Corporate Plan and the State NRM Plan. The importance of community engagement is also reflected in legislation DEWNR is responsible for administering, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972, Natural Resources Management Act 2004, Climate Change and Greenhouse Emission Reduction Act 2007, Marine Parks Act 2007 and Water Industry Act 2012, as well as in South Australia’s Strategic Plan, the Public Sector Act 2009 and the Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector.

Unfortunately, because we have not had a consistent understanding of what we are trying to achieve or how to go about it, DEWNR’s engagement with communities has not always been as structured and effective as it could have been. As a result, sometimes communities have not had an appropriate level of influence on decisions made, at the appropriate stages in the process. Outcomes have therefore not always been aligned with community needs and values, and communities have not always been willing to support the work or participate in implementing it. In addition, there has been no regular evaluation of DEWNR’s engagement, which has made it difficult for us to know whether it has been effective or not.

1 ‘Regional communities’ include members of the public, land managers and other stakeholders in the Adelaide metropolitan area, given they are part of the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM region, as well as members of the public, land managers and other stakeholders in rural and peri-urban areas.
Working with or through the NRM boards and/or the staff that support them

The Natural Resources Management Act provides for a system of regional NRM boards to give ownership of, and responsibility for, natural resource management to regional communities in South Australia. The boards are community-based, made up of local people who understand their communities’ needs and are well placed to help the government and communities work together to conserve and manage the use of our environment, water and other natural resources effectively.

A partnership between DEWNR and each of the NRM boards has been established in the eight NRM regions, with an integrated workforce delivering the full range of environment, water and other natural resource services to communities in these regions.

Community engagement by DEWNR within NRM regions about environment, water and other natural resource management matters should in most circumstances be done either with or through NRM boards and/or the staff that support them in the relevant region/s. Staff should liaise with the relevant regional manager/s or community engagement manager/s as early as possible in the process of developing a policy change, plan, program or service to determine the level of participation the NRM boards and/or staff that support them will have in the matter.

In some situations boards may wish to engage directly with community members, while in others they may wish staff to conduct the engagement on their behalf. Regardless of whether or not they wish to actively participate in the engagement, boards should be invited to provide advice on the views and expectations regional communities may have about the matter and the strategy for engaging those communities.

By working with or through the NRM boards and/or the staff that support them in this way we develop meaningful relationships with the community and increase our shared knowledge and understanding about natural resources. We encourage debate and share the decision-making and accountability for choices made.

Note: Other staff or sections in DEWNR may be responsible for engaging specific audiences or stakeholders, particularly at a political or statewide level. For example:

- Executive is responsible for taking the lead in engaging Members of Parliament, other government agencies and some peak bodies in DEWNR’s work.
- Strategy and Advice staff are responsible for taking the lead in engaging members of the public in the implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan in South Australia.
- Botanic Gardens of Adelaide staff are responsible for engaging members of the public in visiting the gardens and valuing their collections.
Definitions

There are a wide range of views within South Australia, as well as nationally and internationally, about what community, stakeholder, community engagement, communication, community participation and capacity building mean. In this framework, and the supporting materials it refers to, these terms have been defined as follows:

**Community**
A group of people, the members of which reside in the same geographical area or have a shared background or interest.\(^2\)

**Stakeholder**
Any individual or group of people that has an interest or investment in a matter.\(^3\)

**Community engagement**
Any process or interaction used to occupy the attention or efforts of a community, including communication, community participation in decisions and community participation in activities.

**Communication**
Imparting or exchanging information or ideas.\(^4\)

**Community participation in decisions**
Participation by communities in the process of decisions being made about matters that affect or interest them.

**Community participation in activities**
Participation by communities in activities that help achieve desired outcomes, through education, training, support, grants, private investment, sponsorships, volunteering, partnerships and co-management agreements.

**Capacity building**
Increasing the power, ability or resources of an individual or group of people to achieve desired outcomes.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) When defined in this way, communities may be internal or external to the department, and may include but are not limited to members of the public. This means community engagement may also be internal or external.

\(^3\) When defined in this way, stakeholders may be internal or external to the department, and may include but are not limited to members of the public. Stakeholders are usually part of a community so unless there is a sound reason for engaging only a specific stakeholder or collection of stakeholders, the preference when applying this framework is to use the term community, as it is broader and more inclusive.

\(^4\) Communication is necessary for community participation in decisions and activities but is often used for other purposes, such as raising awareness about matters of importance, so by itself may be considered a form of community engagement.

\(^5\) Capacity building is usually considered a result of community engagement rather than a form of it.
The different forms of community engagement in DEWNR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Communication (inform)</th>
<th>Community participation in decisions</th>
<th>Community participation in activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td>This is used to promote the work of the agency and its partners, raise awareness about matters of importance, share knowledge and information, and encourage discussion and debate about problems and ideas.</td>
<td>This is used to ensure communities have an appropriate level of influence on decisions made about matters that may affect or interest them, at the appropriate stages in the decision-making process.</td>
<td>This is used to achieve desired outcomes such as conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, through shared responsibility for and effort in getting things done.</td>
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<td>Who</td>
<td>Communication using branding, news media, social media, events, websites, publications and advertising is led by the central Community Engagement Branch and regional communication staff. Provision of technical and scientific information is led by Science, Monitoring and Knowledge and the publication of departmental data and information products is facilitated by the Business Technology and Information Branch.</td>
<td>This is led by community engagement, operational, policy and project staff across the agency. Advice and support are provided by regional community engagement managers and the central Community Engagement Branch.</td>
<td>This is led by community engagement, operational, policy and project staff across the agency. Advice and support are provided by regional community engagement managers, the Community Partnerships and Volunteer Programs Unit, the Aboriginal Partnerships working group and the Performance and Strategy Branch.</td>
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<td>How</td>
<td>Staff intending to communicate about any matter of significance should first consider whether any communities should participate in decisions about that matter (refer to next column). If not, staff should develop an informing the community strategy.</td>
<td>Staff developing policies, plans, programs or services that may affect or interest communities should consider whether those communities should participate in decisions about those matters. If so, staff should develop a inviting the community to participate strategy using the ‘Better Together Engagement Plan’ template.</td>
<td>Staff should refer to the contacts listed above for advice, and develop a community participation in activities strategy.</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
<td>Policies, procedures and guidelines on internal and external communications, including branding, news media, social media, events, websites, publications and advertising, are available from the Community Engagement section on iShare.</td>
<td>A policy and guidelines, based on Better Together and the values and practices of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), are available from the Community Engagement section on iShare.</td>
<td>Resources include the Project Management Framework, National Collaboration Framework and National NRM Capacity Building Framework.</td>
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6 According to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of participation types, this may be done through informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and/or empowering (see guidelines for community participation in decisions for details).

7 This will depend on the level to which the decisions are likely to affect or interest communities, and the capability and willingness of those communities to participate in the process (see guidelines for community participation in decisions for details).
Developing a strategy for your engagement process

Regardless of the form/s of engagement required, it’s important that you develop a strategy to plan, document, implement, evaluate, report on and if necessary adjust your engagement process. This ensures that you, and the other people that are participating in or need to know about the engagement, are clear about why you are engaging, who you are engaging, what the background and history are, what the approach will be and the tactics you will use, how you will evaluate the success of your engagement, what the results are, and whether the process needs to be adjusted to enhance its effectiveness.

In situations in which only one form of engagement is required, you should develop a strategy for that form of engagement, i.e. a communication (inform) strategy, a community participation in decisions strategy or a community participation in activities strategy. However, in situations in which more than one form of engagement is required, you should develop an overarching community engagement strategy that includes details about each form of engagement (using the ‘Better Together Engagement Plan’ template) as a guide.

Although the principles in Better Together were intended to be used when developing a community participation in decisions strategy, they may also be applied more generally to communication and community participation in activities, so are a useful reference when developing any type of engagement strategy.

Are there particular considerations when engaging with Aboriginal communities or individuals?

The potential impact projects may have on Aboriginal sites, objects or remains should always be assessed and considered against the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988 and Native Title legislation.

Before developing an engagement strategy, seek advice on Aboriginal heritage and Native Title matters from DEWNR’s Aboriginal Partnerships working group and Reconciliation Project Officer. You should also contact the relevant NRM Aboriginal facilitators responsible for liaison and engagement with their Aboriginal communities, as well as the relevant regional community engagement manager/s.

Advice should be sought on, for example: the relevant Aboriginal representatives to contact and engage with; applicable regional agreements and/or Indigenous land use agreements; the relationship between Aboriginal communities and DEWNR; how Aboriginal intellectual property can be used; and how to gain endorsement by Traditional Owners.

Documents available to guide the development of engagement strategies for Aboriginal communities and individuals include the former Department for Environment and Heritage’s Aboriginal Heritage Handbook and Strategy and the State Government’s Cultural Inclusion Framework for South Australia.

Contact
Michael Garrod
Community Engagement Branch
Ph: 8303 2914