



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

IN ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING



COMMUNICATION



MECHANISMS



CONDITIONS



PLANNING PROCESS

This pamphlet provides a series of recommendations for engaging the public in energy infrastructure planning. It is of interest to planners and project proponents alike.

The recommendations are based on a review of 16 academic studies that explore citizen engagement in energy infrastructure planning. Four prominent topics emerged from this review: Communication, Mechanisms, Conditions and Planning Process.

Produced by Ian Search, Ian Rowlands, and James Gaede
School of Environment, Resources & Sustainability
University of Waterloo

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COMMUNICATION



Channels of information provision should be established to update the community on decision making. Failing to clearly articulate the agenda-setting process and the purpose of consultation hinders acceptance.

Prepare a communication package that is meaningful to all stakeholders by taking the perspectives / skepticisms of identified stakeholders into account.



Stakeholder access to information is important. Making reports accessible to the public not only helps them acquire a better understanding of the project, but it demonstrates to them their role as stakeholders is taken seriously.

For unfamiliar types of energy infrastructure, ensuring the public will be able to comprehend information by performing preliminary investigations into the community's current knowledge of the infrastructure is necessary.

A range of material will be required to support different levels of understanding.



Greater and earlier investments will need to be made for development of community knowledge before commencing consultation.



Communities need to be informed of the benefits associated with a project. It is recommended proponents develop formal strategies to share benefits with the community, and disseminate details regarding benefits through a variety of information channels such as websites, social media, and newsletters. The strategies should emphasize the local benefits, both environmental and economic, community members will receive directly from the project as opposed to global benefits like climate change mitigation.

MECHANISMS



Utilizing interesting mechanisms like a sight seeing tool can increase community satisfaction with the overall planning process. Where there is distrust of institutions, the web is likely perceived by the community as an independent knowledge centre.

A forum can help identify problems with the development by bringing together different stakeholders. Participants present their point of view followed by a question period.



Developers should investigate current land use and user groups of a site since it may differ from the site's zone. Adequate staffing at public meetings will ensure every attendee has their concerns addressed by a project team member.

The release of clear and accurate information about the project from a trusted authority may prevent opposition groups from distributing false material.

Government can acquire and deploy an independent advocate to distribute information from a variety of sources to uninformed members of the community. In addition they can hold meetings without the proponent and advocate for members who are unable to attend meetings with the developer.



Studies show the public has a favourable impression of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools, and believe their inclusion in planning will enrich citizen engagement.

GIS can transcend information provision to promote effective stakeholder collaboration as well.

It can function based on a set of criteria different stakeholders consider to be key in determining the location of a development.

CONDITIONS



Studies suggest communities perceive engagement efforts as more effective when the project is long-lived and when there is experience with failed public participation strategies used in the past.



An early stakeholder analysis, in addition to a more collaborative approach, can identify opposition networks and their concerns. Those concerns would be added to criteria used for decision making.



Undesirable pre-existing relationships between the developer and the community can affect proceedings and acceptance.



If the reason for opposition is dealt with during public participation, networks of resistance will fail to form in the first place, or dissipate if they already exist.

An opposition network that has formed in response to a development is an indication of a community amenable to collaborative planning.

Through a collaboration that embraces potential differences, proponents will be able to understand why a project may or may not go ahead.

There should be some form of accountability when private organizations inherit public obligations. Private organizations may lobby to streamline the planning process and restrict the public from information in the name of commercial confidentiality.



Concern over public institutions and local innovation systems is possible as well. Studies suggest people observe corruption in public institutions and no longer trust them to provide accurate information.

PLANNING PROCESS



Stakeholder consultation should be organized so that stakeholders in disagreement over general principles can come to a consensus regarding specific options.

Two way communication between proponents and the community needs to be implemented immediately following research into local issues and relevant local factors.

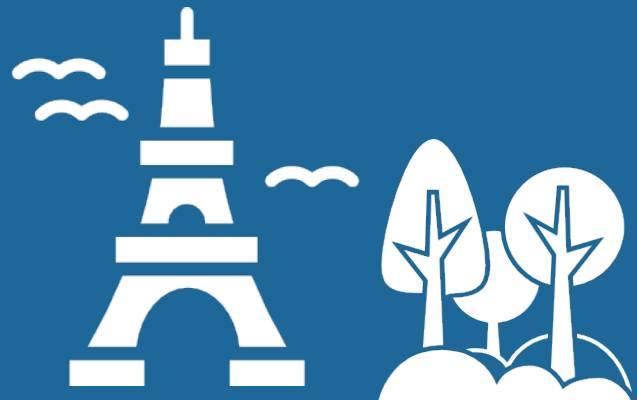


Early engagement will give the community an idea from the outset how much their opinions will influence the project so that they do not feel disenfranchised during decisive stages of the process.



Initiating early and honest dialogue with the community is essential for achieving community buy-in.

Engaging public participation early in the planning process will afford proponents important local knowledge, an insight into the potential complexities of balancing stakeholder interests, and a head start developing strategies in response to strong opposition networks.



Using stakeholder collaboration to structure the problem launches and facilitates an information exchange relationship.

Place attachment and community characteristics ought to be at the foundation of collaborative planning.

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