

Getting Ready *for* Engagement



Shoot for the stars

Take your projects and products to unimaginable heights by collaborating with your community and stakeholders.

In the early 60's U.S. President John F. Kennedy said we would put people on the moon not because it was easy, but because it was hard. At the time we'd barely even made it out of Earth's atmosphere.

The race to space captivated the world throughout the 1960's. In just ten short years, humanity developed the means to send themselves to the stars.

This feat would not have been possible for any single person. But at the time, thousands of people around the world were collaborating around a central problem:

"How do we send someone to the moon and bring them home again safely?"

Once the right specialists, scientists and unsung heroes around the world came together - solving the problem was easy.



What is community engagement?

It has a lot of names including: public participation, stakeholder engagement, civic outreach, co-design and even design thinking - but what is it?



It's part of being human

Collaboration and caring about the greater good of our fellow humans is in our DNA.

Thousands of years ago, our ancestors would have needed to share ideas and make group choices for survival. The same is true today.

We have evolved as a species to make tools, tell stories, share knowledge, and work together to get stuff done.

Community engagement harnesses our natural ability to listen, empathize and cooperate with each other, to achieve better outcomes for everyone.

It's empowering

Providing a range of engagement opportunities allows the community to get involved.

Organizations use the practice of 'community engagement' to empower individuals and groups to contribute to and get involved in decisions that affect them.

It's inclusive

People will be more likely to give you their time and attention if you invest in making your engagement fun and user-friendly.

There is a diverse range of tools available for this purpose, from traditional 'town-hall' events to innovative approaches using social media, interactive maps and virtual reality.

More now than ever before, our interactions have evolved from traditional community gatherings and formal public meetings to the online world.

Use online tools wisely and combine with traditional engagement methods to ensure everyone can be involved and have their say.

While advances in technology are making engagement fun and accessible to more projects and people, never underestimate the value of a simple conversation.

It's transparent and promotes trust

Stop, collaborate and listen to your stakeholders.

If you share your ideas with the community early in the planning process and demonstrate you're willing to collaborate and keep an open mind, you'll improve trust and relationships which will ultimately lead to better outcomes for everyone.

It's a process - and it's evolving

Appetite for community engagement is huge now, and it is driving innovation.

Organizations are exploring new frameworks and models for engagement, and have budgets to invest.

Practitioners are gathering, forming professional associations, and meeting online to discuss projects and new ideas.

Everyday people are becoming increasingly connected, active and aware through social media and the internet.

Governments around the world are also increasingly interested in authentic community engagement.

Community and stakeholder engagement is an exciting space to be in, with more opportunities for people and organizations to listen to each other, agree on what's important and work together on innovative and engaging solutions.

We're on the journey together

More and more, communities expect organizations to consider their views and values when making decisions with far-reaching impacts.

Invite everyone along

Value community input and understand that their ideas and opinions count.

When communities feel powerless to influence a decision that impacts their lifestyles and livelihoods, emotions can run high, projects can stall and the best possible results may not be achieved.

Putting people or 'the user' at the centre of our projects helps us to design better outputs for everyone.

Without being able to see how you arrived at your conclusion, it's sometimes hard for people to get on board with your solution.

Unlearn what you have learned

As a technical expert, it will be challenging but necessary to let go of preconceived ideas of how projects should be delivered.

Project planning methods incorporating co-design and community engagement involve the community early, before you have arrived at your own answer.

Using these approaches and techniques will change the way you think about your projects.

Benefits of engaging early

When you bring everyone along on the journey, great things happen.

1 You'll design user-friendly products and services that people love.

2 You'll solve the real problems with lasting solutions.

3 The right people should play a part in shaping the scope, vision and outputs of your projects.

4 You'll have access to all of the information you need for your team to do their best work.

5 You'll build relationships that will enrich your life and change your point of view.

6 You'll have a richer understanding of opportunities and risks, and how to manage them.

$$\int f(x) dx = F(b) - F(a)$$
$$\frac{z^3}{a^5} = \frac{(a^2 + b^2 + x^2 + y^2)(x^2 - b^2)}{\sqrt{3x - 2y^3 - z^3}}$$

*Authentic engagement starts before
you've got everything worked out.*



Getting the journey started

Bringing everyone along on the journey,
means starting with your own organization.

Ensuring that everyone you work with understands or has
an awareness of exciting new opportunities and possibilities
to engage with the community puts you all on the same path.

While you may see a project that is destined to fail
if the community is not involved, your stakeholders
and decision-makers may only see an opportunity
to cut costs and 'be efficient'.

Sometimes the job of convincing your organization
to see the benefits of involving community early
can be difficult. So, here are some tips to help get
those tough conversations started.



7 Common internal engagement hurdles & how to overcome them.

It is common to encounter individuals within your organization who do not see the value in engaging with the community. Here are some common hurdles blocking community engagement projects and ways to overcome them.

❌ 1. There is no time

In a political environment, decision makers will be reluctant to make a final decision if the community is telling them they have not been properly involved.

If the community surprises you at the last minute with their overwhelming objections, there is a risk your project could be stalled for months or even years.

✔ For complex projects and decisions with a big impact on community, there should always be time for engagement.

❌ 2. There's no budget or resources

Online options are proven to be significantly cheaper, less resource intensive and can be more successful than traditional methods, such as public meetings. Combining online and offline methods is the best way to ensure all bases are covered.

Importantly, online engagement tools and social media provide a platform for project information to be provided to the wider community, while allowing conversations to be constructive. Reducing the risk of misinformation. This allows you to manage community discussions in real time at a low cost.

In the future, try to convince decision-makers as early as possible that upcoming projects need

more time and money spent on engagement and communications.

✔ Effective community engagement does not need to be expensive.

❌ 3. The community does not care

If community engagement efforts have not succeeded in the past, a skeptic may assume this indicates people just do not care.

Do some research on engagement methods your organization has previously used. How was the project explained to the public? How was it made accessible to them, and how were they made aware of it?

The community is unlikely to get involved unless they feel respected and welcomed, and it is easy for them to participate.

✔ The community most certainly does have an interest in how their neighbourhoods, towns, cities, states and countries operate. Moreover, they would be delighted if you gave them genuine opportunities to influence outcomes.

❌ 4. That is not how we do things around here

Traditionally, your organization might stick to the same old methods of community engagement (or lack thereof) because that is the bare minimum that needs to be done to 'tick the boxes'.

First, you need to convince your boss doing things differently is beneficial to the organization and to the community you are all trying to serve. It takes time (sometimes years) to build real relationships and trust between the community and your organization, but everyone needs to start somewhere.

Your organization needs to set achievable innovation targets around engagement for upcoming projects.

✔ Defining what engagement means to your organization takes patience and commitment. Placing value to community engagement will ultimately result in more successful projects.

❌ 5. The community can't tell me anything I don't already know

The community can provide new information that may not have been considered, due to their unique and intimate relationship with the subject matter, issue or place.

✔ Public involvement brings more information to the decision, including scientific or technical expertise knowledge about the context where decisions are implemented, its unique history and personalities - embrace it!

❌ 6. It's too hard

Extra work, yes, but too hard? It doesn't have to be. There are many tools available to assist in making engagement easy. Using the right online engagement tools enable you collect the information electronically and leverage off real time dashboards and reporting as opposed to having to enter all the data manually, which will actually make your life easier.

✔ While it will take more resources upfront to undertake prepare the engagement strategy, market it and get out there; you should consider this as an investment that will deliver returns over the life of your project.

❌ 7. Prove it

At the end of the day, if you are asking someone to invest in engagement – you are going to need to explain how decision-makers will get a return on their investment.

Research similar projects in other areas where there is a strong focus on community engagement. What methods were used, how many people were engaged, how many comments were received and what were the outcomes?

✔ Many online tools provide quantifiable data that make it easy to view the statistics. Talk to your colleagues in other areas and get their feedback on the methods they employed. Be armed with statistics and examples to prove that effective community engagement works!



Relationships have history
and take time to grow.

Don't expect the community to
trust you if you haven't given them
a reason to. Your organization
will need to show it is reliable and
willing to listen and collaborate.

*This transformation
could take years.*



Planning For Success

Engaging authentically with your community
and stakeholders takes time and requires
some careful planning. Knowing where
to start is key:

Where should you be spending your time? What
kind of resources will you need? How will you create
opportunities for the community to play a genuine
and valuable role in your project?

Here's a simple overview which gives brief insights
about time and activities for conducting meaningful
community and stakeholder engagement.

The Engagement Process

✓ 1 Planning

6 weeks to 6 months ⌚

Priorities

- Define objectives of engagement
- Understand strategic reasons for engagement
- Identify and understand project stakeholders
- Decide on effective methods and opportunities for involving and communicating with stakeholders
- Understand priority issues (for them and you)
- Identify regulatory requirements

What you'll be doing

- Project planning and scheduling
- Researching and selecting best-practice engagement methods and tools for data collection, monitoring, analysis, reporting
- Creating a project marketing and communications strategy
- Identifying and allocating resources necessary
- Identifying engagement tools and evaluation method
- Get internal agreement on the engagement approach
- Ensure engagement approach is inclusive and transparent

✓ 2 Co-defining the problem

4- 6 weeks ⌚

Priorities

- Get the word out about project to all stakeholders
- Focus on the issues and opportunities for improvement
- Collect only the information you absolutely need
- Help community to understand aspects of the project they can influence
- Ensure opportunities for two-way dialogue between project team and stakeholders

What you'll be doing

- Collaborating with technical and subject matter experts
- Project and stakeholder management
- Engaging with the community face-to face and online
- Online community management and moderation
- Promoting the engagement via appropriate means
- Reporting back to your team and stakeholders

✓ 3 Reviewing contributions

2 - 4 weeks ⌚

Priorities

- Review the community's contributions to understand their needs, expectations, aspirations and priorities
- Identify common themes, ideas and concerns
- Manage stakeholder expectations
- Advocate for your community internally

What you'll be doing

- Iterative process of exporting, collating and reviewing contributions from the community
- Engaging with the community face-to face and online
- Collaborating with stakeholders and government to identify possible solutions.
- Reporting back to the community

✓ 4 Solutions exploration

3 - 4 weeks ⌚

Priorities

- Based on the problem (co-defined) explore possible solutions
- Talk to your community about which issues your project will be able to solve – and which are out of scope.

What you'll be doing

- Conduct multiple rounds of engagement (as appropriate for the project)
- Allow enough time & opportunities for community to contribute

✓ 5 Reviewing responses

2 - 4 weeks ⌚

Priorities

- Ongoing discussion about solution
- Finding solutions not everyone loves but can live with

What you'll be doing

- Iterative process of exporting, collating and reviewing contributions from the community
- Reporting back to the community about responses

✓ 6 Doing

Ongoing ⌚

Priorities

- Communicate clearly with the community and stakeholders to ensure they understand the solutions & reasoning behind decisions

What you'll be doing

- Execute your projects solution based on your engagement feedback & priorities identified during the planning phase.
- Update community/stakeholders about key milestones
- Thank community for their contributions to the project

✓ 7 Evaluation

Ongoing ⌚

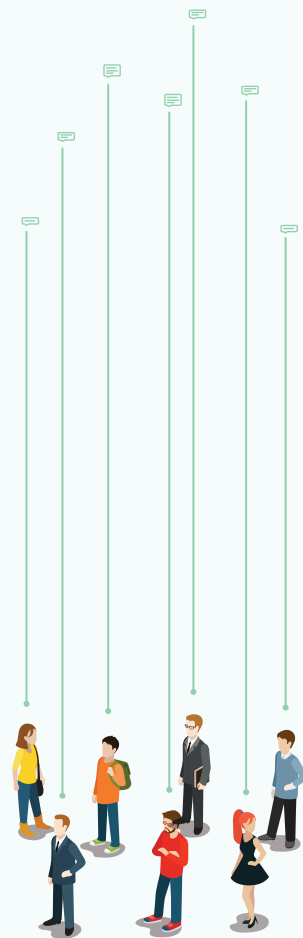
Priorities

- Understand process and outcome success/failure
- Reflect on lessons learned from project
- Sustaining constructive relationship with stakeholders to build trust and understanding

What you'll be doing

- Document consultation processes and outcomes
- Ask community to evaluate project (evaluation survey)
- Evaluate your project and relationship management approach.
- Understand the positives and negatives about your project and how to improve for the next project

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