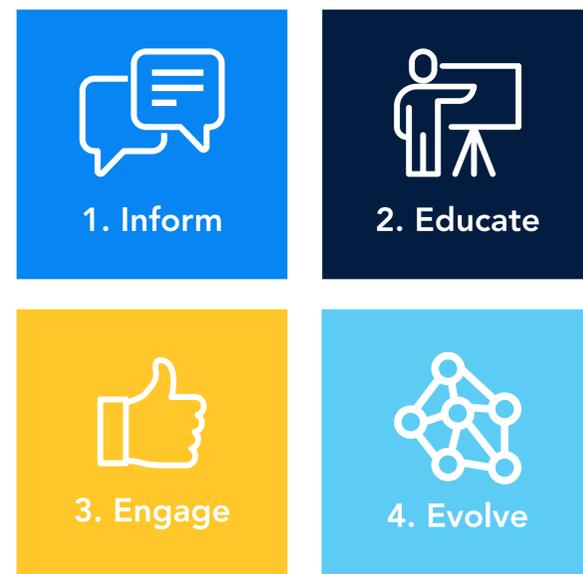


→ Early engagement: Key to successful community partnerships



Stakeholder engagement is often viewed as a required but limited activity, conducted in the middle of a project to satisfy compliance regulations. But we know that stakeholder engagement can—and should—be so much more. To be truly effective, **stakeholder engagement should start early** and continue throughout the project lifecycle. Done well, stakeholder engagement allows you to tune into the conversation and use what people are saying to create tailored messages to key audiences, solicit input, and shape a project to be reflective of community interests and needs.

With a 24/7 news cycle amplified by social media creating a unique challenge of information and education dissemination, agencies and project developers need to **get ahead of their message**. Early engagement is critical to **inform, educate, engage, and evolve** with their targeted communities. Communicating early and often has proven to aid in keeping projects on schedule, defensible, and foster long-term community relationships. Early engagement starts by listening to the community—what issues or topics are of interest to them, what is important to them, and what makes their community unique.



Our stakeholder engagement **best practices** keep you ahead of potential pitfalls that can slow down your projects or stop you in your tracks.

Best Practice	Do Now!
 <p>SEEK TO UNDERSTAND. Be present in your community. Seek to learn about their unique interests and concerns as you work to build community-centric goals to foster lasting relationships and partnerships. Learning about a proposal or project in a formal meeting is too late!</p>	<p>Stop talking and start listening. Become an integrated party of the local community by getting involved. Have a visible presence at local community events.</p>
 <p>DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH. Use digital insights to perform audience assessments, sentiment analysis and build early strategies to ensure the right people are reached at the right time with the right message.</p>	<p>Leverage existing social media to connect with your local community. Use data to tell your story in a way that will resonate.</p>
 <p>MULTI-TIERED ENGAGEMENT. Provide your community and stakeholders with opportunities that work for them. Community meetings, virtual meetings, and events such as townhalls and site tours, create opportunities to work together as partners, will ensure your stakeholders feel valued and a part of the process, while increasing trust and understanding.</p>	<p>Let your community know that you are a long-term partner by providing them opportunities to engage with you in developing a shared vision for the future.</p>

CASE STUDY

An offshore wind developer invested time to become an integrated part of the local community. Their employees attended local events, showing their long-term commitment to the local community. Early on the developer held workshops to listen to the community's concerns and now shares regular electronic newsletter updates with the community. These newsletters share project information and progress, highlight recent milestones, announce upcoming meetings, and share stories of project staff's involvement in the local community and have in turn bolstered attendance at local meetings. An educated and engaged community makes for a great strategic partner!

Learn more about ICF's Stakeholder Engagement methodology and approach at www.icf.com/work/environment/stakeholder-engagement

