Association of State and Territorial

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Measuring Effectiveness of
State Stakeholder Engagement and Partnering Efforts

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement and partnering are strategic tools that improve environmental management and lead to increased support for processes and decisions. In order to improve State stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts and demonstrate return on investment, there is a need to develop and implement a tool for measuring the effectiveness of current programs and for analyzing areas for improvement. By capturing key elements of effectiveness and developing performance indicators and measures, program managers will be able to anticipate problem areas, allocate adequate resources, and mitigate adverse impacts to environmental projects. In the context of this effort, a stakeholder is defined as anyone having a stake in the outcome of environmental projects. This includes, but is not limited to, the agency, other governmental entities (federal, tribal, local), Congressional and legislative representatives, impacted community members, heads of community organizations, schools, businesses, potentially responsible parties, special interest groups, and the media.

Although there have been numerous research projects (individual site surveys, focus groups, etc.) focused on measuring the effectiveness of stakeholder involvement programs, to date no uniform standards, benchmarks, indicators, metrics, or scorecards exist to evaluate stakeholder engagement efforts. Most researchers are in agreement that performance management involves collecting data in a systematic and objective manner to determine efficiency and effectiveness toward program or project objectives, and that stakeholder engagement and partnering activities must be an integral component in overall program management and budgeting. Data collection upfront provides information about community interest and political impacts that will drive the amount of resources required to meet the needs of the public. It is important to note that community interest at some sites may be low or non-existent, requiring minimum resources to keep a "finger on the pulse" of the community, which can change quickly due to emerging issues or previously uninterested participants suddenly taking interest for some reason.

Stakeholder Value

There is little argument within commercial industry concerning the importance of stakeholder input and the value-added to a decision-making process. Organizations that have utilized stakeholder opinion and considerations have proven to be more successful in accomplishing goals and avoiding costly mistakes, in time, money, and social capital. Businesses such as Coca-Cola, Nabisco, Bellsouth, and other retail companies spend millions of dollars every year to monitor consumer spending habits to determine product development, marketing and sales strategies. These businesses are interested in stakeholder perceptions and behavior because they see the necessity of understanding stakeholders to continue making a profit.

Although a State's interest is not profit, effective stakeholder involvement enhances the ability to design and implement sustainable solutions to environmental issues which can be supported by community and political leaders. Federal and State environmental regulations require public

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involvement and input throughout an environmental decision-making process. It is important to understand, however, that the value of stakeholder engagement is more than merely meeting minimum requirements. Interested groups and individuals have a role in providing informed input to the regulatory decision-making authorities and their participation benefits a State's environmental programs through solid relationships, shared ideas, information exchange, cost avoidance, and supportive alliances.

Measuring a Social Science

Measuring stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts is inherently subjective in nature and often not understood or valued within a scientific and technical organization. How do we know what we are doing is right? How do we know our efforts are making a difference in meeting overall program management objectives? How can we determine if stakeholders view the process and decisions as legitimate? How do we measure trust and credibility, the foundation for any effective stakeholder engagement effort?

Without indicators and measures, stakeholder involvement efforts are unfocused and become subject to trial and error. The tool proposed here is designed to bring some objectivity to the measurement and evaluation process. The tool defines indicators, metrics, measurement tools, and a scale of outcome that can provide a numeric value to aspects of stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts that we can manage. It should be noted, however, that numbers do not provide the full picture of the effectiveness of a stakeholder engagement and partnering effort, and that to some extent, the results of measurement will always remain subjective.

Success vs. Effectiveness

It is important here to clarify the difference between "success" and "effectiveness." By definition, *success* refers to definitively meeting goals, standards, deadlines, awards, or completion, such as operating under budget or meeting a deadline. The answer to the question "were we successful?" requires a definitive yes or no answer.

Effectiveness, on the other hand, requires a more in-depth explanation. Effectiveness explains or gives insight into how or by what process the goals were accomplished. It usually is measured in terms of an activity's impact on something else. For example, an indicator of a program's effectiveness might be the ability to identify and incorporate community needs, provide for meaningful dialogue, and gain support for a decision, or agreement to proceed even if the community doesn't always agree to the specific action, but agrees that the process was inclusive and fair.

One can argue that effective programs are successful programs, but the reverse is not necessarily true. For example, an environmental cleanup project may be considered successful by engineering standards because it was completed, but it may not be considered effective because it was delayed twice, went over budget, and incurred a lawsuit.

The tool proposed here is meant to measure *effectiveness* of stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts.

Attributes of Effectiveness

An effective stakeholder engagement program can be described as one that allows full and active stakeholder representation and provides sufficient opportunities for stakeholders to impact decisions. A 1998 study by S.A. Carnes, et al, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), contributed to the concept of attributes most important in measuring effectiveness of a stakeholder involvement effort. In a survey, respondents were asked to rank the order of perceived importance to a list of several attributes. Results indicate the following identified by stakeholders as key components of an effective program:

1. The decision making process allows full and active stakeholder representation
2. The decision making process is accepted as legitimate by stakeholders
3. DOE and other stakeholders understand each others' concerns
4. The public has trust and confidence in DOE and the DOE facility
5. Key decisions are improved by public participation
6. Key decisions are accepted as legitimate by stakeholders
7. DOE's site-specific mission is accomplished

It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents indicated "Environmental management costs are minimized" was among the least important, and that "DOE's site-specific mission is accomplished" was important to DOE as a stakeholder, but not broadly embraced by respondents. The final result of the Carnes study suggests placing more emphasis on process, understanding, and decisions than on directly measuring the effect of decisions made. Although trust and confidence are abstract perceptions and difficult to measure, Carnes, et al, suggest that information can be obtained by directly asking the public for their responses to those questions.

Developing Indicators of Effectiveness

Research confirms the notion that indicators and measures are interactive and a thorough evaluation requires the whole package. This simply means that developing indicators to measure a stakeholder engagement process is useless if what you are measuring is invalid, thus verifying that goals need to be agreed upon up front, and that stakeholder engagement must be an integral component of environmental management.

Indicators proposed to measure State stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts include:

- Accessibility to the decision making process
- Clear understanding of stakeholder interests and concerns
- Diversity of views represented
- Integration of interests and concerns
- Information exchange
- Project efficiency
- Decision acceptability
- Mutual learning/respect
- Cost avoidance, direct and indirect

Metrics, measurement tools, and scale of outcome are detailed in Attachment A.

Evaluation Strategies

Environmental projects, particularly cleanup or remediation activities, can take several years to complete. Measuring stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts will take equally as long. Stakeholder engagement and partnering program evaluation should not be a one-time event, but rather continuous and embedded within the overall project management to track progress in meeting planned goals. This means evaluations should occur before, during, and after the project, with adjustments made throughout the process, as needed. Formative evaluations throughout the implementation phase will prove invaluable to tracking progress and identifying areas of adjustment and improvement as the project evolves.

Monitoring stakeholder behavior and interests will help determine if communication mechanisms are effective. Including stakeholders in collaboratively identifying the issues and agreeing on goals and solutions is crucial to effective program management.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Effective stakeholder engagement and partnering activities are crucial components of any effective environmental program. They are integral to strategic planning efforts, and must be included in scheduling, budgeting, and resource management of environmental projects. Measurement of these efforts is imperative to demonstrate value and return on investment. The proposed tool can be used to track and analyze the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and partnering in accomplishing environmental management goals.

In order for stakeholder engagement and partnering efforts to be included in overall environmental management, State project management must:

- create an environment of support for including stakeholder engagement and partnering in environmental planning, budgeting, and resource management
- invest in stakeholder involvement training for environmental management personnel
- establish a culture that values stakeholder engagement and partnering as integral to environmental program management
- support developing an electronic mechanism for implementing the proposed measurement and reporting tool

References

S.A. Carnes, M. Schweitzer, E.B. Peelle, A.K. Wolfe, J.F. Munro. Measuring the success of public participation on environmental restoration and waste management activities in the U.S. Department of Energy. Technology in Society. 20 (1998) 385-406.

K. Cleere. Measuring effectiveness of public involvement in support of the Army Strategy for the Environment. Discussion paper prepared for U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, Health Risk Communication Program. (2005)

Appendix A

Indicator	Metric	Measurement Tool	Scale of Outcome (3=High)
Accessibility to decision-making process	1. Timing and focus of engagement 2. Influence on decisions/processes 3. Access to decision maker	1. Number of opportunities for stakeholders to engage in early planning, to include issue identification and focus 2. Number of jointly identified alternatives/solutions discussed and adopted	1. No engagement; decision imposed without stakeholder input 2. Alternatives identified and presented for stakeholder feedback 3. Issues and alternatives jointly identified, discussed, debated; mutually beneficial solution adopted
Clear understanding of stakeholder interests and concerns	1. Comprehensive stakeholder assessment completed 2. Assessment results analyzed and categorized 3. Strategic stakeholder involvement plan developed and implemented 4. Changing/emerging interests and concerns identified and plan modified, as needed	1. Key stakeholders identified and interviewed 2. Analysis completed to identify and categorize interests and concerns 3. Methods and approaches in strategic stakeholder involvement plan reflect stakeholder needs, as identified in interviews 4. Plan contains methods for continually assessing stakeholder interests and flexibility for changes, as needed	1. No stakeholder assessment done; no involvement/engagement with stakeholders 2. Minimum requirements met; limited interviews; standard methods and approaches; plan not tailored to specific stakeholder interests and needs; little flexibility to modify for emerging/changing situations 3. Maximum number of interviews to ensure identification of all interests; methods and approaches reflect specific needs identified; plan is flexible to incorporate changes, as needed

Indicator	Metric	Measurement Tool	Scale of Outcome (3=High)
Diversity of views represented	1. Participants represent full diversity of interests 2. Engagement opportunities are convenient for all participants	1. Number and types of participants 2. Types and locations of meetings/discussions	1. Participants represent less than 50% of interests; public meeting/hearing formats only; meetings are inaccessible and/or conducted at inconvenient times 2. Participants represent 50-75% of interests; meeting formats foster discussion, are accessible, and held at convenient times 3. Participants represent 100% of interests; meeting formats are open, flexible, and based on participant needs; discussions are open and provide opportunities for civil debate and joint problem-solving
Integration of interests and concerns	1. Participant interests identified and integrated into issue identification; common interests identified 2. Participant interests integrated into alternative solutions 3. Participant interests result in changed actions, reprioritization, adjustments throughout the project	1. Number and types of interests included in issue definition 2. Number and types of alternatives reflecting common interests 3. Number and types of changed actions, adjustments, and/or reprioritizations, based on participant interests, throughout the project and integrated into final decisions	1. Interests neither sought nor identified; issue defined without input; no adjustments or reprioritizations based on participant interests/concerns 2. Interests of some participants identified and integrated into issue definition; alternatives reflect some, but not all interests; few or only established process adjustments 3. All participant interests identified and integrated into issue definition; alternatives reflect common interests of all participants; process continually assessed and adjustments made throughout the project

Indicator	Metric	Measurement Tool	Scale of Outcome (3=High)
Information exchange	1. Documents from all participants are readily available, clearly written, understood, and translated when necessary 2. Meetings are conducted in a manner and format conducive to open dialogue and free exchange of ideas and viewpoints 3. Innovative approaches are utilized to share ideas and reach mutually acceptable solutions to complex issues	1. Routine evaluations to gather feedback from participants on availability, clarity, and understandability of written materials 2. Routine evaluations to gather feedback from participants on openness of meetings and ability to enter into discussion on various ideas and viewpoints 3. Types of approaches used; types of issues discussed; solutions identified; routine evaluation to gather feedback from participants on effectiveness of approach and satisfaction with identified solutions	1. Written materials are highly technical and available to only a minority of participants; only large, required public meetings are conducted 2. Somewhat filtered information is provided at regular, but infrequent intervals and only at key points in the process; public meetings and limited participation workgroups are convened 3. Written materials are clear, readily available, with flexible formats to meet needs of all participants; multiple opportunities open to all for information exchange, to include meetings, workshops, issue-specific workgroups, presentations, and additional innovative approaches
Project efficiency	1. Engagement and partnering are realistically integrated into overall project planning and budgeting 2. Projects are completed on time and on budget, with engagement and partnering integral to the decision making process 3. Partnerships leverage resources and result in general support for outcomes	1. Ratio of actual to projected costs of overall project 2. Percentage of deadlines met 3. Number of decisions readdressed due to lack of support	1. Public controversy and/or litigation results in extended time and/or additional cost to complete 2. Project implemented on schedule, on budget 3. Project implemented in less than anticipated time and/or at less cost due to leveraging resources with partners resulting in general acceptance of solutions

Indicator	Metric	Measurement Tool	Scale of Outcome (3=High)
Decision acceptability	1. Engagement and partnering relationships are established at the issue-identification stage and routinely utilized throughout the project 2. Alternatives are jointly identified, discussed, and debated 3. Decisions reflect the goals and interests of all participants	1. Number of project delays due to public protest/controversy 2. Documentation of regulatory approval 3. Documentation that jointly identified implementation goals are met; funding provided	1. Negative participant response; decision is rejected due to public controversy 2. Responses mixed; project given low priority due to public controversy 3. Response from majority of participants is positive; decisions are routinely implemented with general support
Mutual learning/respect	1. Participants can clearly articulate other participants' positions 2. Participants with diverse viewpoints engage in civil dialogue and debate on issues 3. Participants are willing to engage in joint problem-solving, compromising to reach mutually acceptable solutions	1. Number and types of concessions/compromises made throughout the project 2. Documentation of routine contact among participants 3. Meeting/engagement summaries indicating civil and productive dialogue among participants	1. Participants defend individual positions; not willing to compromise, remain polarized; participants don't talk to each other and/or routinely make negative/derogatory remarks 2. Participants understand others' positions, but do not fully embrace the process; compromise is limited or one-sided; participants are civil to one another, with occasional flare-ups 3. Participants are willing to engage in joint-problem solving to reach solutions beneficial to all; free flow of communication among participants, with positive and constructive exchange; improvements to process due to enhanced understanding and acceptance of opinions and interests among participants

Indicator	Metric	Measurement Tool	Scale of Outcome (3=High)
Cost avoidance, direct and indirect	1. Engagement and partnering are adequately integrated into project planning and budgeting up front 2. SMEs have realistic workloads to ensure facilitation of quality engagement and partnering 3. Informational material production time and cost requirements are understood and planned for	1. Number of times inadequately planned engagement and partnering activities result in project delays; documented feedback from participants on value of participation 2. Number of projects in SME workloads 3. Amount of cost/time overruns due to unrealistic expectations of informational material production requirements	1. Ratio of actual to anticipated cost/process time greater than 10; participants regret participating 2. Ratio of actual to anticipated cost/process time greater than 2; participants ambivalent about participating 3. Ratio of actual to anticipated cost/process time = 1; participants enthusiastic and see value in participating

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