
Stakeholder Recruitment Tools

Who to Recruit as Stakeholders

In addition to including a broad cross-section of the community, the Stakeholder Group can include all the various town leaders — department heads, for example, and the heads of significant local institutions. They all will gain by allowing others to see links between what they do and the value they add to the community as a whole. Once these linkages are clear, so is the importance of each individual role to community development. For example, a new recycling operation and efficient solid waste management systems might be a good way to attract businesses and markets. The different leaders can also offer a lot of valuable information on the contents of the various planning documents that have been produced in the past.

What the Position Requires

The Stakeholder Group will be responsible for a large part of the planning process. They should have the skills and commitment to engage in a wide variety of public outreach activities... everything from hosting focus groups to discussing key community issues to engaging local organizations in short term projects designed to keep people excited about the process. Your Core Team will need to do a lot of preparation for the first meeting, including the drafting of basic documents. From there, you will need to let the Stakeholder Group shape the final version of the documents, and facilitate the group processes that the planning effort will produce.

The Recruitment Process

Task One: Brainstorm Stakeholder Group Candidates

The Core Team can brainstorm a list of people suitable for the stakeholder group, and determine who will contact each person identified. Consider representatives of the following as a starting point:

- Local government officials and staff — e.g. mayor's office and municipal council
- Civic and community organizations (NGOs)
- Businesses and industries
- Professional organizations — e.g. natural scientists, physicians, land-use planners
- Utility companies
- Regional and national governmental institutions — e.g. social welfare offices, environmental inspectorates, health inspectorates
- Social service recipients
- People with special needs
- Youth and elders
- Local schools and universities
- Private landowners

- Religious and ethnic groups
- Labor unions
- Community residents
- Media

Task Two: Schedule a Meeting to Accommodate the Most Prominent Candidates

Identify a few of the busiest people who are critical to your effort's success (a mayor or supervisor, planning department head, a prominent business leader), and set a first meeting for the Stakeholder Group, several weeks in advance, that fits into their schedules. Do your best to get their commitment to attend and participate.

Task Three: Invite other Candidates

Contact people and ask them to participate. In-person contact is best. Call them up, make an appointment, and go visit them with some materials describing the project and what their responsibilities would be. Let them sleep on it, then follow up in a few days. It doesn't hurt to mention some of the other people who have expressed a willingness to participate. An alternate way to recruit people is to conduct a simple community survey that will begin to generate a buzz about the project and let you see who is enthusiastic.

Task Four: The First Meeting of the Stakeholder Group

For effective functioning, the first meeting agenda should include the following:

- Clear definition of the role and responsibilities of the Group
- Choosing a chairperson and a deputy chairperson
- Determining the logistics of the Group — how often and where it will meet, etc.
- Discussion and agreement on how information will be shared
- Discussion and agreement on a process for making decisions (e.g., by consensus or majority vote)
- Discussion and agreement on a process for resolving conflicts
- Setting a date for a stakeholder committee retreat (see next Task)

Meeting Materials Checklist:

- List of member contact information
- Community Map
- Selected background readings
- Relevant municipal mandates
- Draft mission statement for the campaign

A note on selecting a Chairperson: It can be a challenge to select one person to lead, when the group is new and made up of people who don't know each other very well. One effective technique is to go around the group and ask everyone to name someone (including themselves) who they think would make a good chairperson. Treat it as a

brainstorming session, so that everyone gets a chance to make a recommendation, and try to encourage everyone to participate. Then go around again and ask people to say why they chose who they did. Now go around the group again to see if there is consensus. Often, by the third time around, you'll have identified someone who everyone can support. An alternative to this is to recruit a good leader at the outset — someone who can serve as an interim chair, at least, until the group has met a few times. Talk to them in advance, and recommend them to the group at your first meeting.

Task Five: Hold a Stakeholder Retreat

When a diverse group of strangers get together for the first time to discuss something as important as the future of their community, a cordial, relaxed social time will help them to get to know each other and speak freely about their concerns. The retreat is thus the ideal time to discuss some guiding principles and ground rules for the group process. It is particularly advisable to set aside time for the Group to focus on designing the groundwork for the community sustainability project.

Ideally, it is good to get people away from their normal setting for two or three days together to get acquainted, share meals, and have some fun. But even if the retreat can only be a day long, it is well worth the time it will take to do it. All the work that follows will be easier as the people begin to build trust and camaraderie.

Make it a priority during the retreat to describe in detail the scope of the project, and give people an opportunity to comment on the sustainability planning process itself. In group activities participants can learn about, and determine, how the process will work. Each phase should be discussed — the endorsement process, the asset inventory, vision, strategy development, implementation, and evaluation.

Realistically, a full discussion of these steps will require more time than that allotted for the retreat, but it's a good start, and people can continue to work together in teams. You should strive to determine a real action plan, with goals, timelines, and a schedule for regular meetings. Subcommittees or teams can be established, and all individuals ought to determine what roles they will play in the process. Guidelines for interaction can be determined and agreed upon. It is important for everyone to have a role, and to be perceived by themselves and others as important to the group process.

You will find there are many issues to be explored regarding the functioning of the Stakeholders group in more depth than is possible at the first organizational meeting. Where will meetings be held? How will they be run? How will disagreements be handled? How will conflict be resolved? How will final decisions be made, and by whom? How will subcommittees give their input to the whole group? Who are the leaders? It is important for people to feel comfortable with the resolution of these issues, especially if they have never worked together before.

If there is a municipal mandate for the group to follow, such as laws that require meetings be open to the public, or a special charge to the committee, or limits set on the scope of its work, then these issues should also be discussed at the outset. For many questions that will arise, there are no right answers, only the answers that the group itself determines. Leaders can suggest certain methods to use, but the group must decide to use them or not. It can be helpful to organize group activities during the retreat that provide a structured way to develop a good team, to improve people's skills, and to allow the participants to shape the process. They should be integrated into an agenda that includes a balance of work time, social time, and team-building activities.