



Basics

Stakeholder Management Plans

How to create a meaningful, actionable plan

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This guide is for you if you're about to create your first stakeholder management plan, or perhaps you've created stakeholder management plans before and you're looking for an easier or more effective way to write your future plans.

As the founder and CEO of Darzin Software and Simply Stakeholders, and previously a stakeholder engagement consultant, I've spent decades in stakeholder management — and worked with hundreds of stakeholder professionals worldwide across a range of industries. Even as this space has evolved with new technology and methods, creating stakeholder management plans remains an important part of the work — and a part that many people find challenging.

In this eBook, I'll cover the foundations you need to know before you can get started. Then I'll break down the process and give you the tools you need to draft a simple-but-effective stakeholder management plan. Whether you're about to write your first plan or your tenth, you'll come away with new insights and tips to create a better plan with less effort.

What about stakeholder engagement, community engagement and public participation plans? Or what if I'm creating a plan specific to a project or right across my organization? Fortunately, there's a lot of overlap between the different types of stakeholder consultation, so you'll find that most of the steps and insights here will apply to your plans, too.

01 What Makes a Stakeholder Management Plan 'Good'?

Before you get stuck into drafting a stakeholder management plan, it's important to know what a good plan looks like. Because if you're reading this eBook, you probably want to go further with your stakeholder practices than just ticking the boxes for compliance.

So, what makes a good plan? Is it the weight or size of the plan? Is it how comprehensive it is? Or how well it works?

Back when I started my career, I was working as a consultant. One of the projects I first worked on was a tourism plan.

I can remember going along to the first meeting with the steering committee and saying, "We're going to create a 30-page plan."

They were actually quite outraged at what they thought was going to be poor value for money, and even complained about it to my boss!

For context, normally tourism plans are quite lengthy documents, with things like geology and climate of the area. I didn't see the point of them paying me to document that information. Were we going to change the geology? What we needed was to just zoom in and get to the real challenges and opportunities.

Luckily, my boss backed me up and I got the chance to explain further. I explained, "If we create a 30-page plan, I can guarantee you that it's going to get read by all of you, as well as some of the key stakeholders. Most importantly, it's going to get implemented. Wouldn't you rather a plan that delivered results?"

I'm sure you can guess how this story ends.

So, does length make a stakeholder management plan good? I think we can safely say... no. But short and sweet doesn't necessarily make it good, either.

What really matters is making it **effective**.

02 What Makes a Plan Effective?

As the leader of two stakeholder software companies, I'm in a fairly unique position. I have a birds-eye view of stakeholder management processes across a variety of industry sectors around the world. That means I get to see a lot of what works and what doesn't work.

I truly believe that we don't have enough strategic, critical evaluation and discussion of community engagement.

My personal quest is to see more widespread and regular evaluation of stakeholder engagement processes, outcomes and plans. Because if we had more regular, robust evaluations, stakeholder professionals would get valuable feedback to optimize their stakeholder processes and make their plans more effective.

That's part of the reason why I created an Evaluation Framework for effective stakeholder engagement, which I'll share more about later in this eBook



What Makes a Plan Effective?

To sum up, what I've learned over the past two and a half decades, a stakeholder management plan is effective if:

- **It identifies and analyzes stakeholders** – Because knowing who your stakeholders are is critical to identifying your strategy and priorities
- **Responsibilities are clear** – The roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated, including for monitoring and reporting
- **It provides clear, strategic direction** – It helps you do the right things, not just do things better, with SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound)
- **Stakeholders read it from beginning to end** – You'd be surprised how many people have plans that aren't read more widely than the actual team that developed it.
- **Someone owns it and actions it** – A plan that sits on the shelf is next to useless.
- **It is adopted and accepted** – Getting key stakeholders to accept the plan is the first objective
- **It is updated regularly** – Ideally, once a quarter but at the very least, once a year



03 Building Blocks: What's In a Stakeholder Management Plan?

All the elements that make up a 'good' stakeholder management plan can be distilled into three core building blocks:

- **Strategies** – What are you focusing on and why? Who are your stakeholders and where do they fit in?
- **Operations** – How are you going to deliver the stakeholder engagement and report on it? Who is responsible for what?
- **Outcomes** – What is the plan actually going to deliver for our organization or project?

Keep these building blocks in mind, as you'll need to come back to these when you work on building out your draft plan.



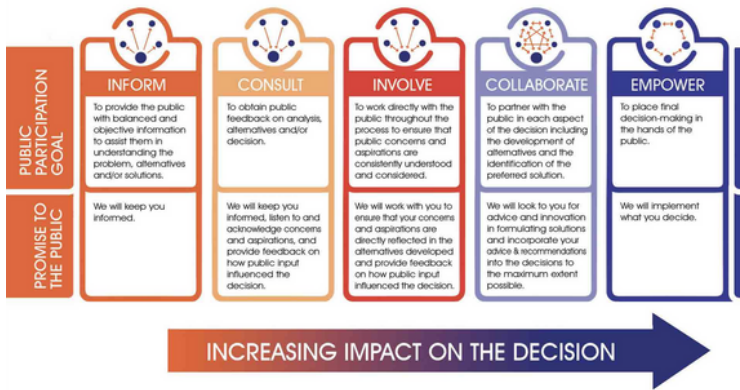
04

Big Picture View: 3 Stakeholder Management Frameworks

We've already covered what your plan needs in order to be effective, but it's also important that you're familiar with the key stakeholder frameworks so that you understand the context of what your plan is trying to achieve.

I'll take you through some of the most common frameworks, as well as their benefits and some limitations you need to be aware of.

1. International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)



You've probably come across this one before, as it's used quite widely by a large number of organizations. IAP2 is a spectrum that goes from Inform to Power. It has two levels – one is the public participation goal and the other is the promise to the public. Most organizations use it to choose a level that they want to aim for or that they believe is appropriate for their project.

For example, they might identify that right now, they're at the "Inform" stage. That means that their promise to the public is to keep them informed. Whereas, other projects might be at the collaborative end of the spectrum and so they'd be looking to partner with the stakeholders and develop solutions more collaboratively.

While it's popular and widespread, I have some problems with this framework.

The main issue is that it can make it a little bit too easy to decide you're at a certain level and therefore, you've met your goals.

This means that organizations can conveniently decide that they're at a certain level, making their efforts good enough.

But that's not such a good idea.

IAP2's spectrum was developed in the early 90s and it's beginning to show its age. Community expectations have evolved so much in the last 20-30 years around how stakeholders should be engaged and what an acceptable level of involvement is. The goals and promises that were good enough last century may not be sufficient for this time.

So, while it's still a useful framework, you'd be wise to exercise caution when it comes to only relying on the IAP2 spectrum.

2. Equator Principles & IFC Performance Standards

Another framework is the combined Equator Principles & International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards, which includes the following key indicators for effective community engagement:

- **Company's strategy, policies or principles on engagement**
- **Stakeholder identification and analysis**
- **Community engagement**
- **Information disclosure**
- **Free, prior and informed consultation**
- **Informed participation**
- **Consultation with vulnerable groups**
- **Grievance mechanism**
- **Feedback to affected communities**

The Equator Principles are a financial industry benchmark for determining, assessing and managing environmental and social risk in projects. And IFC's Performance Standards are designed to manage environmental and social risks for private investments in emerging markets.

We tend to see these used more commonly in projects in Europe, South America and Africa, as well as projects that are funded by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

Unlike IAP2's spectrum, which maps different stakeholder promises and actions to different stages of a project, these Principles and Performance Standards assess whether a project or company is doing all the right things to ensure effective stakeholder engagement (at any phase of the project).

They look at the company itself, including their strategy and principles. It covers stakeholder identification and analysis – making sure that they're focusing on the right people. And it ensures that they're doing the right thing by those people, with information disclosure, free and prior consent, informed participation and inclusiveness, as well as grievance and feedback mechanisms.

The Equator Principles & IFC Performance Standards essentially outlines all the boxes you need to tick in order to conduct good, effective stakeholder engagement.

3. Evaluation Framework

The third framework I'd like you to consider is the Evaluation Framework that I designed myself.

To give you a little background, the first ever United Nations Conference on Community Engagement was held in Brisbane in 2005. Out of that conference, we came up with the [Brisbane Declaration](#), which aimed to define what good community engagement is. It identified a number of principles: integrity, inclusion, deliberation, influence, capacity building and sustainable decisions.

I was quite involved in helping to write that Declaration and I started to think about how we might be able to implement it in a really practical way. I created this Evaluation Framework, breaking down each of the declaration principles into key indicators.

PRINCIPLE	INDICATOR
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and honesty about scope and purpose • Appreciate respective roles and responsibilities
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely expressed and heard • Representative of the population • Appropriate and equitable opportunity for all to participate
Deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient and credible information for dialogue • Space to weigh options, understand and reframe issues, movement towards developing shared understanding, identifying common ground and shared value
Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have input in how they participate • Policies and services reflect their involvement, and their impact is apparent
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers • Build Capacity and confidence of people to participate meaningfully • Develop confidence in the process and the value of their participation • Engender a shared sense of ownership and commitment to the process and outcome • Adequately resource indigenous peoples and the poor and commitment to the process and outcome • Ensure that they have a stake in the outcome and benefit equitably as a result of being involved
Sustainable decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Subject to evaluation • Recognise and communicate the needs, interests and values of all parties, including decision-makers • Decision-makers find the output useful and have sufficient confidence to act on the community recommendations • More cohesive and informed communities and governance result from the process

You can use this Evaluation Framework a few ways:

- **To evaluate existing plans** – Look at what’s in the plan to determine how well it meets the criteria for good stakeholder engagement (and better understand why it worked or didn’t work)
- **To create new plans** – Reference the indicators as you’re creating a stakeholder management plan that’s set up for success
- **To refresh an existing plan** – Evaluate plans that are due for an update so you can identify potential improvements

Several years ago, I used my Evaluation Framework to conduct a review of some community participation plans for four local councils in New South Wales, Australia. I gave each councils’ plan a score on a scale of 1-10 for each evaluation principle to see how they stacked up against each other.

It was actually a bit controversial at the time – I touched a bit of a raw nerve with some people! But others wrote to me and told me that the plan and evaluation of the plan actually matched their lived experience of working with that particular organization. And then a number of councils went on to use my review as a way to assess their own plans.

You might like to use my Evaluation Framework, too. It’s a quick and simple process. Simply conduct a desktop review of a written or drafted plan to get an idea of how it stacks up against the principles and indicators.



05 Applying Agile & Design Thinking to Your Stakeholder Plans

Not long ago, I was thinking about the world of software development and how it might apply to stakeholder management planning and operations. I believe there are some interesting lessons we can take from software development that can help us create more effective plans.

In the early 2000s, some software developers got together and came up with a new way of working that has transformed the way most software companies work.

The traditional way of developing software, known as the Waterfall method, where a project is broken up into phases, fully planned and specified before any coding starts and then released in one go. The new approach of the team was the Agile method. Agile teams work in short sprints, incrementally releasing and improving in a cycle of continuous improvement. They gather feedback, test and adapt as they go, focusing on the highest value features first. This allows them to continually test what they are working on and how they are working.



Waterfall Method	Agile Method
Linear and sequential	Incremental and iterative
Project divided into phases	Project divided into sprints
Complete one big project	Complete many small projects
Prioritize successful project delivery	Prioritize satisfying the customer
Do all planning at the start	Plan each sprint and each day
Avoid any changes to scope after starting	Deliver working software early and continuously
Test after building the product	Deliver high value features first
Release the product	Welcome change, even late in development
Assign a project manager to oversee the whole process	Test regularly, as you go
	Encourage self-organizing teams (without a dedicated project manager)

Agile is popular among software companies, as it leads to better software that satisfies customer needs much sooner. It's also much less risky, as you're not waiting 12-18 months for user feedback and testing to find out if you're creating something that users will use or buy.

But the Agile way of working – or at the very least, its principles – is making its way into other sectors, too.

Design Thinking is another approach to work that's becoming increasingly popular. Similar to Agile, it's an iterative process, but it has a strong focus on:

- Seeking to understand the user
- Developing empathy for the users' problems and pain points
- Redefining problems in a more human-centric way
- Constantly experimenting and trying out new ideas
- Building deeper understanding that leads to alternative strategies and solutions

Stakeholder professionals can find ways to innovate and improve stakeholder engagement processes and plans by incorporating both agile and design thinking.

Here are some ways you might try to do things differently:

- **Brainstorm problems and solutions** – Unpack what has and hasn't worked in your previous plans to start thinking outside the box
- **Simplify your plan** – Don't try to create a perfect or detailed plan from the start
- **Understand stakeholders better** – Seek to understand your stakeholders, the challenges they're facing and what they want
- **Implement sooner** – Start engaging your stakeholders as soon as possible
- **Deliver value early** – Prioritize engaging with your high priority stakeholders
- **Plan as you go** – As you learn more about what your stakeholders want, incorporate that into your plans
- **Evaluate and adjust** – Constantly evaluate your stakeholder plan and adjust it to better meet your stakeholders' needs and become more effective

Keep these ideas in mind as you continue reading, as I'd like to propose a different way of creating the first version of your stakeholder management plan that fits nicely with agile and design thinking.



06 The One Page Plan

I'm going to give you a really simple way to create a high-level stakeholder management plan.

The One Page Plan is quick to develop and easy to adapt. And most importantly, because it's short, everyone will read it.

In order to get to the final product of a One Page Plan, you'll first need to create a high level 3 Year Plan and then break it down. So, let me take you through the process.

3 Year Plan

Your 3 Year Plan includes all your building blocks (outcomes, strategy and objectives) and gives you a sense of where the project or organization is headed. It forces you to think about the results and strategy before you plan out your stakeholder activities. By creating this plan, you will:

- Define the current situation (where you're starting from)
- Define your long-term goals with a 3-year vision
- Work backwards from the 3 year vision to define the key milestones or short and medium-term goals for 2 years, 1 year and 6 months. What will you need in place at each of those steps in order to get to the 3 year vision?
- List the strategies needed to deliver each outcome
- Outline the operations needed to support the strategies and outcomes

	Today	6 months	1 year	2 years	3 years
Outcomes					
Strategy					
Operations					

Note: If your plan is for a specific project, rather than an organization, you may need to adapt it to fit the project timelines, whether it's 6 months, one year or something else.

How to identify suitable Outcomes

Start by writing down a fairly ambitious big picture goal, and define where your current situation in relation to that goal. Where would you like to be in 3 years, setting some high-level, ambitious goals and targets. Then work your way backwards to map out outcomes for your 2 year, 1 year and 6 month milestones.

For example, my 3 year objective might be that 50% of my high influence stakeholders have positive sentiment towards us. If I estimate that only 10% are positive towards us right now, I might set the following goals:

	Today	6 months	1 year	2 years	3 years
Outcomes	High-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment: 10%	High-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment: 15%	High-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment: 30%	High-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment: 40%	High-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment: 50%

Prioritize outcomes that are likely to deliver the greatest value to your stakeholders.

Your 3 Year Plan shouldn't look like a big, long shopping list. Just keep it strategic and high level. To begin with, you might only put 1-3 items in your 3 year column and then work backwards from there.

Some other ideas and inspiration for your 3 year vision:

- **Team goals** – You might aim to have a fully trained team or a team of a certain size
- **Stakeholder respect** – 100% of stakeholders respect the authenticity, even if they don't agree with the outcome
- **Stakeholder reach** – You might want to reach a certain number, percentage or group of stakeholders
- **Communication goals** – You could aim for a certain number of updates, more way for stakeholders to provide feedback or something else
- **Tracking goals** – You might want to collect and analyze a new type of data (or a larger volume of it) to better understand stakeholders and meet their needs

How to identify suitable Strategies

Are there any strategic initiative that you might need to implement at each milestone in order to achieve the outcomes?

For example, I might need to start mapping my stakeholders to properly measure their sentiment. And then I'd need to be tracking that sentiment over time.

	Today	6 months	1 year	2 years	3 years
Strategies	Not tracking sentiment or mapping	Do stakeholder mapping	Track stakeholder sentiment	Review stakeholder sentiment	Review stakeholder sentiment

How to Write Your Operations

Operations is all about figuring out what you'd need to happen within the organization to support the strategies and outcomes.

If I needed to improve and define stakeholder sentiment, I'd need to have some kind of stakeholder mapping methodology – and ideally, some software that can help track sentiment for me.

	Today	6 months	1 year	2 years	3 years
Operations	No stakeholder mapping methodology or sentiment software	Choose a stakeholder mapping methodology	Trial and implement stakeholder sentiment tracking software		

The 3 Year Plan is an ideal starting place because it gives you a big enough horizon that you can set some ambitious goals before you start to figure out the details. It's a really useful framework for considering your most important goals, any essential strategies and the operational things you need in place in order to deliver the outcomes.

Be SMART

The 3 Year Plan tends to give you goals that are broad, general and feel unattainable (even if you've done a good job of breaking them down). That's why the next step is to take each of those goals and turn them into SMART goals.

Use this framework to make sure your goals are something you can actually deliver.

Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Timely
What do you want to accomplish?	How will you know when you have accomplished your goals?	How can the goal be accomplished?	Will the goal meet your short - and long-term needs?	When will the goal be accomplished?

Don't try to make your plan perfect. If you work iteratively, you can continually improve and refine what you're doing and start working towards your goals right away.



Break Your Goals Down Further

Now it's time to break your 6 month and 1 year goals down a little further so that you can start to understand the next steps. Use the START. STOP. CONTINUE. framework to flesh your goals out further and take them another level down. Don't write every detail – focus on the important tasks and strategic stuff needed to get to your goals.

- **Start** – Write down what you need to implement before you can achieve your outcomes
- **Stop** – Add anything that doesn't support your objectives, like bad habits that take up a lot of time
- **Continue** – Add what you're already doing well that's contributing towards your goals

Start	Stop	Continue
What should the team start doing?	What should the team stop doing?	What should the team continue doing?

Remember that with agile methodology, we want to be iterative and continually improve and refine what we're doing, so don't worry about breaking down your longer term goals just yet.

In my example, the 3 year goal is for 50% of high influence stakeholders to have a positive sentiment towards us. At 6 months, I want to map my stakeholders and at 1 year, I want to track their sentiment. It's clear that I need to start identifying high influence stakeholders by stakeholder mapping. And I need to start tracking sentiment. Perhaps some things my team can continue are building good relationships with the community and working well with each other. And maybe we need to stop spending a lot of time on meetings that don't move us forward.

Create Your One Page Plan

Finally, we bring it all together in the One Page Plan. This is a top down and bottom up plan that covers an entire year of stakeholder management.

The most important thing to remember here is that each box should contain just two or three items so that we end up with everything on a single page. It should give you an overall picture of stakeholder engagement or stakeholder management for the year.

I'll take you through each section and how to fill it out.

Overall Goals	PROCESS		OUTCOMES/OUTPUTS	
Regulatory/Ext Requirements	EVALUATION	RELATIONSHIP/RESULTS		REPORTS
Internal Success Measures	OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT PROCESS	STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	INNOVATION/ KNOWLEDGE SHARING	TEAM REQUIREMENTS
Stakeholders' Perspective	WHO IS INVOLVED	INFORMATION/CAPACITY BUILDING		WHO CAN BE INFLUENCED

Overall Goals

At the top, we have our overall goals, split into PROCESS goals and OUTCOME/OUTPUT goals.

This split is important because when we're evaluating successful stakeholder engagement, we need to look at whether our process was effective and efficient, as well as whether we achieved the outcomes we were aiming for. It's important to have goals that align with process as well as and goals that align with outcomes so that you can measure success.

For example, high-influence stakeholders with positive sentiment would be an outcome goal. But a three year goal to have a team of 40 people, all trained in stakeholder engagement, would probably be a process-related goal.

Consider your one year goals that you developed and see where they fit in. Were they process-related goals or outcome goals? Place them in the appropriate box.

Stakeholders' Perspectives

Jump down to the bottom of the page and consider **WHO IS INVOLVED** in your project or organization and who you'll need input from. Revisit the IFC Standards and Evaluation Framework to understand who stakeholders might expect to get involved. Consider representation, marginalized people and what the roles and responsibilities might be.

Think about what they might need to be able to participate meaningfully and what their information needs might be. Add those details under **INFORMATION/CAPACITY BUILDING**. Finally, define **WHAT CAN BE INFLUENCED** to ensure the outcomes people have the opportunity to influence are achievable.

Internal Measures

Now we'll go up a level to define the **OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT PROCESSES and STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES** needed to meet those objectives and the needs of your stakeholders. This is where you'd put things like workshops, surveys and so on. This is where most stakeholder management plans focus their detail, but when you see it in the overall context, it really is just one element of your stakeholder engagement or stakeholder management plan.

Define anything you might do that's a bit different in order to enable **INNOVATION/KNOWLEDGE SHARING**. And outline any **TEAM REQUIREMENTS**, both in terms of resources and training, so that they can deliver the outcomes and process goals.

Regulatory & External Requirements

Finally, go up to the last level. This section depends on your processes and the field you're in, especially if you're in a heavily regulated industry. Under **EVALUATION**, outline how you'll assess whether you're meeting the requirements. Add any information on the **RELATIONSHIP/RESULTS** expected from complying with the regulatory requirements of external stakeholders. And make note of any **REPORTS** needed to demonstrate that you're on track with your processes and outcome goals.

That's it — your One Page Plan is done!

Simply Stakeholders One Page Stakeholder Management Plan

Overall Goals	PROCESS		OUTCOMES/OUTPUTS	
Regulatory/Ext Requirements	Evaluation	Relationship/Results	Reports	
Internal Success Measures	Operations management processes	Stakeholder engagement processes	Innovation / Knowledge sharing	Team requirements
Stakeholders' Perspective	Who is involved	Information/Capacity Building	What can be influenced	

I hope this eBook helps you plan more confidently, create more useful stakeholder management plans and do more effective engagement!



07 Useful Resources

Watch this [webinar](#) where I take you through a step-by-step guide to setting up a stakeholder engagement plan. Or [fill out the high level template](#) to create a 12 month stakeholder engagement plan in just 15 minutes.

Popular Blogs

[7 signs you're getting your community engagement right \(or wrong\)](#)
[Stakeholder Management Plan in Five Steps](#)



Would you like to find out more about how our Stakeholder Management Software could help you implement a Stakeholder Management Plan like this?

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