Best practice community engagement

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Overview

- Why engage community? Purpose, objectives, and definitions
- Who are the stakeholders?
- Range of engagement depends on purpose and need
- Innovative and inexpensive methods for engagement
- What happens if poor engagement
- Evaluating effectiveness of engagement
- Checklist for best practice engagement

Why engage community?

Planning and environment decisions should serve public interest; checks and balances built into legislation, but usually at a minimal level

People have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them and/or they have to pay for

Difficult for elected reps to know their community and take into account diverse interests – reduces political risk

Need to understand how to minimise impact on sectors of the community

Informed community can better contribute to decisions

Decisions are better accepted, implemented, and complied with when stakeholders understand and are involved.

Contributes to accountability; prevents misuse of power

Transparency fosters legitimacy and reputation of the decision-maker

Purpose

Any process that involves

the *community*

in problem-solving or decision-making and uses community input

to make *better decisions* (IAP2)

...aiming for more robust, better informed, more implementable decisions

Who are the stakeholders?

- Work/life will be affected
- Live close to location of proposed project
- Organisations and activities might be affected
- Change to customary habit, activity, route
- Values, interests may cause them to care about an activity

Usually identified through stakeholder analysis or mapping:

- Different stakeholders may have different roles and characteristics and therefore need a different consultation method
- Different phase may require different level of participation
- Different interests emerge at different levels of involvement

Range of engagement methods depends on purpose and need

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public:	**Promise to the Public:**	**Promise to the Public:**	**Promise to the Public:**	**Promise to the Public:**
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools:	**Example Tools:**	**Example Tools:**	**Example Tools:**	**Example Tools:**
• Fact sheets • Web sites • Open houses	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings	• Workshops • Deliberative polling	• Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making	• Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

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iap2
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Depends on stage of process

Tailored for needs of stakeholders and purpose of consultation

A basic: consult with existing interest groups but make opportunities for the range of stakeholders

Methods of engagement (there are lots!)

- On-line information provision and submission
- Interactive open house, displays
- Longer term project: advisory group
- Large numbers e.g. 5000 person citizen summit re World Trade Centre
- Citizen jury e.g. Noosa waste; river management
- Well designed surveys
- Public meetings (less than ideal)

Examples of interactive visual methods …

Interactive mapping allows stakeholders to draw on local knowledge and experience (Grant et al. 2015)

Photovoice on map overlay (Grant et al. 2015)

Community uses own photos to identify issues

Draws on local knowledge and experience.

Overlay on a map to show the context.

3D visualisation (Lieske et al. 2015)

Current Climate

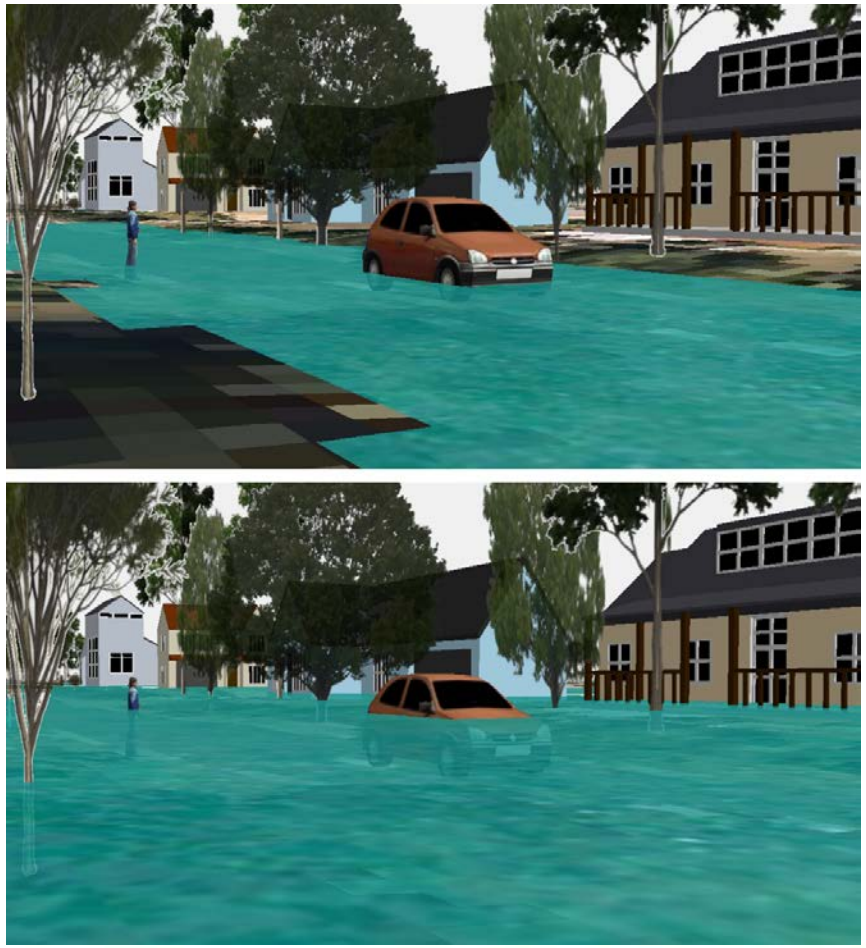
Year 2100

Storm Surge, Riverine Flooding and Sea level Rise

3D visualisation (Lieske et al. 2015)

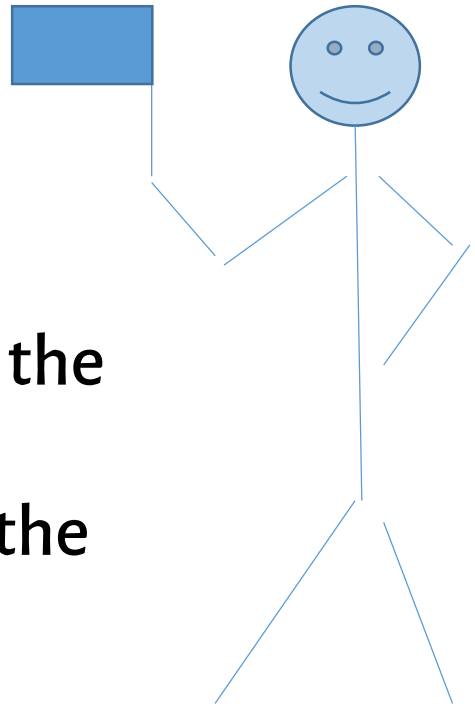
Localized flood inundation:

- current (upper photo) and
- year 2100 climate (lower) scenarios.



What happens if poor engagement

'If planners will not involve the citizens, citizens will involve themselves'
(Sarkissian, 2010:3)



- Advocacy
- Less control by government over dialogue and outcome
- Individuals spend time fighting for a cause rather than nurturing the community
- Government resources spent responding rather than addressing the real issues of concern
- Affects relationships: lack of trust

Evaluating effectiveness of engagement

Use evaluation to improve processes and prove the benefits of engagement to community and Council.

A well-designed consultation program that builds in evaluation at the start can be cost-effective.

Ideal if evaluation is independent.

- Process – Sufficient time; appropriate opportunity for stakeholders; did the methods work at each stage – value for money
- Outcomes – Did decision take account of stakeholder views? What did it do for relationships?

Checklist for engagement

1. Were all those potentially affected by or interested in a decision given an opportunity to participate in a timely manner?
   - Stakeholder analysis and consultation plan based on understanding of participant needs
2. Were participants provided with the information they needed to participate in a meaningful way?
   - While information needs to be user friendly, it shouldn't be patronizing. There are experts in the community too and agencies should be able to justify decisions based on good evidence.
   - Access to information at the appropriate time?
3. Did the process reflect the size, complexity and stage of the proposal?
   - Were visual methods used to make the intangible, tangible?
   - Were interactive, experiential techniques used to assist individuals to connect, contribute and understand?

Checklist, cont'd

4. Did community input influence outcomes?

5. Were process and outcomes (incl relationships) evaluated?

    Was it used for improvement? Independent? Transparent?

6. Did analysis of stakeholder input identify which sectors or individuals have particular concerns?

7. Was there communication with participants about how their input affected the decision?

References

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- Sarkissian W, 2010. *Creative community planning: transformative engagement methods for working at the edge*, London, Earthscan.