

The benefits of engaging the community

These are just some of the benefits that are achievable through effective community engagement.

Planned and implemented effectively, community engagement:

- ***Achieves better decisions and results:***
 - ▶ Brings more information into a decision
 - ▶ Adds more perspectives and expands options
 - ▶ Helps to create decisions that are informed, understood, 'implementable' and sustainable
- ***Improves our project management by:***
 - ▶ Providing an early warning system for issues
 - ▶ Reducing the overall cost of program development or service delivery
 - ▶ Providing 2-way communication and opportunities for dialogue
 - ▶ Creating a credible channel for timely and accurate information
 - ▶ Encouraging modification of decisions before major problems develop
 - ▶ Reducing delays while a decision is defended
- ***Meets regulatory requirements:***
 - ▶ Sometimes you just have to consult stakeholders or you can't proceed
- ***Facilitates mutual understanding:***
 - ▶ Serves as a sounding board for proposed programs
 - ▶ Manages single-issue viewpoints
 - ▶ Helps to find common ground
- ***Meets stakeholder expectations and values:***
 - ▶ People have the right to influence what affects them
 - ▶ Provides a method for incorporating stakeholder values into decisions
- ***Builds relationships:***
 - ▶ Encourages sharing of positive experiences which builds trust
 - ▶ Helps to build long term relationships
 - ▶ Helps organisations to move beyond a focus on customer complaints, to working with consumers to ensure services meet needs

Other Concepts

Co-intelligence

Co-intelligence is the name given to the power of working together. The Co-intelligence Institute (www.co-intelligence.org) says that co-intelligence is the ability we have to wisely organise our lives together. The fundamental belief is that all of us together are wiser than each of us as individuals. Community engagement acknowledges and makes use of the wisdom of the group.

Partnership of equals

Community engagement is based on the idea of a partnership of equals, whereby each member of the community of interest has an equal right to participate in decision making processes, and an equal right to put their viewpoint forward.

The risks and costs of not involving the community

Without good community engagement your process may become entangled in legal and political quagmires. Lawsuits about lack of due process, legislative interventions and other such strategies are signs that individuals or organisations are unsatisfied with the decision-making process.

Sometimes known as “the veto”, concerned individuals and groups have many tools and increasing knowledge and sophistication in slowing down and stopping your decision-making. When solutions are imposed communities will often react.

- They may seek legislative action to undo your decision or even remove your responsibility and control of the decision.
- They might physically disrupt a project, perhaps even endangering safety.
- They may create a public relations nightmare for you and your organisation.

When you assess the costs and benefits of community engagement, you should consider the potential costs of delays, or even the inability to move forward should the public exercise its veto.

