

The Stakeholder Engagement Process: An Overview

Your particular approach to stakeholder engagement will depend on a number of factors such as the goals of your solar strategy, the players involved, and the overall context in which you are operating. Still, there are some basic activities that are generally present in most successful engagement processes. In this section of the tool kit, we use a four-step model to provide a general overview of these activities:

- Step One:** Initial Planning and Strategy Development
- Step Two:** Identifying Your Stakeholders
- Step Three:** Building Relationships with Stakeholders
- Step Four:** Maintaining Relationships & Refining Your Strategy



STEP 1: Initial Planning and Strategy Development

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Why are you engaging stakeholders?*
- With what (or whom) do you plan to invite them to engage?*
- What is your intended result?*

Before you engage your stakeholders, it is important to understand why you are engaging them and what you hope to accomplish. Developing a plan will help you use your resources efficiently to engage the right stakeholders at the right time to achieve your goals. While your engagement goals will reflect your particular context, they will likely involve 1) ensuring the success of your solar strategy by building better relationships with stakeholders who can affect its outcome, and 2) ensuring that stakeholders are not harmed or negatively affected, either directly or indirectly, as a result of your strategy.

You may find that you need to gather information about stakeholders in order to answer these questions. It can be useful to conduct a preliminary, exploratory mapping process as part of the planning stage.

TIPS:

- Don't neglect your internal stakeholders. Use this planning phase to build consensus among core team members and project partners about the goals of your stakeholder engagement process.

- If you choose to conduct informal stakeholder interviews at this point in the process, ask for recommendations of other individuals or organizations with whom you should consult. This will contribute to the brainstorming and categorizing process in Step Two.

OTHER RESOURCES:

- ISC's [9 Questions](#) tool: another question-based approach to planning a stakeholder engagement process.



STEP 2: Identifying Your Stakeholders

KEY QUESTIONS:

Who are your stakeholders?

What are their positions and interests?

How might their support (or lack of support) influence the success of your solar strategy?

How might your solar strategy affect them?

What unintended effects might your strategy have on stakeholders?

This is a crucial step and an important one to conduct thoughtfully! One of the most common mistakes that people make is to limit themselves to a 'convenience sample' – in other words, only engaging with the stakeholders that they know well or that are easy to access.

When identifying stakeholders, be sure to consider everyone who could potentially influence the success of your solar strategy. Some stakeholders might have a direct influence on your work; others might be in a position to influence it indirectly through their relationships with other stakeholders. Also consider your target groups – those who you hope the solar strategy will benefit – as well as anyone else who might be affected, either positively or negatively.

The process of identifying stakeholders does not have to be elaborate or complicated. You can keep it simple; aim to be systematic and rigorous enough to ensure that you are identifying stakeholders beyond the 'usual suspects.' One way to do this is to begin with free-form brainstorming. Based on that brainstorm, generate a list of categories that are as mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive as possible. Make sure that you identify examples of specific stakeholders for each category. Then consult with both internal and external stakeholders to solicit feedback on the list. Finally, flesh out each category. See one example of a template for doing this [here](#).

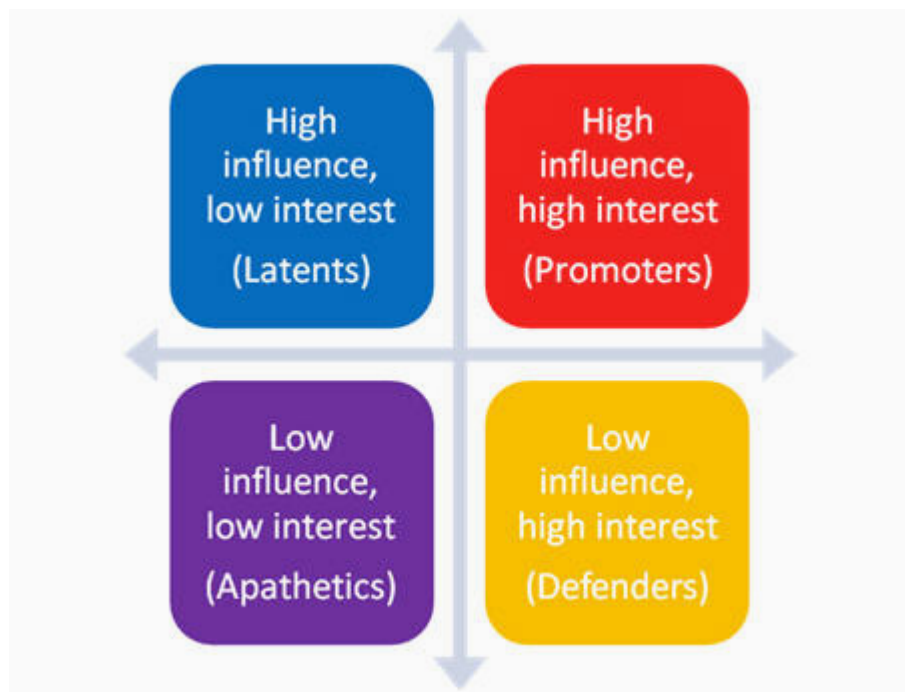
Once you have a good list of stakeholders, you'll want to analyze them with the goal of understanding their interests and positions, their potential to contribute to the goals of your solar strategy, and the ways in which your work can benefit them (or avoid harming them). One technique is to analyze

stakeholders according to the role or the purpose they might serve with respect to the goals of your solar strategy. For example, [Business for Social Responsibility](#) suggests using the following 5 criteria:

- Contribution (value): Does the stakeholder have information, counsel, or expertise on the issue that could be helpful?
- Legitimacy: How legitimate is the stakeholder’s claim for engagement?
- Willingness to engage: How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
- Influence: How much influence does the stakeholder have? (You will need to clarify “who” they influence, e.g., government agencies, NGOs, consumers, investors, etc.)
- Necessity of involvement: Is this someone who could derail or delegitimize the process if they were not included in the engagement?

Note that these criteria might need to be modified to best reflect stakeholder roles you envision for your strategy. For example, if you know your efforts will require a certain kind of technical expertise that doesn’t exist on your core team, you may want to include this as a specific criterion when you map stakeholders. Note also that these criteria focus on the forms of power or influence that stakeholders may exercise. But other important arguments exist for including certain kinds of stakeholders, regardless of how much power or influence they have over your strategy. For example, engaging the general public can help ensure a transparent and fair process and lead to more equitable outcomes.

Another common stakeholder analysis tool is the Power/Interest Grid. It involves placing stakeholders on a four-quadrant grid to help distinguish among different types of stakeholders according to degree of influence on your solar strategy. There are many versions of this grid and you should feel free to tailor it to your own stakeholder engagement goals. Typically, the Y axis represents stakeholders’ degree of power or influence, and the X axis represents their level of commitment or support for your solar strategy. The result is four classifications that the [Community Tool Box](#) and the [World Bank](#) describe as follows:



- **Promoters** have both great interest in the effort and the power to help make it successful (or to derail it).
- **Defenders** have a vested interest and can voice their support, but have little actual power to influence the effort in any way.
- **Latents** have no particular interest or involvement in the effort, but have the power to influence it greatly if they become interested.
- **Apathetics** have little interest and little power, and may not even know the effort exists.
- (Note that this classification assumes that stakeholders in the upper right quadrant will promote your strategy. In fact, these high influence/high interest stakeholders could also represent very powerful opposition to your strategy. Either way, they are important stakeholders to consider.)

TIPS:

- Don't worry about identifying ALL potential stakeholders at the outset. Do make sure that you have an exhaustive list of stakeholder categories, and that you have ground truthed it from multiple perspectives.
- Remember that stakeholder mapping is an iterative process. You will revisit this list and your mapping tools over the course of your project.
- Don't guess your stakeholders' interests. Ask them.

OTHER RESOURCES:

- [Sample Template for a Stakeholder Analysis matrix](#), Capable Partners Program.
- BSR, [Stakeholder Mapping](#), 2011.
- Mindtools, [Interactive Power/Interest Grid](#)



STEP 3: Building Relationships with Stakeholders

KEY QUESTIONS:

What mechanisms will you employ to engage your stakeholders and why?

At what point(s) in the process should you engage them?

What should your message(s) be?

How will you solicit their input?

How will you use their input?

Now that you've mapped your stakeholders, you are prepared to design specific engagement strategies for particular stakeholders (or groups of stakeholders). It is rarely effective or practical to engage with all stakeholders in the same way all the time. Not all stakeholders will require the same level of engagement and certain forms of engagement will be better suited to a particular type of stakeholder,

or a specific point in the process. Think carefully about which stakeholders will warrant the most ‘care and feeding,’ which will have useful input early in the process, and which could derail your efforts if they aren’t consulted at key decision points.

At its heart, stakeholder engagement is about relationship building -- which is often best done in person. For many, direct face-to-face interaction remains an indispensable, and central, part of their engagement strategy. Some commonly-used tools to facilitate in-person stakeholder engagement include: one-on-one meetings, focus groups, surveys, public meetings or events, forming advisory bodies or other structures, including stakeholder representation on project implementation or governance bodies, participation in networks or coalitions, and formal partnerships between organizations. There are a growing number of online technologies and social media platforms that provide opportunities for virtual stakeholder engagement. The most robust engagement strategies employ a combination of in-person and virtual techniques.

For more in-depth discussion of how to design and facilitate in-person engagement events, see **Tactical Tools - Holding Successful Engagement Workshops & Events.**

TIPS:

- Relationship building doesn’t *start* at this step in the framework. It is an on-going process. Think about every interaction – including the outreach you do as part of planning your strategy, identifying stakeholders, and analyzing their interests, as contributing to building your relationship with a particular stakeholder.
- Make sure you coordinate stakeholder engagement within members of your team or initiative. For some stakeholders, you may want to designate one single point of contact or ‘relationship manager.’



STEP 4: Maintaining Relationships & Refining Your Strategy

KEY QUESTIONS:

How will you know if your stakeholder engagement efforts are working?

How will you report back to your stakeholders with progress and updates?

How will you update your stakeholder analysis to reflect new information or changing circumstances?

Stakeholder engagement is an iterative process. Stakeholders may come and go, and their positions, interests, and agendas may shift. Your objectives with respect to specific stakeholders may also evolve over time. Be sure to update and adapt your approach as you engage with stakeholders and learn more about their positions, interests, and perspectives. Keep in mind that **trust** and managing **expectations** are both critical components of strong stakeholder relations.

Aim to schedule periodic reviews of your stakeholder analysis and engagement strategy. Use these reviews as opportunities to re-scan the landscape and take note of new players that might not have been on your radar screen during the initial stakeholder mapping process.

TIPS:

- Don't forget to report back to your stakeholders periodically about progress and achievements!
- Make sure to document the results of your engagement efforts. Documentation need not be extensive. At a minimum, you should track your interactions with each stakeholder and keep a written record of what was discussed.

Resources for more information:

Business for Social Responsibility, *Back to Basics: How to Make Stakeholder Engagement Meaningful for Your Company*, http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Five-Step_Guide_to_Stakeholder_Engagement.pdf

Business for Social Responsibility, Stakeholder Engagement Series, 2011, http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Stakeholder_Engagement_Series.pdf

Community Tool Box, Chapter 7, Section Eight. [Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and their Interests.](#)

J. Neil, *Stakeholder Engagement: A Roadmap to Meaningful Engagement*.

<http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/media/CR%20Stakeholder.pdf>

Doughty Centre, Cranfield School of Management, 2009.