BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit

Part 3: How to identify stakeholders

Consultation draft 2013

BiodivERsA is a network of national funding organisations promoting pan-European research that offers innovative opportunities for the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.

http://www.biodiversa.org/

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Objectives: Identify, categorise and understand relevant stakeholders.

Having established clear reasons for engagement, the next step in the stakeholder engagement process is to identify which stakeholders need to be engaged. Selection will depend upon the focus of research that is being carried out, the potential outcomes and impacts, available resources, the objectives of the engagement, as well as the stakeholders willingness or ability to engage (Morris and Baddache, 2012).

Stakeholder identification can be considered to consist of three stages:

Stage 1: Identify all potential stakeholders and stakeholder groups.
Stage 2: Assess and prioritise the stakeholders.
Stage 3: Develop an understanding of your stakeholders.

The outcomes from this three stage process can then be considered by the project team in order to ascertain the level of engagement that is required, the timing and role of the engagement, and ultimately which methods of engagement are to be adopted.

Stage 1: Who are your stakeholders?

In order to identify stakeholders it is necessary to consider all people, or groups, that are affected by, who can influence, or may have an interest in the research (NERC, 2010). In this first stage it is important to be inclusive, identify all stakeholders, and consider not only what they may be able to contribute to the project but also what will motivate them to become involved (i.e. what they can gain from engaging). In some exceptional cases, very few, or even no, stakeholders may be identified (NERC, 2010).

The stakeholder identification process should be reassessed regularly throughout the project to ensure that no groups or individuals have been missed, as well as potentially identifying new stakeholders, that need to be engaged as activities progress. In these early stages of the project it could be beneficial to enter into dialogue with scientists working in other disciplines and/or groups or individuals who are likely to oppose the research, as this may help identify potential conflicts that could arise. It is important to ensure that groups or individuals that are considered to be potential sources of conflict are not left out of the engagement process based upon opposing views.

It is useful to identify stakeholders in a systematic fashion, as far as possible, by considering all aspects of the project's area of influence throughout the entire cycle, as stakeholders and their interests may change as the project progresses (University of Edinburgh, 2008).

There are a number of ways to identify stakeholders, perhaps by considering particular sectors or groups of relevance (e.g. public sector, private sector, voluntary groups, academics, researchers) or by considering specific roles or functions of different actors (e.g. data users, funders, policy makers, local communities) (Pound, 2004; Whyte *et al*, 2010).

Other useful methods for identifying key stakeholder could include:

- Brainstorming with other organisations that have been involved in similar activities or those working in similar locations.
- Consulting with colleagues to share knowledge about who may have an interest in the research.
- Developing a mind map that can be used to identify suitable stakeholders; assess secondary data (e.g. historical records, media articles).

- Utilising government statistics and data (e.g. census information)
- Initiating self-selection by promoting the engagement process and encourage individuals with an interest to come forward
- Use snowball sampling techniques, whereby one stakeholder identifies further stakeholders until no additional new stakeholders are identified.
- Utilising existing lists of organisations in order to identify specific groups, networks and agencies who represent relevant elements of society
- Consulting with forums used by government and other organisation (e.g. local authorities, town councils, emergency services etc.).

(Forestry Commission, 2011)

Case Study: Ecosystem serVIce provision from coupled planT and microbiAL functional diversity in managed grassland (VITAL)

Given increasing political and public concern for the environment, and resulting changes in legislation and policy, European agriculture is challenged to provide ecosystem services, such as carbon storage and protection of water quality, along with biodiversity conservation and maintenance of economically viable production. The VITAL project studies mountain grasslands where abandonment of manuring, mowing and grazing, or conversely management intensification, has altered plant species and functional diversity, soil microbial activities, soil Nitrogen availability and Nitrogen transformation processes. These changes have the potential to fundamentally shift the ecosystem services that these agro-ecosystems can provide, and thereby the livelihood and development potential for local economies. Research conducted at three sites in the French Alps, Austria, and the UK, provides a representative range of management and natural conditions.

The VITAL team kindly provided information about how they went about identifying stakeholders. Their answers are as follows:

How were stakeholders identified?

- Regional experts and local stakeholders for the ecosystem service assessment were selected by reputation or recommendations.

- For scenario workshops held in Austria farmers were selected based upon differing farm structure characteristics (full-time / part-time, traditional / modern, conventional / alternative production etc.).

- In France the scenario development involved a first stage with regional experts who represented different sectors and a second stage with eight local farmers from the Villar d'Arène municipality.

What different types of stakeholders were identified?

- Regional experts working for governmental institutions.

- Regional institutions.

- NGOs that represent consumers of their sectors of activity (e.g. agriculture, nature conservation, tourism or rural development) and act as decision makers.

- Local beneficiaries who are consumers (e.g. farmers and inhabitants).

- Producers (e.g. farmers)

How many group and individual stakeholders were involved?

- Regional experts: 22 (agricultural sector), 23 (non-agricultural sector).

- Local beneficiaries: 35.

Jolibert and Wesselink (2012) and the University of Edinburgh (2008) make reference to pre-defined stakeholder categories. These may provide a useful starting point when embarking upon stakeholder identification. Their categories include:

- Policy makers or advisers.
- Other national or international policy makers or policy groups (e.g. European institutions, environment agencies).
- Scientists and researchers working in relevant disciplines.
- Scientists and researchers working across different disciplines.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Business and industry.
- The general public.
- Local communities.
- Landowners.
- Users of project outputs (e.g. practitioners, data users).
- Students.
- Interpreters (science communicators, mediators, facilitators).
- The media.

It can be useful to tabulate the information on stakeholders (Whyte *et al*, 2010). Doing this will enable stakeholders to be ordered and grouped (e.g. by sector or expertise); information on how they would contribute to the project to be categorised; and ascertain why they might wish to become involved. It should be kept in mind that there may not be reasons or benefits for both the research and the stakeholder, particularly during the initial identification of stakeholders. Table 3.1 shows an example of a table containing details of the types of potential stakeholders, reasons to involve them, and reasons why they might wish to engage.

Table 3.1 *Stakeholder identification, categorisation, reasons for engagement, and potential stakeholder benefits for engaging.*

Stakeholder	Category (e.g. government dept, general public, NGO, potential partner)	Reasons to involve them	Why they might wish to be involved (benefits to stakeholder)
Local council	*Government policy maker.*	Strengthen science-policy interface and ensure relevance of research outputs.	Opportunity to develop better policies based upon rigorous scientific knowledge. Better transparency of decisions made.
Local business	*Private sector businesses*	Sharing technical expertise and potential contribution of resources to project.	Possibility of networking with potential new customers through the engagement process. Publicity and CSR opportunities.
Environmental charity	*NGO*	Better access to available data, potential contribution of resources and expertise to project.	Interest in using the new data produced. Increased local publicity through engagement. Opportunities for partnering in future projects.

Suggested activity:
With a specific research projects objectives in mind, consider the following key questions in order to help identify stakeholders and stakeholder groups:

- Who is responsible for making decisions that might affect the research?
- Which individuals are likely to be affected by the outputs of the research?
- Are there stakeholders that have been involved in similar projects on previous occasions (some of these may have been identified in Step 1)?
- Who, although not directly affected, may be interested in the results of the research?
- Which groups or individuals may be able to provide relevant information, equipment or resources?
- Who is likely to have a (perhaps misconceived) negative view of the research?
- Which stakeholders will it be essential to involve?
- Who is it preferable to involve?
- Who needs to be consulted?
- Who needs to be informed?
- Which parties are likely to be the most influential?
- Who will be critical to the final delivery?

Stage 2: Assess, analyse and prioritise your stakeholders

The first stage of the stakeholder identification process should generate a list of all relevant stakeholders, and stakeholder groups, along with an indication of the reasons for engagement. The next (second) stage is to assess and analyse your stakeholders in order to prioritise them in relation to the necessity of engagement, keeping in mind that not every stakeholder or stakeholder group needs to be involved to the same degree, or at the same time. Considering stakeholder relevance to the project makes it possible to establish which stakeholders might be best to contribute and which will be affected and so critical to involve (Pound, 2004).

A common approach is to carry out a stakeholder mapping, or analysis, exercise which considers factors that identify how relevant the stakeholders interests will be for the project, the interest that a stakeholder has in the research, or the potential impacts or effects the outcomes may have on the stakeholder (REVIT, 2007; University of Edinburgh, 2008; Jeffrey, 2009; NHS, 2009; Morris and Baddache, 2012). Another way of identifying potential stakeholders is by constructing a mind-map; an example is given in Figure 3.1. The first step in developing a mind map is identifying the major groups of users that make up the centre of the map, and then mining down into greater detail as you move towards the outer edges (Forestry Commission, 2011).

This process can help recognise which segments of society need to be included. For example: Which groups or affected parties are particularly vital to meeting aims and objectives? Are there particular stakeholders that are likely to find themselves in conflict with one another or present particular challenges? Are there sub-groups of particular importance that need to be involved to ensure engagement is truly representative? It is critical to invest time in evaluating the initial stakeholder list, comparing this information with knowledge about the focal area, and determining if more needs to be done to identify less obvious stakeholders or marginal groups (Forestry Commission, 2011).

Figure 3.1 *Example of stakeholder mind-map, adapted from Forestry Commission (2011).*
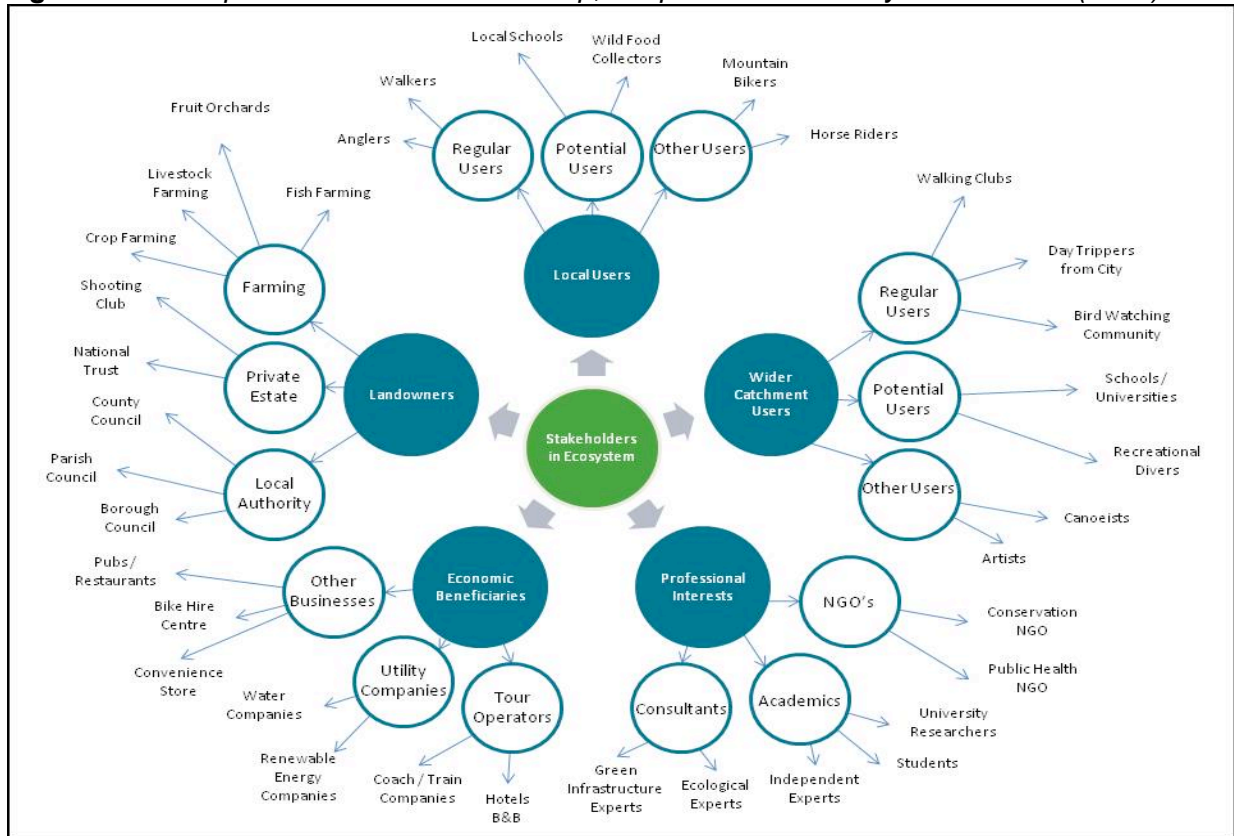

Figure 3.2 shows a table that plots stakeholder relevance (i.e. whether they can make useful contributions or whether they will be affected by the outcomes), against the interest of the stakeholder in the project. Stakeholders are plotted according to whether they have a high or low interest in, and high or low relevance to, the project. The four boxes each represent a 'level' of engagement, from the lowest level ('*inform*'), through the middle levels ('consult', and '*Involve*') to the highest level ('**Collaborate**'). Stakeholders in the 'high interest – high importance' '**Collaborate**' box are those with which it is likely to be most beneficial to engage with.

Figure 3.2 *Plotting stakeholder importance against interest. Stakeholders are assigned to a category according to their importance to, and interest in, the project. The boxes provide details of the levels of engagement. Figure has been adapted from work conducted by the National Health Service (UK) (2009) and the University of Edinburgh (2008).*
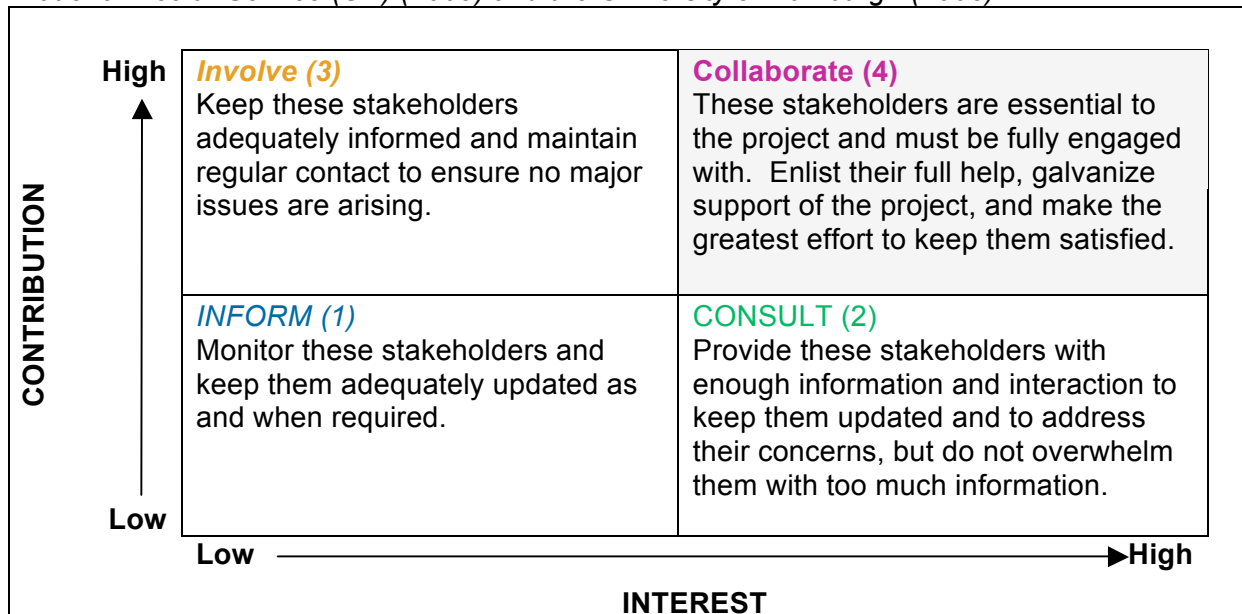
The levels of engagement are defined more fully as:

*   *Inform* – providing interested third parties with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, identifying alternatives, recognising opportunities and discovering potential solutions. Information must be tailored to stakeholder needs.
*   Consult – obtaining feedback from interested third parties on relevant aspects of a projects designs, methodologies, analysis, alternatives, decision making, and desired outcomes of a process.
*   *Involve* – working directly with interested third parties throughout the project lifecycle to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are understood, considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into decision making.
*   **Collaborate** – working in partnership with individuals, or groups, in relevant aspects of the decision making process, including the development of alternative methods and the identification of preferred solutions or outcomes.

When undertaking this selection it is important to keep in mind whether this process will be open to stakeholder scrutiny. If stakeholders were to view mapping diagrams and tables how may they react to the assumptions being made about them and what could be the impact on working relationships? In cases where full transparency is needed it may be considered more appropriate to present stakeholders with the opportunity to assign themselves into the different groups. It may also be necessary to agree mutually acceptable terminologies and definitions for the four levels of engagement.

Suggested activity:
In order to consider a stakeholder's interest in, or relevance to, a project, a series of questions can be asked. With your specific research objectives in mind, consider the following questions:

*   What interest does the stakeholder have in the project?
*   What influence can the stakeholder have on the project?
*   How may the stakeholder be impacted or affected by the project?
*   How beneficial would engagement of the stakeholder be to the project and why?

Stakeholder selection analysis allows the significance of the project to each stakeholder, or stakeholder group, to be assessed and will make it possible to prioritise stakeholders with regards to how beneficial it is to engage with them and to what extent (NHS, 2009). For example, there may be stakeholders who are deemed to be of greater benefit to the projects desired outcomes because they can supply relevant information, provide resources, or are likely to be markedly impacted by the eventual outcomes. Stakeholders that fall into this category may be deemed as being highly important to the project and therefore it is deemed essential to engage with them. Other stakeholders may have an interest in the outcomes of the research but little to contribute and the decision might be taken to engage with them at a lower level.

There are other components which can be assessed against the relevance or influence of the stakeholder. These include: willingness to engage, ability to engage (ease of engagement), and expertise (including local and traditional knowledge) (Morris and Baddache, 2012; REVIT, 2007). The most important components having a bearing on the level of engagement will be highly dependent upon the proposed outcomes of the project.

Many stakeholder analysis plots (as illustrated by Figure 3.3) include stakeholder importance or influence, as this is often considered to be a critical factor to be taken into consideration. However, if it is not included on the axes, it can still be represented through the use of colour coding or different sized circles or fonts (Morris and Baddache, 2012). Figure 3.3 provides a hypothetical example. The choice of components to map will depend on the research project, the stakeholders selected, and the desired aims of the engagement. Adopting the style of approach allows three factors to be considered and displays relative benefit of engagement in relation to the size and placement of the circles.

Figure 3.3 *Willingness to engage versus expertise. Benefit/influence is reflected by the size of the circle surrounding the stakeholder (e.g. SH1 = Stakeholder 1).*
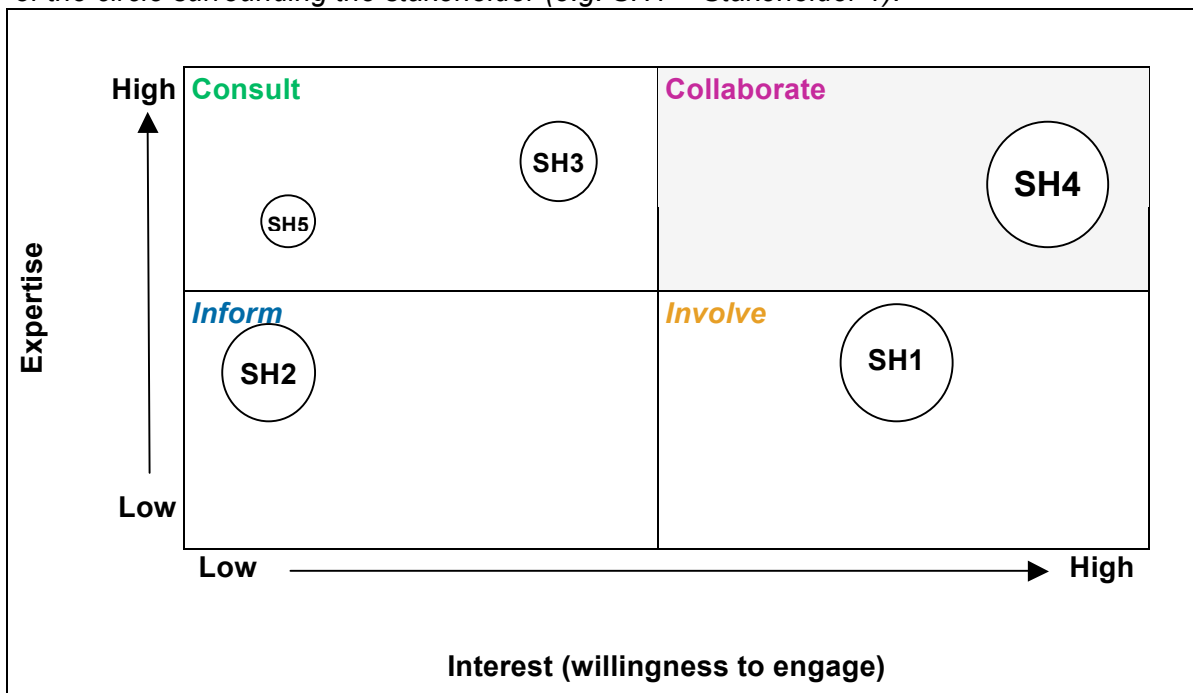
Using analysis plots to map and prioritise stakeholders provides a clear first assessment of the types of stakeholders the project will need to engage, and to what extent. However, it is also important to remember that different levels of engagement may be necessary with

particular stakeholders at different times of the project. This is discussed further in Parts 4 & 5 of the toolkit on timing and methods of engagement'.

Stage 3: Understand your stakeholders

Having begun to prioritise the relevant stakeholders, it is then necessary to obtain a greater understanding of their motivations, interests, expertise and capacity to engage; in order to begin considering how and when to engage. The points highlighted for consideration in the following suggested activity have been adapted from University of Edinburgh (2008) and AccountAbility (2011).

Suggested Activity:
Identify a range of stakeholders or stakeholder groups that you would consider important to the project and consider the following:

- Is there an existing relationship between the project and the stakeholders?
- Do relationships already exist between stakeholders?
- What knowledge do the different stakeholders possess that may be relevant to the project?
- What views are the stakeholders likely to hold about the project and its outcomes, will these views be positive or negative?
- Is there the potential for any conflict arising amongst stakeholders or between stakeholders and the project?
- What are the appropriate means of communication and will this need to be adapted in order to reach certain groups or individuals?
- Is there a willingness to engage; if not, why not, and how could this be overcome?
- Are there any barriers to participation and/or engagement (e.g. technical, physical, linguistic, geographical, political, time, information or knowledge)?

The type of information that is described in the previous suggested activity can then be tabulated, an example of how this could be approached is shown in Table 3.4. The completed table should provide a representative and balanced list of relevant stakeholders, and the levels of engagement required. The stakeholders themselves could be consulted for their views (when appropriate) to ensure they agree with the details entered; this may also prove to be an effective method for establishing an open and transparent working relationship. The table used to understand stakeholders needs to be kept under review throughout the project cycle for a number of reasons, which may include: stakeholders may request greater involvement at different stages of the project to those originally identified by the project team; new stakeholder groups may request involvement; a need may arise to engage over previously unforeseen subject matter or issues; or there may be a shift in the direction of the research or its potential outcomes which needs to be communicated (Pound, 2004).

The analysis goes some way towards indicating the varying levels of engagement required and the outcomes of the 'identifying stakeholders' process can be used to consider the types of engagement required and/or the timing and role of the engagement process. By developing a sound understanding of the stakeholders it should become more apparent what will be the most appropriate stage or stages to engage, the types of engagement which may or may not be suitable, and any potential barriers that exist which could inhibit engagement.

Table 3.4 *Understanding your stakeholders. Examples of typical stakeholders and possible overall levels of engagement have been provided. The overall level of engagement will depend on the results of the mapping exercise. Stakeholders can be grouped according to the overall level identified and/or the level be depicted through the use of certain colours or type face, as depicted here..*

Stakeholder	Existing relationship	Relationship with other stakeholders	Knowledge of the project	Views on the project	Best means of communication	Willingness to engage	Capacity to engage
Collaborate							
Government policy makers							
Scientists from same discipline							
Involve							
Landowners							
NGOs							
Consult							
Businesses							
Students							
Scientists from a different discipline							
Local community							
Inform							
General public							
Media							

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