BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit

Part 5: Methods for engagement

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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Methods for engagement

Objectives: Identify and develop the methods that will be used to engage with different stakeholders and stakeholder groups at different stages in the lifecycle of the project.

The methods used for engagement will depend upon objectives, the level of engagement required, when engagement is intended to take place, and the expected role of the stakeholder. Initial assessment with stakeholders of the desired outcomes from a project (Part 2) can help identify which methods are most likely to deliver these outcomes and achieve the purpose identified for the engagement process (REVIT, 2007). All engagement methods have particular strengths and weaknesses; the key is to choose the right one(s) for the particular purpose and context. Methods should also be selected to meet the needs, capacity and expectations of the relevant stakeholders. More than one method is often desirable and several methods can be combined to achieve an aim.

Types of engagement method

Engagement methods can be participatory or informative ('one-way'). Informative methods are considered as engagement methods as long as they meet the needs of stakeholders and are designed with those needs in mind, which usually means that they are co-defined and possibly co-designed with the stakeholders. There are innumerable engagement methods being used by different projects and new methods are being continually developed. The methods described in this section include the ones most commonly used by environmental organisations and projects (INVOLVE, 2005).

The key to success is to understand the broad range and types of methods being used, what they are being used for, and why one might be more suitable than another in a particular context and for a particular purpose (INVOLVE, 2005). Table 5.1 lists some of the main participatory methods used by biodiversity researchers; it is not exhaustive, but provides a range of methods that could be used with different stakeholders at different times.

Table 5.1 Frequent methods for participatory stakeholder engagement.

Engagement method	Key reference
One-to-one meetings and interviews	When to use, advantages and disadvantages Jeffrey, 2009 Carney *et al*, 2009
Questionnaires and surveys	When to use, advantages and disadvantages Jeffrey, 2009 Carney *et al*, 2009 Hartley and Robertson, 2006
Knowledge exchange groups (including steering groups, advisory panels, focus groups, multi-stakeholder forums)	When to use, advantages and disadvantages Jeffrey, 2009
Workshops (including brainstorming sessions)	When to use, advantages and disadvantages Jeffrey, 2009 RELU, 2005 Carney *et al*, 2009

The following methods may also be considered at different stages of research projects. Specific references have not been provided since further information on them is widely available (a good example is the public engagement toolbox published by the UK Forestry Commission, 2011).

- Informal contact
- Meetings, including 'town hall' and social events
- Talks or lectures
- Conferences
- Practical demonstrations, including participatory events (training) and games
- Websites (including blogs, e-consultations, online games)
- Social media (including online discussion groups/forums)
- Guidelines
- Databases
- Tools
- Posters (including brochures, leaflets or factsheets)
- Videos
- Newsletters/bulletins
- Press releases (including Frequently Asked Questions)
- Popular publications
- Stakeholder-specific publications, e.g. policy briefs
- Academic publications

Practice notes

A collection of practice notes on a selection of most frequently used methods are available to download from the BiodivERsA website [currently being drafted and to be added to the toolkit in April 2014].

Engagement skills

Research consortia frequently do not include professionals with experience in engagement practice or non-scientific communications. In some circumstances this might limit the effectiveness of engagement activities and so it is worth considering training for consortium members or using professionals who can help to support effective engagement such as workshop facilitators, councillors, brokers, communicators, artists and others. Early consideration of knowledge exchange and engagement needs can help in estimating the need for specific training or professional support and allow any likely costs to be included in project applications.

Working with others to share expertise in engagement and costs of activities is also worth considering. This might mean working with other research teams or securing contributions from stakeholders with the relevant expertise. The BiodivERsA Secretariat and other resources, like the BiodivERsA Database, may provide useful information on opportunities to work with other research teams or on suitable professionals with experience of training or working with biodiversity research teams.

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Case study: European Beech Forests for the Future (BeFoFu)

In 2010, the project Beech Forest for the Future (BeFoFu) started as an international collaboration between 5 universities and research institutes over Europe. The aim was to better understand the policy, socio-economic and ecological background and processes of beech forest conservation and management under the Natura 2000 network across Europe. The research should be highly relevant for forest and conservation policy makers, scientists and practitioners.

What methods of engagement did you use and what was the contribution from stakeholders?

- Initial round of 'Delphi' interviews: stakeholders (*c*.50) gave insights into the politics of Natura 2000 in beech forests in several EU countries and contributed to the formulation of research questions and identified expectations of BeFoFu;
- Social science empirical research: stakeholders as most important data source (more than 200 involved in several case studies);
- Advisory board: stakeholders commented on project progress and results, and gave hints for designing the stakeholder involvement (3 stakeholders on the AB: EU Commission, European Forest Owners, a European Environmental NGO);
- Second round of 'Delphi' interviews (*c*.50 stakeholders): stakeholders received information on project results and commented on possible policy relevant conclusions;
- Stakeholder workshop: stakeholders (*c*.10 EU level) evaluated results and we will jointly develop possible conclusions for policy making.

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Matching methods to levels of engagement

Different levels of engagement are defined in Step 3; the level of engagement and involvement will vary from one stakeholder to another and throughout the project lifecycle as stakeholder roles change.

In order to illustrate different levels of involvement, methods have been colour-coded as follows:

Inform – most basic level of engagement
Consult – specific questions are asked, but not full discussion or interaction
Involve – more opportunity for discussion, but not involved in decision making
Collaborate – full involvement, often including decision making

Methods of engagement can be considered in terms of the level of engagement they are most appropriate for. For example, stakeholder specific publications on a website or newsletter are most likely to be used to *Inform*, and a workshop could be used to engage at *Involve* or **Collaborate** levels. Examples of some methods and their most appropriate levels of engagement are provided in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Examples of methods and their associated levels of engagement.

	Inform	Consult	*Involve*	**Collaborate**
Website	**	**		
Social media	**	**		
Lectures	**	*		
Multi-stakeholder forums		*	**	*
One-to-one meetings and interviews		*	**	*
Town Hall meeting		*	**	*
Workshops		*	**	**
Questionnaires/surveys		**	*	
Practical demonstrations			**	**
Steering group				**

*** – most appropriate level of engagement for a particular method.*
** – other levels for which the method is also relevant.*

Once stakeholders have been identified, overall levels of engagement have been established, and the roles that the stakeholders are to play have been determined, the appropriate methods and their timing can be selected.

Table 5.3 provides an example of how methods can be selected for a project based on the level of engagement required. Most projects will involve various levels of engagement and more than one method for each level of engagement required. Each stakeholder does not have to be engaged in every case at the level of engagement they are associated with.

Table 5.3 Stakeholders and methods, based on appropriate levels of engagement.

Level of engagement →	*Inform*		Consult	*Involve*		**Collaborate**
Method of engagement →	*Website*	*News-letters*	Questionnaire	*Worksho p*	*One-to-one meeting*	**Steering Group**
Stakeholders ↓						
Govt advisors		X		X	X	X
Landowners		X	X	X	X	
Local Business		X	X	X		
Media	X	X	X			

Recording all the elements of stakeholder analysis

Based on the information gathered throughout stakeholder analysis (using Parts 2-5 of the toolkit), a matrix of stakeholder engagement can be created. Such a matrix can be part of an initial plan for seeking engagement, can be used to inform discussions with stakeholders in the early stages of a project and can then be adapted as actual plans and activities are undertaken.

The matrix is developed more, as a planning tool, in Part 6 and a template provided [consider providing this as a downloadable spreadsheet].

References

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