

Best Practice Guide

BP110 | Identify

Know your stakeholders



Introduction

A key component of impact design is connecting to stakeholders to maximise your chance of creating measurable and meaningful impact that aligns with the needs of your community and your organisation's strategic goals and responsibilities. People should be placed at the front and centre of your program design to create impact. Thus, you need to know who your stakeholders are, what they care about, why they care about it, and as closely as possible, how new data or technology may be able to help them.

The success of your air quality monitoring project or program will be largely a function of how well you know your stakeholders and how well you are able to deliver value to them.

This aligns with the [NSW Smart Places Strategy](#), which sets 'delivering outcomes for customers' as a key impact measurement for Smart Places. The Strategy places people (which might include individual citizens, businesses, employees, or partner organisations) at the centre of the design process.

How to use this resource

This Best Practice Guide chapter will expand on the importance of engaging stakeholders. It will help you to map your stakeholders by identifying who your key stakeholder groups are and what their various concerns might be. You should undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise as part of your high-level project planning (see the *Identify template*—an OPENAIR supplementary resource).

Who is this resource for?

Many local governments may already have established methods for identifying and engaging internal and external stakeholders. This resource is intended to compliment those efforts and emphasise that a good air quality monitoring project should start with knowing your stakeholders and having an approach to engage with them at various stages.

All local governments developing a smart cities program within their communities need to ensure that they allow for sufficient time and resourcing at the start of the project for this process. One key indicator of a successful smart cities program is planning the high-level design of the program through early, thorough stakeholder engagement.

Types of stakeholders

Internal and external

There are two main groups of stakeholders - *internal* and *external*.

Internal stakeholders are people or groups working within your organisation and may include staff as well as contractors. This includes managers or senior managers, through to the most junior positions in the organisation. It might include specific teams or departments (e.g., rangers, arborists, planning department).

External stakeholders may not have a direct interest or relationship with your organisation but they are affected by organisational actions and outcomes. They may be directly concerned with air quality issues and any actions taken by your organisation to address them.



Examples of external stakeholder groups: High-street businesses, hospitality businesses, schools, childcare centres, universities, children, parents, hospitals, people using sports facilities, cyclists, wheelchair users, commuters using public transport, people living with asthma, pregnant women, homeless people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

This list is indicative and is not intended to represent a comprehensive diversity of stakeholder groups.

Participants and beneficiaries

A key item to note when considering stakeholders is the distinction between participants and beneficiaries.

- Participants take an active role in developing, implementing, or evaluating the project. They are often also the beneficiaries.
- Beneficiaries are people or groups that directly benefit from the impacts of a project. Beneficiaries need not be participants. For example, the efforts of a small number of participants might support cleaner air for all the people living and working in a particular area (the beneficiaries).

When planning your project and impact strategy, consider how you can support and deliver value both to participants and to broader beneficiaries within your community.

Engaging with stakeholders

The following section is intended to provide some high-level guidance and suggestions for stakeholder engagement; however, it is recognised that local governments generally have their own established processes in this area.

Engaging stakeholders within your organisation

Within your organisation there may be multiple teams or even whole departments with a direct interest in air quality issues. Your air quality monitoring project may be able to engage with those interests and could potentially provide your colleagues with valuable data or insights that help to improve operations and impact. A vital part of planning your project includes taking the time to identify and clearly define these internal interests and potential concerns about air quality issues. The following activities are recommended to support this:

- **Reach out to colleagues** in specific teams that you think might have an interest in air quality issues (see below info box for examples). Aim for face-to-face meetings that allow you to rapidly explore ideas, challenges, and inherent complexity.
- **Identify existing organisational policy and strategy** that aligns with and supports the core aims and planned activities of your project. This may be further focused through discussions with colleagues.
- **Engage senior management.** This is important for developing executive awareness and buy-in to the project and is recognised as a critical factor for the success of smart city projects of all types. It also provides an opportunity to ascertain current perceived importance or urgency of a specific issue (e.g., traffic pollution) at the executive level. Two issues might both appear in policy as areas that local government cares about and has committed to addressing. However, due to political or practical factors, one of these issues may take much stronger precedence over the other.
- **Check whether there are any policy/strategy renewal processes underway** (or upcoming) where an air quality agenda (or other aligned concern associated with your project) might be introduced. This may present an opportunity to develop a longer-term sustainable foundation for your project.
- **Check whether there are any planned funding allocations** in other departments that might align with and compliment your project. For example, infrastructure upgrades for a park or public square might support the installation of sensing devices. Engagement with the team responsible for the upgrades could result in considerable mutual benefit to both parties.



GROUPS WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT THAT COMMONLY HAVE AN INTEREST IN AIR QUALITY ISSUES

- Strategic planning department
- Transport planning and policy, including teams engaging with cycling and walkability, public transport, and commercial freight and logistics.
- Public space design and placemaking
- Green infrastructure, trees, and parks
- City rangers
- Arborists
- Community engagement and public programs, including libraries and other local government-managed facilities that host educational events
- Daycare centres
- Sports facilities
- Major events team

Another important angle to consider is how your planned project activities might intersect with, or impact, the standard operations of other teams—or conversely, how critical city operations might place constraints upon your planned project activities. This is a more practical consideration, but no less critical to your planning. Some examples might include:

- Public space renewal that involves construction, landscaping and placemaking works that might increase or restrict your opportunities for mounting sensing devices. You may need to work closely with your planning and design teams as part of your project delivery, meaning that you will need to engage with them early and understand their priorities.
- You may have an existing team responsible for community engagement and educational outreach. If you plan to include outreach and education in your air quality monitoring project, you may want to engage with that team to ensure that you are not treading on anyone's toes. Ideally, this would present an opportunity for fruitful collaboration, however reaching out during early planning is likely vital for establishing a sense of shared ownership of project activities and ensuring buy-in from your colleagues.

Engaging stakeholders outside of your organisation

When defining your air quality issue, it is important to consider all possible stakeholders in your community, the issues they may be facing, and their associated concerns. Try to place yourself in other people's shoes to gain a broader perspective of an issue, its impacts, and possible ways to address it.

Aim to refine your focus to a specific impacted group of people and their concerns. For air quality, some common examples might include parents' concerns about the health of school children at a bus stop, residents concerned about industrial pollution from a nearby factory, or café owners concerned about traffic pollution along a busy high street.

It takes considerable time and effort to undertake effective external engagement, particularly in a community context. Building trust and mutual understanding around an issue is pivotal and evidence suggests that the most successful air quality monitoring projects from around the world all have a strong emphasis on this at the project planning stage. You are strongly advised not to rush this aspect of project planning or development, or to add it on as an afterthought. Likewise, try not to assume that you already know what your community thinks and feels about an issue—you may well be off the mark.

The following points may be helpful in guiding your approach to external engagement:

- **Consider how broadly you should cast your net at the outset.** On the one hand you may want to be as inclusive as possible, recognising that you do not know who all the concerned stakeholders might be. There may be hard-to-reach or less obvious interest groups that you might otherwise miss. On the other hand, you may have a good idea of who to target and in the interest of time and limited resourcing it may make sense to rapidly focus on a specific stakeholder group.
- **Identify existing organisational policy and strategy that aligns with and supports the specific interests of external stakeholders.** Local governments care about community issues first and foremost because their mandate is to directly represent community interest. However, in practical terms, the ability of the organisation to engage and respond comes down to the existing organisational policy position regarding the issue in question. For example, you might have an existing commitment to address community air quality concerns as part of your broader sustainability or climate resilience strategy. Ideally, you should be clear about these supporting policies before you engage more deeply with stakeholders, so that you can confidently assure people that local government is able to take them seriously and take action.
- **Identify opportunities for collaborating on public program development within your organisation, to directly support ongoing engagement with a stakeholder group or otherwise address their needs.** This is a reminder to undertake internal engagement with your various colleagues to determine opportunities for mutually beneficial cross-over initiatives, and ideally to do this before you go out to the community. The clearer you can be about what might be possible, the more confidence you can instil in your stakeholders and the more specific you can get with any participative design activities you might undertake.



Inclusivity and the challenge of engaging hard-to-reach stakeholders:

The type of people who fill out surveys or who come forward for events and workshops are usually a small and predictable subset of the community. Certain groups within the community are much harder to engage than others, notably the elderly, young adults, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, people who have English as a second language, people with disabilities, and people in lower socio-economic brackets. Unfortunately, the people who are hardest to reach and engage are often the people who are most likely to be disproportionately impacted by poor air quality. This means that it is vital for you to develop an inclusive engagement strategy.

There are many ways of expanding your engagements to be more inclusive of disadvantaged groups and your organisation likely has policy positions and effective tools and processes in place to support this. The key point is to keep this challenge front of mind as you undertake your stakeholder engagement activities.

References

NSW Department of Planning and Environment. (2022). *Delivering outcomes for customers*. NSW Government. <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/strategy-and-innovation/smart-places/smart-places-strategy/delivering-outcomes-for-customers#smart-places-have-the-customer-at-the-centre>

Associated OPENAIR resources

Supplementary resources

Identify template

This template contains a guided process to identify and prioritise stakeholders and their concerns. The template helps to establish a long list of all stakeholder groups in your community and broadens awareness outside of issues that might currently be the 'loudest' or more 'obvious'.

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Participative design practice

This Best Practice Guide chapter elaborates on some of the methodologies you can apply to external stakeholder engagement.

Further information

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This Best Practice Guide chapter is part of a suite of resources designed to support local government action on air quality through the use of smart low-cost sensing technologies. It is the first Australian project of its kind. Visit www.openair.org.au for more information.

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