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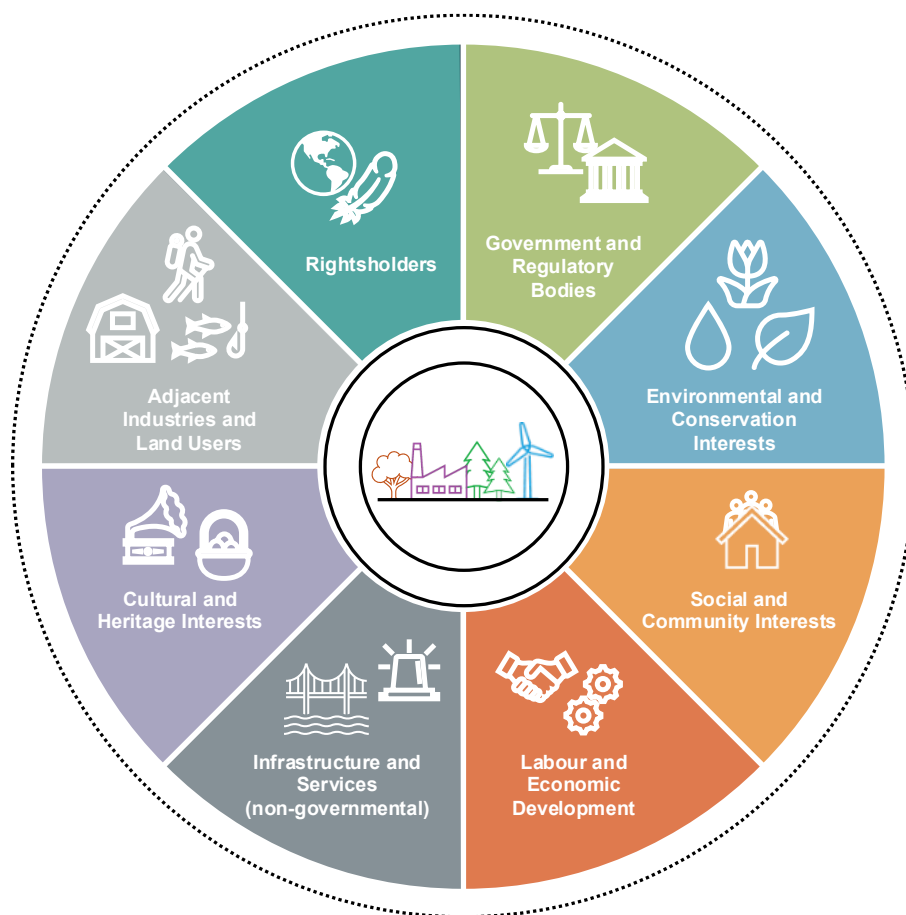
ENGAGEMENT ROADMAP NATURAL RESOURCES PROJECTS

Prepared for: Nova Scotia Forestry Economic Task Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nova Scotia's forestry sector is a major economic driver, contributing \$1.6 billion in output and \$655 million to GDP while supporting over 5,700 jobs through wood and paper product exports. The industry is dependent on wood fibre supply from forests comprising over 70% private land ownership, much of it fragmented into small woodlots. Proponents must satisfy legal obligations to engage the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, face public scrutiny, and undergo environmental permitting processes. This combined complexity necessitates a nuanced engagement strategy that addresses social acceptability for any proponent planning projects that use forest resources.

The Engagement Landscape: Key Parties in Natural Resource Projects



Parties of the Engagement Landscape

This report presents a roadmap for natural resource project proponents to design and implement effective engagement programs to manage communications about their project. As the province experiences increased interest in development of renewable energy and resource extraction projects, the need for early, inclusive, and well-planned engagement is critical for proponents to introduce projects to potentially affected communities, build relationships, and gain social acceptability. The roadmap will serve as a guide to proponents in how to successfully plan to undertake engagement in a manner that supports these goals.

The report is structured into three core sections:

1. Understanding the Engagement Landscape: Explores the types of engagement (regulatory, Rightsholder, stakeholder), defines successful engagement, and highlights shared themes and challenges across diverse perspectives.
2. Recommendations for Future Proponent: Provides strategic imperatives and practical guidelines for embedding engagement into project planning, ensuring inclusivity, and building long-term relationships.
3. Engagement Toolkit: Offers tools and templates for stakeholder mapping, communication planning, engagement tracking, and feedback integration to support proponents in designing and executing robust engagement programs.

Purpose and Scope

Commissioned by the Nova Scotia Forestry Economic Task Force, this roadmap offers practical guidance for future proponents navigating the complex Nova Scotian landscape of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators. It draws on extensive research including interviews with Environmental Assessment (EA) practitioners, surveys of community and industry participants, and direct engagement with Mi'kmaq and other groups. Application of the guidance of this report will help project proponents successfully plan for interactions with a variety of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators, that will contribute to a project's ability to gain social acceptability. These various interactions collectively comprise the engagement that a proponent is not only expected to conduct but must do so skillfully to ensure the greatest chance of success for their projects.

Key Findings

Based on the results of the study, lessons learned from past engagement that future proponents should take into consideration include:

- Early and Comprehensive Engagement Is Essential: Engagement must begin at the conceptual stage of a project and continue throughout its lifecycle. Early outreach builds trust, allows meaningful input to shape project design, and reduces the risk of opposition or costly redesigns.
- Trust Is the Cornerstone of Engagement: Trust must be earned through transparency, honesty, and consistent follow-through. Missteps – such as withholding information or failing to deliver on commitments – can quickly erode relationships and jeopardize project success.
- The Intent–Impact Gap Is a Major Risk: Even well-intentioned actions can have negative consequences if not communicated clearly. Proponents must actively listen, clarify intentions, and respond to concerns to avoid misunderstandings and build mutual respect.

- Engagement Must be Tailored and Inclusive: One-size-fits-all approaches fail to account for local context and diversity. Effective engagement requires understanding the unique needs, preferences, and cultural sensitivities of each group, especially Indigenous Rightsholders.
- Common Pitfalls: Common pitfalls include poor timing, lack of transparency, and engagement fatigue. These issues often stem from inadequate planning or viewing engagement as a compliance task rather than a strategic investment.

Action-Oriented Recommendations for Future Proponents

While the engagement landscape is complex, successful engagement does not need to be complicated. These key steps will contribute to a project's positive outcomes.

- Embed Engagement Early and Deeply: Treat engagement planning with the same rigor as technical and financial planning. Begin outreach before decisions are finalized.
- Lead Engagement Internally: While consultants can support, the proponent must take ownership of relationships and communication to demonstrate authenticity.
- Allocate Adequate Resources: Budget for engagement as a core project function, including staff training, facilitation, and accessibility measures.
- Use Diverse and Inclusive Methods: Employ a mix of communication formats (e.g., email updates, in-person meetings, translated materials) tailored to stakeholder preferences.
- Track and Respond to Feedback: Maintain detailed records of engagement activities and clearly communicate how input influenced project decisions.
- Build Long-Term Relationships: View engagement as an opportunity to foster durable partnerships that support project success and community well-being.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the NS Forestry Sector

Nova Scotia's forestry sector stands out in the Canadian and global context due to its unique land ownership structure, which dictates management and engagement approaches. The industry is a vital component of the provincial economy, generating an annual economic output of \$1.6 billion and contributing \$655 million to the GDP. It directly supports 5,722 jobs, many in rural areas, with exports including roughly \$193 million in wood products and \$307 million in paper products. This economic importance means project planning is under intense public and governmental scrutiny.

However, unlike most Canadian jurisdictions where Crown land is dominant, over 70% of Nova Scotia's forested land is privately owned, with approximately half of that held by a high number of small-scale, non-industrial landowners (woodlot owners). This creates a complex patchwork where the province's legal and public obligations toward sustainable forest management (such as protecting biodiversity and water quality) apply to the smaller portion of Crown land but are often more advisory and incentive-based on the vast private land base. Furthermore, the province has a large and vocal civil society heavily invested in forest practices, coupled with the constitutional requirement for meaningful engagement with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia on projects potentially affecting their rights. These combined factors make for a complex and nuanced engagement landscape when planning any project that relies on forest resources.

1.2 The Need for Comprehensive Engagement Planning

Nova Scotia is in a natural resource and energy development boom, with a strong pro-development stance provincially (NSDOE, 2025) as the pace of renewable energy and natural resource projects proposals has already been increasing for half a decade or more. This growth has been spurred by a push for increased renewable energy development (NSECC, 2022) and most recently by a push from the Premier's office to utilize the diverse natural resources to fuel economic prosperity for Nova Scotia (Gorman, 2025). Proponents wishing to develop natural resource-based projects will enter into a diverse and sometimes confusing landscape that will require them to communicate, work, and sometimes collaborate with a wide range of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulatory bodies (a glossary of terms has been provided in Appendix A and includes definitions of this and other key concepts used throughout this document). These interactions collectively comprise the engagement that a proponent is not only expected to conduct but must do so skillfully to ensure the greatest chance of success for their projects.

In the context of project development, engagement can take on many forms at different times. Engagement might refer to communicating the benefits of the proposed project to those in the surrounding communities, discussing how the project might affect traditional practices with Mi'kmaq groups, working with government entities to understand the regulatory environment, or communicating with concerned individuals or groups about the ways in which the project's potential impacts will be mitigated. If done effectively, a proponent may gain critical support from communities, some of whom may become project champions, helping navigate other engagement challenges. If poorly planned or executed, failed engagement may be a galvanizing factor that sets the stage for direct and sometimes active opposition to the project.

Effective engagement requires careful planning, skillful implementation, and an understanding of both the engagement landscape and the expectations of proponents from a variety of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators. Understanding the differences between these three categories of people and groups to be engaged is an initial hurdle, for example, that may cause confusion for new entrants into Nova Scotia's development environment. For that reason, this roadmap serves as a tool for prospective project developers in understanding the timing, content, and targets for successful Rightsholder and stakeholder engagement in the context of natural resources-based project development.

1.3 Roadmap Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide future proponents with practical knowledge and tools to design and implement successful engagement strategies. The focus herein is on projects proposing use of natural resources, and especially forest resources, but many of the tenets and tools of successful engagement are applicable across project types. The results, conclusions, and recommendations in this report are meant to be a guide to proponents, but are not a recipe for successful engagement or all-encompassing – engagement for every project is unique and requires a bespoke approach based on a variety of factors. A successful approach to engagement will depend on the nature and location of a project, the background and characteristics of the proponent, recent events in the media, and much more.

Methods

Developing this document involved a variety of methods to understand different perspectives on the characteristics of, and successful conduct of, engagement through a project's lifespan.

- Discussions with skilled Environmental Assessment (EA) practitioners provided a third-party viewpoint of what proponents have done successfully (or not) in the past, and how those who were engaged responded.
- A public survey presented to stakeholders of Nova Scotia's forests asked respondents to provide their experiences with engaging or being engaged around projects. The survey provided unique insights into preferences on engagement format and timing, expectations of proponents, and the different approaches required for successfully engaging different groups or individuals.
- Interviews with a range of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators provided the opportunity for in-depth discussion about past experiences with being engaged by project proponents and provided examples of how a proponent's intent can be misinterpreted, sometimes with dire project consequences.
- Interviews with project developers who have recently introduced new projects to the province identified key "do's and don'ts" with respect to engagement.

The variety of methods used in generating this report allowed for exploration of the engagement landscape from a variety of perspectives and are provided in further detail in Appendix B.

Format

This report is presented in three core sections. The first section provides an overview of the engagement landscape by delving into how “good” engagement is defined, how skillful engagement practitioners may navigate difficult experiences, an exploration of some of the key attributes of successful engagement, and takeaways from the research for future proponents. The second section, driven substantially by “ground level intelligence”, focuses on recommendations for future proponents including how to plan for and deliver on a successful engagement campaign. The third section, the engagement toolkit, provides proponents with examples of tools that can be used in the planning and implementation of engagement.

2.0 THE ENGAGEMENT LANDSCAPE: DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, SHARED THEMES

This section presents the perspectives we heard about engagement, drawing on past experiences with both well- and poorly executed processes. Input from engagement practitioners, observers, former participants, and others drives insights into effective engagement planning and pitfalls to avoid. By exploring these key themes, we highlight where different types of participants agree and where their perspectives differ.

2.1 Types of Engagement

This section defines the core categories of engagement critical to a project's success. As the engagement process must address varied legal obligations and relational needs, it is essential to distinguish between the three primary types of engagement: Regulatory Engagement, Rightsholder Engagement, and Stakeholder Engagement. This framework will clarify the distinct parties involved and the unique purpose and legal basis for interacting with each group.

Regulatory Engagement

When proposing most commercial or industrial projects, a variety of regulators will be engaged at some point in the process. These regulators may include any or all Municipal, Provincial, or Federal government departments and agencies. Many of these interactions are required by various regulations, policies, or other prescriptive practices, and result in approvals or other outcomes that are explicitly project enabling. As these interactions are prescriptive, there is typically a clear pathway for the engagement process such as which government department to speak with, when, and with what information. While this type of engagement may present a variety of technical challenges, the pathway itself should be relatively clear from early engagement with an overseeing body. In the case of EAs in Nova Scotia, conversations with the EA Branch of NS Environment and Climate Change (NSECC) will provide the proponent with a guide on the necessary government departments to contact. Alternatively, other required regulatory engagement may be detailed in guides to proponents, such as Nova Scotia's A Proponent's Guide to Environmental Assessment (NSECC, 2025). Whereas the regulatory engagement pathway is generally prescriptive and project-specific, this is not the focus of this report.

Rightsholder Engagement

The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia have constitutionally protected rights under the Canadian Constitution, and are considered Rightsholders with respect to the environment, natural resources, and more. These rights pertain fundamentally to their pre-existing presence and use of the lands and resources in Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaq traditional territory, including all of Nova Scotia. Their rights include, but are not limited to, the traditional activities of hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering, and claims to self-governance and Aboriginal Title over the land. This distinct legal status dictates that **proponents must treat engagement with the Mi'kmaq differently** than stakeholders and projects may trigger the Crown's Duty to Consult if a project has the potential to adversely affect these asserted or established Aboriginal or Treaty rights. Robust and early engagement is imperative to building good relationships with Rightsholders and will be covered in this report.

Stakeholder Engagement

Broadly defined, a stakeholder is any person or group who has an interest in the outcomes of a project, whether as a member of the community who will be impacted by a variety of environmental, social, and economic impacts, a potential project partner, or more. This broad category includes groups likely to be project supporters such as business development authorities and industry associations, project critics like concerned citizens' groups, and more neutral groups and individuals such as academic researchers, utility providers, emergency service providers, and more. Additionally, there are a broad range of stakeholders like recreation groups, tourism providers, other business operators, nearby private landowners, and more who may be positive to neutral about different projects based on the expected impacts. Understanding the types of stakeholders you will interact with, and the unique approach required with each, is of critical importance and is a primary subject of this report. Although regulators can be considered a type of stakeholder, for the purpose of this report they are not included as a 'stakeholder'.

Roles and Responsibilities of Different Parties

This section clarifies the distinct roles and responsibilities of the key participants in a project's engagement process: the proponent, the consultant, and the affected parties (Rightsholders and stakeholders).

Project Proponent	The Project Proponent holds the ultimate responsibility and control for organizing, proposing, and developing the project. Their engagement duties are extensive and generally non-transferable, including initiating direct lines of communication, providing clear and timely information, actively soliciting and responding to feedback, and cultivating long-term relationships with affected parties. While they may manage regulatory engagement to secure approvals, their primary responsibility is to maintain the project's Social Licence to Operate.
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Engagement Consultant	An optional, however recommended participant, an Engagement Consultant acts as a specialized support resource for the proponent.
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Consultants can develop the engagement strategy, plan and facilitate engagement opportunities, and document interactions, offering expertise in tracking and complex analysis. Hiring consultants with local knowledge and experience can also help in both planning and making local connections. However, their role is generally not to conduct community engagement on the proponent's behalf; it is critical that the proponent remain the lead relationship builder, delegating only procedural or administrative tasks to the consultant.

Rightsholders and Stakeholders

Rightsholders and stakeholders participate in the process due to their interests or concerns regarding the project's potential outcomes. Their influence and level of involvement are contextually dependent, shifting based on legal rights (for Rightsholders), the severity of potential impacts, and their organizational capacity. Rightsholders possess the constitutional leverage of the Duty to Consult, while stakeholders leverage public opinion and advocacy. Both groups may engage directly with the proponent or approach regulators (either in support of, or in opposition to, the project) during the permitting phase.

Effective engagement hinges on clearly defined roles and a shared commitment to open communication. When the Proponent leads the relationship, the Consultant provides expert support, and Rightsholders and stakeholders are genuinely heard, the project gains the necessary legitimacy to move forward.

2.2 Is Engagement Necessary?

Cynically, a proponent might muse, "my project is privately funded, on private property, and is going to do economic good for the province. Do I even need to engage with the public?" The answer is simply yes. A core tenet of engagement and a lesson we heard from many: in the absence of information, people will assume the worst. Think about this question from the perspective of those who live and work in potentially affected communities, a company has proposed a project that is designed to make use of natural resources to make products for domestic and distant use but has not made any efforts to speak with the community. The assumption will be that the proponent hopes to sneak by without notice. It too is a cynical take, but one informed by a history of proponents engaging in bad faith or attempting to handle project development within the regulatory environment alone. Good engagement can do so much more beyond avoiding negative outcomes, and the rest of this section seeks to define 'good' engagement and demonstrate the benefits of good practice.

Whether engagement is required legally is another matter. Some processes, such as EA, have a requirement for a degree of engagement with Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators. An additional requirement for engagement is with the Mi'kmaq, especially in the context of an EA. Although the Duty to Consult rests with the Crown, regulators may delegate certain procedural aspects of this to proponents. Regulators considering applications, including through the EA process, will consider how a proponent has sought to understand and

accommodate Rightsholders' concerns through comprehensive engagement. This may affect approval conditions including the requirement for a formal Consultation process. Finally, municipal planning requirements can also be a trigger for public engagement requirements, often in municipally hosted forums. Although a proponent in this case may rely solely on this form of engagement to satisfy requirements, relying solely on a municipal forum as an opportunity to hear from the public has a higher potential to result in poor community relations and would not generally be considered 'good' engagement.

2.3 Defining "Good" Engagement

What constitutes 'good' engagement is highly contextual; critically, it depends on who you ask. A proponent might indicate pragmatically that effective engagement gets a project across the development finish-line and operational with minimal friction. Community members have indicated that they consider engagement to be going well when they feel heard and proponents demonstrate that they take their input seriously. While these perspectives on the relative success of engagement are clearly interest-driven, EA practitioners and engagement facilitators presented a different metric for the success of engagement: dialogue. Interviewed consultants discussed that simply whether there is two-way communication is a good indicator of the success of engagement. Conversations between proponents and communities mean that lines of communication are established and each side is sharing perspectives. In that sharing is trust building. Although proponents and various groups may not see eye-to-eye, open and honest dialogue promotes mutual trust that helps build productive relationships. Without dialogue, none of this is possible.

A common pitfall for proponents is misunderstanding a lack of engagement around a project. Asked what a common mistake in engagement was, several interviewed consultants responded that proponents assumed that a low volume of community feedback was incorrectly assumed to indicate social license to proceed. This may be the case; a project that poses little environmental risk while promising to deliver economic benefits may not garner much concern. However, a proponent must be conscious of whether a lack of engagement stems from either low concern or insufficient awareness and be aware of the dynamic nature of community interest. First, you must ensure that Rightsholders and stakeholders are sufficiently informed about the nature of the project to be aware of its potential impacts and benefits, forming the basis for their feedback. Second, interest in and concern about a project changes with local, national, or even international news, compounding events that affect resources or perceptions, and even the weather. Proactively keeping people informed about the project ensures that they are sufficiently aware and will not resent a lack of communication later. Remember that in the absence of information, people will assume the worst and information gaps may be filled in by misinformation.

2.4 Elements of Successful Engagement

Survey respondents, Rightsholder and stakeholder interview participants, and engagement consultants shared examples of practices and tendencies that were either explicitly recognized as good practice or clearly contributed to positive engagement outcomes. These contributions are presented below as a list of good practices in engagement. The list is by no means exhaustive and more general guiding principles of good engagement are presented throughout this document.

Proactive, Strategic Planning	Understand the Rightsholder, stakeholder, and regulatory landscape early and plan to engage proactively, early, and often. Be clear and consistent in messaging: everyone benefits when communications are clearly thought out, honest, and doesn't seem to shift arbitrarily.
Build Genuine Relationships	Invest time to establish authentic, long-term relationships based on mutual respect and trust, not just transactional interactions. This ensures communication is effective during conflict and fosters a foundation of trust that is crucial for gaining and maintaining the project's social acceptability.
Honesty is Paramount	Prioritize truthfulness and candor in all communications, especially when discussing bad news, risks, or unavoidable negative project impacts. Operating with complete honesty builds credibility and a resilient form of trust; stakeholders are more willing to accept difficult realities if they believe the proponent is not hiding information or attempting to manipulate the narrative.
Follow Through and Follow Up	Consistently deliver on every commitment and promise made to Rightsholders and stakeholders, no matter how small the deliverable may seem. Even following up on feedback, whether positive or negative, can help build relationships and establish trust. Failure to follow through on promises, whether to return a call, send a document, or implement a mitigation measure, destroys credibility faster than any other misstep and completely undermines the entire engagement effort.
Responsive and Adaptable Approaches	The engagement strategy must be flexible and capable of shifting based on stakeholder feedback, evolving project risks, and unforeseen events. Being responsive demonstrates that the proponent is truly listening and willing to make changes, which directly mitigates the intent-impact gap (Section 2.7) and the opposition it tends to generate.
Empowerment and Inclusion	Good engagement involves more than just informing stakeholders; it means actively creating structures that allow all affected groups, especially vulnerable ones, to influence the decision-making process. This practice builds local ownership and ensures project outcomes are equitable and sustainable.
Importance of Timing	Engagement must start early and continue consistently throughout the project lifecycle, well before key decisions are finalized. Engaging early signals respect and allows provided input to shape the project design when changes are feasible. A key early-engagement practice can be to ask participants how often and through which means they would prefer to be engaged in the future, giving them an immediate

say in the terms of the relationship. A commitment to a frequency or format of engagement is foundational to the relationship.

Continuous and Consistent

A lot of work invested in developing relationships with Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators to build social acceptability for a project, but once established, must be maintained. Though initial development is a critical hurdle for any project, loss of social acceptability at any point in a project's lifecycle will harm the proponent's ability to continue operations.

Project Champions

Identifying and actively supporting credible local individuals or groups who can advocate for the project within their own networks is an important relationship-building tool. These champions act as trusted intermediaries who can provide critical local context to the project team, translate complex project information for local communities, and facilitate access to local resources, accelerating social acceptance and community buy-in.

Effective project champions are rooted in the community and possess high trust and credibility, operating as genuine, independent voices rather than paid spokespersons. To maintain their credibility while supporting a project, they must demonstrate even-handedness, acknowledging local concerns and ensuring that the proponent is responsive to community feedback. Proponents effectively support champions by providing them with the accurate and timely information they need to answer difficult questions, by ensuring the champions' own interests and concerns are addressed, and by allowing them the necessary autonomy to advocate authentically and on their own terms, without appearing controlled by the company.

The Right Team

Engagement team members must possess specific interpersonal and professional attributes including an even temperament and the ability to handle strong emotions, criticism, and conflicting opinions without reacting defensively. They must be perceived as credible by all parties, which requires demonstrating competence, consistency, and a deep, accurate knowledge of the project. Engagement outcomes are directly related to the trustworthiness and capability of the individuals managing the process, making the selection of the right team critical.

Local Presence

Establishing a consistent, accessible physical or dedicated local contact ensures stakeholders have a reliable way to voice concerns, rather than relying on distant corporate offices. This local presence might be in the form of project champions, frequent visits by high-level company officials with a mandate to be accessible, or a local

office with staff empowered to communicate openly with locals. A sustained local presence signals the proponent's commitment and accountability to the community.

Two Ears, One Mouth

Proponents must prioritize active listening over one-way communication or advocacy. By listening more than they speak, proponents gain a genuine understanding of stakeholder concerns, identify project-critical local knowledge, and tailor their communication to be relevant and impactful.

2.5 Planning for Engagement

For a proponent, planning for good engagement means understanding the engagement landscape specific to your project, dedicating time and resources to opening lines of communication, and preparing to hear the perspectives of diverse Rightsholders and stakeholders. The first step is deciding that good engagement is worth the investment in time and resources. If comprehensive and meaningful engagement are desired, the proponent must make a commitment to providing adequate resources to the task. It will require a healthy investment of the proponent's time, likely involve hiring a consultant to help manage, and be a topic of meetings and planning throughout the project's development. Not all projects require the same level of engagement effort – projects with a clear regulatory pathway, use proven technology, and have obviously low environmental and social risk, will likely garner less potentially oppositional attention. Despite the low risk of these cases, engagement efforts can help build constructive and mutually beneficial relationships.

With the decision to allocate adequate resources to the task, an engagement plan is needed to guide the process. Engagement plans can take a variety of forms and will be driven by the unique characteristics of each project, both in terms of the nature of the project and the context in which it is planned. In general, an engagement plan should contain several key elements:

- Objectives, targets, and measurable indicators of engagement
- Summary of the stages of engagement and how the overall approach is tailored to each stage
- Rightsholder and stakeholder list and characteristics
- Rightsholder and stakeholder mapping and desired engagement level
- Communication strategy, including what information is shared with whom, at what frequency, and how
- Assignment of responsibility
- Methods of tracking and monitoring
- Resource allocation

Several tools that are helpful for an engagement plan are provided in Section 4: Engagement Toolkit for Proponents. If you are new to planning for Rightsholder and stakeholder engagement, it may be advisable for you to hire the assistance of experienced consultants who can help with the preparation of an engagement plan.

2.6 Understanding the Landscape

The process for identifying Rightsholders and stakeholders relevant to your project is project specific. A list of common parties to engage is provided below (Figure 2.1 a), but proponents should note that engagement for every project will be unique and requires careful examination of individuals and groups who may have varying levels of interest in a project. More information on how to identify relevant Rightsholders and stakeholders is provided in section 4.2.

Rightsholders  • The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia – Kwi'mu'kw Mmaw-Klusuaqn (KMK) – Native Council of Nova Scotia – Individual First Nations	Government and Regulatory Bodies  • Federal and provincial regulators • Local/municipal government • Health authorities • Infrastructure/public works departments • Tax/revenue authorities	Environmental and Conservation Interests  • Conservation groups • Land trusts • Environmental NGOs • Species-at-risk/ wildlife advocacy groups • Water users/watershed groups • Agricultural associations	Social and Community Interests  • Local residents/ neighbourhood associations • Schools and educational institutions • Healthcare providers/hospitals • Faith-based organizations • Housing and homelessness advocates
Labour and Economic Development  • Trade unions and labour organizations • Economic development agencies • Workforce training and skills development centres • Financial institutions	Infrastructure and Services  • Utility providers (electricity, natural gas, telecommunications/ internet) • Waste management • Public transit authorities	Cultural and Heritage Interests  • Archaeological/ historical sites protection authorities • Archaeological/ historical interest groups • Cultural preservation groups	Adjacent Industries and Land Users  • Recreational land and water users • Aggregate, quarry, or sand/gravel operators • Other resources users with permits/leases

Figure 2.1: Rightsholder, Stakeholder, and Regulatory Landscape

There are trends in the issues that motivate people of different backgrounds and groups of certain types to interact with project proponents. As part of the public survey, participants were asked about their perspectives in terms of their environmental, social, and economic values, both individually and of the groups that they represent. We found that many concerns are common to people from different backgrounds and groups with different interests. These are presented below, including context in how each subject was raised by respondents (Figure 2.2).

Effects		
	Community	Referencing local impact, involvement, or benefits.
	Access	Used by recreational groups (trail access), ENGOs (public access), and utilities.
	Sustainability	Forestry practices, environmental protection, and long-term resource use.
	Water	Water crossings (recreational), quality (utilities), and watershed protection (NGOs).
Process		
	Timing	The timing of engagement matters; earlier is generally better with few exceptions.
	Transparency	Desired in government processes, project communication, and community relations.
	Consultation	In relation to timing, effectiveness, and inclusivity of engagement.
	Feedback	Expressed as a need for follow-up, responsiveness, or acknowledgement.

Figure 2.2: Commonly Referenced Subjects across Survey Respondents

These common themes were also heard consistently during interviews, with participants from all backgrounds expressing similar values respecting the potential for effects and process of engagement. The frequency with which these themes of effects and engagement process were raised are a strong indicator that proponents planning outreach should be aware they will be top of mind no matter who they contact. In contrast, the survey demonstrated that some subjects are more closely aligned with the type of group engaged. Subjects and key words more closely associated with different groups are indicative of the respondents' group objectives (Figure 2.3).

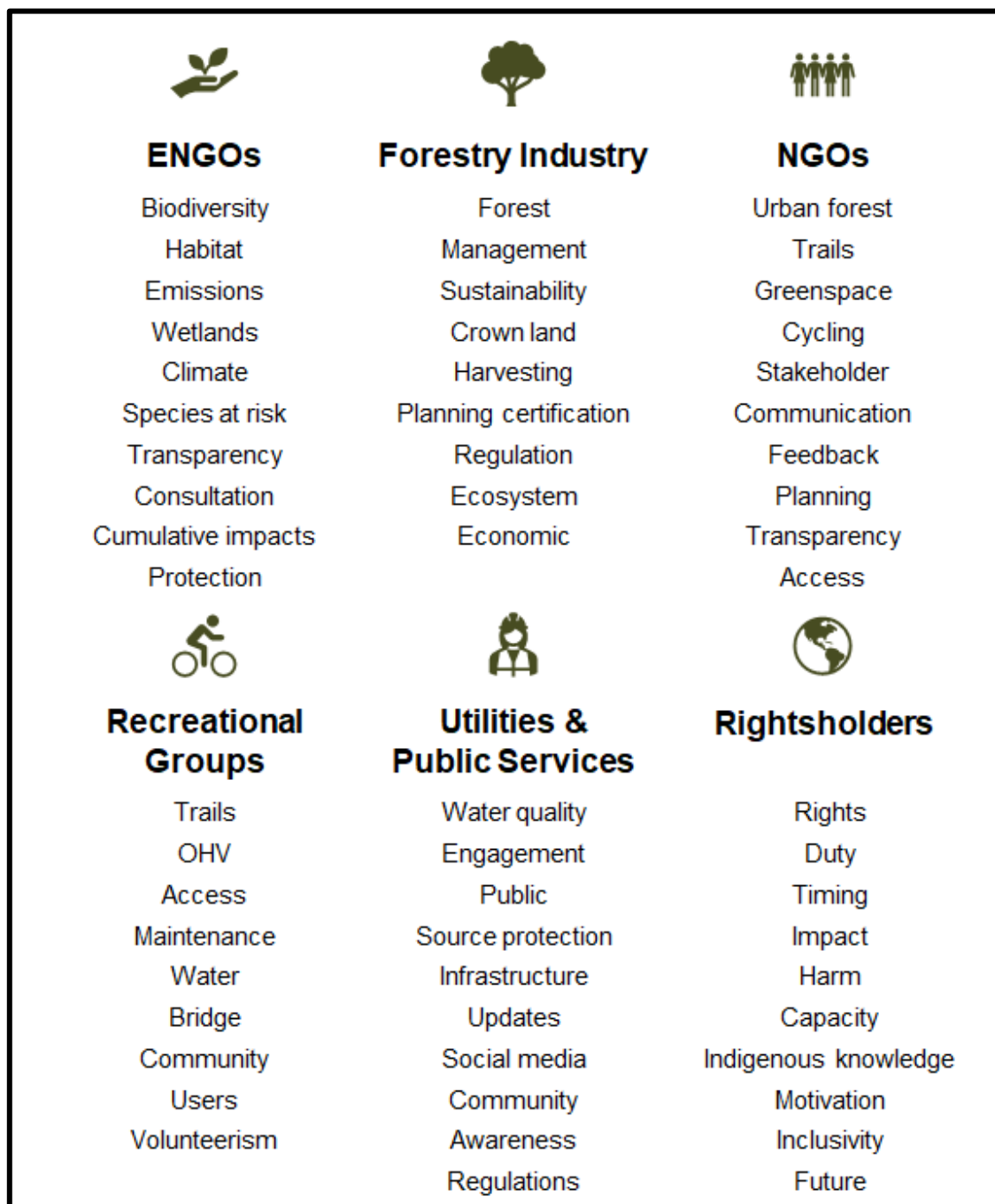


Figure 2.3: Subjects Referenced by Survey Respondent Type

Knowing that certain subjects are of particular interest to different Rightholders and stakeholders, a proponent is better prepared to engage with such groups. It is important, however, not to assume the interests or motivations of a particular group, regardless of what is known about the group or has been communicated in the past. In all engagement matters, always default to asking the engaged. Many interview participants expressed that the best way to find out is simply to ask. Questions that will be helpful to plan and carry out your engagement include:

- What kinds of concerns do you have?
- What benefits would you like to see in the community?
- How would you like to be engaged? How often?

More generalized information that was gathered through the survey and in-person interviews is provided in Section 4.0 that can serve as general guidelines to begin your process. Given the unique nature of every project, the most effective method to understanding your project's engagement landscape better is to ask.

2.7 Navigating Difficult Engagement Experiences

Engagement is designed to provide people with information about the project and proponent with the intent to develop relationships, assuage concerns, and contribute to project success through widespread support. Not all projects are met with broad support, however, despite good-faith efforts to engage. It must be made explicit: good engagement does not always lead to widespread project support. Keep in mind that dialogue itself is an indicator of successful engagement practice, and if relationships are being built, one goal is being met. That said, it is disappointing for a well-intentioned proponent to face opposition following wholehearted efforts to engage broadly and openly.

This section seeks to help understand why past projects have been met with opposition, and how future proponents might avoid such outcomes. Looking back to Section 2.3: Defining “Good” Engagement, a key component of open and honest communication is that it builds trust. The relationships between proponents and Rightsholders or stakeholders rely on trust, and trust is difficult to build but very easy to lose. Throughout the rest of this section, note the multitude of ways in which hard earned trust can be lost in a single misstep. Not all is necessarily lost, but it will take more careful, open, and honest engagement to build back the trust that was lost.

The Intent-Impact Gap

A unique insight gathered from speaking with both the proponent and different project stakeholders was a manifestation of the intent-impact gap. The intent-impact gap exists when one party's positive intentions (what they aim to do) do not align with the actual, lived experiences and outcomes (the impact) felt by others. A lack of transparency is the single largest contributor to the gap. This phenomenon can be seen in any manner of relationships from personal to professional, and at its core demonstrates that the sincerity of intention is irrelevant if the resulting impact is negative. Implications of the intent-impact gap include generating a trust deficit, escalating conflicts, increasing project costs, producing engagement fatigue, and more. The phenomenon can go both ways, as well – Rightsholder and stakeholder attempts to engage proponents may be misconstrued as hostile or combative, when the intent was to be direct, to the point, and not waste people's time.

Mitigating this issue requires clear and open communication that allows for the impacts of actions to be clearly articulated by your team, engagement participants, and third parties.

Listening intently during engagement sessions allows you to understand others' perspectives before responding. Clarifying intentions, where appropriate, provides a greater degree of transparency by communicating the reasoning behind your actions and helps build trust and understanding. Consistently following through on commitments ensures that actions match expectations, an important component of trust. Finally, recognize that humility is a strength, and approach engagement by asking what engaged parties wish to know and if there is any uncertainty that you could clarify. There are other steps and practices a proponent can take to avoid a gap but being aware of the potential and actively looking for them is critical to ensuring positive intentions do not unintentionally harm relationships.

Intent-Impact Gap Example

Consider a project in development; the proponent does not feel able to disclose the volume of resources required to operate annually. Understanding that people do not appreciate ambiguity or shifting narratives, the proponent decides to remain quiet about this. Knowing that a project is under development near their community, nearby residents look at similar projects elsewhere and make assumptions about their similarity. In the absence of information, people may assume the worst. While the proponent's actions came with good intentions, to provide a correct description of the project, their information was not timely. The local community assumed that the proponent was deliberately withholding information because of a fear of how it would be received. The ultimate impact was an erosion of trust and the creation of an opposition based on resentment of a lack of transparency.

Common Frustrations

Survey respondents, Rightsholder, and stakeholder interview participants, and engagement consultants all shared examples of practices and tendencies that have led to problems in past engagement. These frustrations range from minor irritations to practices that on their own are enough to sour a relationship and create opposition to a project. These are presented below.

Lack of Transparency

From the results of both the survey and interviews with consultants, Rightsholders, and stakeholders, the most frequently cited example of bad engagement practice is a lack of transparency. This can include withholding vital information, conducting selective engagement (deliberately excluding certain individuals or groups), delaying engagement, and hiding conflicts of interest, among many more. These errors can be classified as information withholding or selective disclosure.

Survey respondents and interviewees also spoke of frustrations with proponents who make unsubstantiated claims about a project's benefits, an example of which is "greenwashing". Inconsistent messaging from the project team, in addition to the use of ambiguous or highly technical, inaccessible information are also examples of misrepresentation or evasion that erode trust.

Finally, engaged parties described examples of past proponents who undertook engagement only to check a box, often ignoring concerns and not following up on commitments. In addition to attempting to control the narrative through not permitting open Q&A sessions and placing limitations on engagement at public meetings, these represent examples of manipulating the engagement process.

In all cases, a balance needs to be struck with transparency that respects proponent privacy and the project planning process but provides Rightsholders and stakeholders with adequate and honest information through equitable means. In cases where information cannot be shared, an honest and upfront explanation of why will contribute to building trust through honesty and integrity.

Poor Timing

Rightsholders and stakeholders alike expressed frustration in interviews with proponents who engage too late, while proponents worry about engaging too early. The perceived risk in engaging too early is that people may feel it is not worth their time. The real risk of engaging too late is that your audience feels that the late timing was intentional, to minimize potential for opportunities to be heard and influence the project.

Rightsholders specifically mentioned the need for adequate time to mobilize a response to a request to engage. All engaged people and groups deserve adequate time to consider the project and discuss within their respective communities.

Lack of Perceived Influence or Voice

While poor timing may compound this problem, even in cases where adequate time was allowed for engagement, survey respondents and interviewees expressed frustration with a lack of impact from their efforts. Individuals and groups often dedicate significant resources to engaging with project proponents, and while not all suggestions, requests, and comments can be actioned in a project's design or operation, demonstrating to those who participate in engagement that they have been heard helps build trust.

Underestimating Small Groups

From interviews with a variety of stakeholders, it was stated outright and clear from discussion that it is a mistake to conflate a group's size with their influence or organizational capacity. Natural resource projects are most often proposed for small communities where community groups have an incredible ability to rally rural community members around or against a cause. Omitting groups based on size risks an information gap that is filled in by the group's members.

One-Size-Fits-All Approach	Interviewees expressed frustration with a history of proponents who attempted to apply engagement strategies elsewhere, failing to account for unique local circumstances in the process. This can be a strategy that worked in another country, another county, or even just for a different project type. Every project requires a fresh look at the engagement strategy that considers the project, the locale, and the proponent's history.
Arrogance and Defensiveness	Interviewees who were on the 'engaged' side of the table previously, described past experiences where a proponent's relationship with various communities was immediately soured because of the tone of their approach. A proponent's tone and attitude are critical. Approach Rightsholders and stakeholders with humility, curiosity, and a willingness to listen.
Cultural Insensitivity	Communicated by both Rightsholders and stakeholders, there are examples of proponents who have been insensitive to cultural traditions and norms of Indigenous Peoples as well as ethnic, socioeconomic, locational, and professional communities. Understanding the cultural traditions of the groups you wish to engage is critical to a positive reception and can be as simple as avoiding engagement or review periods over specific holidays, times when specific work is planned, or more. A local champion can help uncover and navigate sensitivities and result in a more positive relationship overall.
Engagement Fatigue	Rightsholders and stakeholder are often asked to participate in engagement for a wide range of projects. While engaging is important to those who participate for a variety of reasons, a fatigue can develop when the volume of projects is very high, there is a legacy of projects not being realized, and is compounded when the engagement feels tokenistic and they do not have an opportunity to make a difference in the process. Dedication to follow-through on commitments, routine communication at agreed upon intervals, and being available as needed can help mitigate this frustration, but it may be the result of more than one project and thus only partially within your control.

The above frustrations serve as a framework of sorts for what not to do in engagement and are in direct contrast to the earlier list of key elements of successful engagement (Section 2.4). It is no coincidence that research participants expressed diametrically opposed practices for successful versus poor engagement, but it is reassuring that there is a path to tackling engagement successfully.

2.8 Lessons for Proponents

The preceding sections provide specific practices to emulate and to avoid when planning and undertaking engagement. From these practices, there are core principles of engagement that proponents must understand and embody as part of their engagement mission.

Trust is Paramount	Trust serves as the fundamental currency of engagement; it must be consistently earned, protected, and prioritized above all else. Without trust, every piece of information, every promise, and every action taken by the proponent will be met with skepticism and resistance, making constructive dialogue and project progress nearly impossible. Trust takes consistent and dedicated action to earn over the long term, but can be lost fairly rapidly with missteps, whether intentional or not.
Humility is a Strength	Proponents must approach engagement with the humility to acknowledge that they do not possess all the answers, especially regarding local impacts and solutions. This involves being open about internal project limitations and recognizing that community members often hold invaluable local knowledge and expertise that is essential for a project's successful design and mitigation strategy.
Diversity Demands Nuance	Recognizing that a single "community" is composed of diverse individuals, interests, and vulnerabilities (e.g., gender, age, income, language) is critical. Effective engagement requires proponents to use a variety of tailored methods to reach different stakeholder segments, ensuring that no group is unintentionally excluded or left without a voice.
Ask, Don't Assume	Proponents must consistently seek direct input and clarification from stakeholders rather than assuming they understand their concerns, preferences, or desired outcomes. This practice ensures that the engagement addresses the actual priorities of the community, avoiding the waste of time and resources on irrelevant or misaligned initiatives. The right approach for a given project depends on the details of the project and proponent, and the context in which it is proposed. Understand that context by being curious.
Engagement is an Investment	Effective engagement should be viewed not as a mandatory cost or regulatory hurdle, but as a critical, value-adding investment that reduces risk, prevents costly delays, and creates better project outcomes. Allocating sufficient budget, time, and dedicated staff to engagement protects the overall project budget and contributes to the project's social acceptability. Effective engagement requires an unwavering commitment.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROPONENTS

3.1 Strategic Imperatives

To give engagement the best chance at successful outcomes throughout a project's lifecycle, the proponent must establish high-level plans and objectives at the outset that treat engagement as a core strategic function, not a compliance activity.

A primary objective must be to embed engagement early and deeply. This means treating the stakeholder engagement plan with the same rigor as the technical design or financial model. Engagement activities should be planned for the entire project timeline and integrated into the schedules and responsibilities of key technical, environmental, and engineering teams. The commitment must be to initiate dialogue before decisions are made, allowing stakeholder input to genuinely shape the project design or be reflected in key reporting about the project.

To foster a productive environment, the proponent must set the objective to champion genuine dialogue. This requires cultivating an internal culture of open and honest two-way communication. The proponent must commit to actively listening, responding promptly, and being transparent about project risks and bad news. This involves understanding stakeholder concerns over simply advocating the project's benefits, ultimately narrowing the intent-impact gap.

Finally, engagement will fail without the necessary commitment of means. The objective must be to allocate ample resources by budgeting sufficiently for the required time, money, and dedicated personnel. Viewing engagement as a critical risk-mitigation investment, and not an optional expense, is essential. Furthermore, the objective to cultivate internal capacity must be met through ongoing training for project teams on best practices for communication, active listening, conflict resolution, and cultural competency. This ensures that every team member who interacts with Rightsholders and stakeholders, from executives to site supervisors, understands their role in building and maintaining the project's good standing in the communities on which it depends.

3.2 Practical Guidelines

Successful execution of Rightsholder and stakeholder engagement requires meticulous planning and a genuine commitment to the process. Proponents should develop clear engagement plans, which serve as the project's roadmap for interaction. This involves:

- Outlining specific, measurable objectives for each project phase
- Identifying and segmenting target audiences (e.g., regulators, community leaders, affected residents)
- Setting clear timelines
- Assigning resources and responsibilities

These plans must also incorporate the use of diverse communication channels, employing a mix of formats (for example formal reports, public online forums, small-group dialogues, and translated materials) to ensure all relevant groups are reached. Critically, the proponent should

actively solicit and respond to engagement participant feedback on their preferred formats to maximize reach and utility.

A core measure is the commitment to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Engagement processes must be intentionally designed to remove barriers to participation, which may include providing accessible meeting venues, flexible scheduling, or language interpretation. It is crucial to acknowledge that interested parties who are unable to participate on the proponent's terms (due to time, money, or access issues) often feel compelled to make their own terms to be heard, typically through protests, media campaigns, or legal challenges. Proactive accommodation is a necessary investment to prevent these actions. Furthermore, proponents should invest in skilled facilitation, utilizing trained, neutral facilitators to manage complex or contentious discussions. This investment ensures discussions are managed effectively and equitably, and the use of an independent party can significantly mitigate concerns about bias.

Finally, the success of the program hinges on sustained integrity and mutual benefit. Proponents must provide timely and transparent feedback, frequently and clearly communicating how stakeholder input was considered, what impact it had on decisions, or why it could not be incorporated. This critical step closes the feedback loop and validates the time and effort stakeholders contributed. Above all, the proponent must prioritize relationship building, viewing every interaction not as a transactional hurdle but as an opportunity to build and nurture long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. These durable relationships, cemented through trust and consistent follow-through, are the most effective way to secure and maintain the project's long-term social acceptability.

4.0 ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR PROPONENTS

This section offers a set of practical tools and resources designed to assist future proponents in operationalizing their engagement commitments. These actionable templates and guidance materials will streamline the planning, aid in execution, and provide reliable metrics for evaluating engagement effectiveness.

4.1 Generalized Engagement Checklist

This checklist outlines the core, systematic steps a proponent should follow to plan and execute a robust engagement program with Rightsholders and stakeholders. It is designed to serve as a high-level framework for ensuring all necessary components (from strategic resource allocation to transparent follow-up) are addressed. Take note, however, as this summary does not capture the full legal or political nuance required for every project, including obligations toward Mi'kmaq Rightsholders. It must be applied flexibly, adapting the depth and methods to the unique context, risks, and relationships specific to your project. Also note that the checklist is not a one-time process, as depicted below (Figure 4.1). Lessons learned through engagement, changing biophysical and sociopolitical conditions, differing engagement needs as the project advances, and more will dictate that the overall approach to engagement evolves as the project progresses.

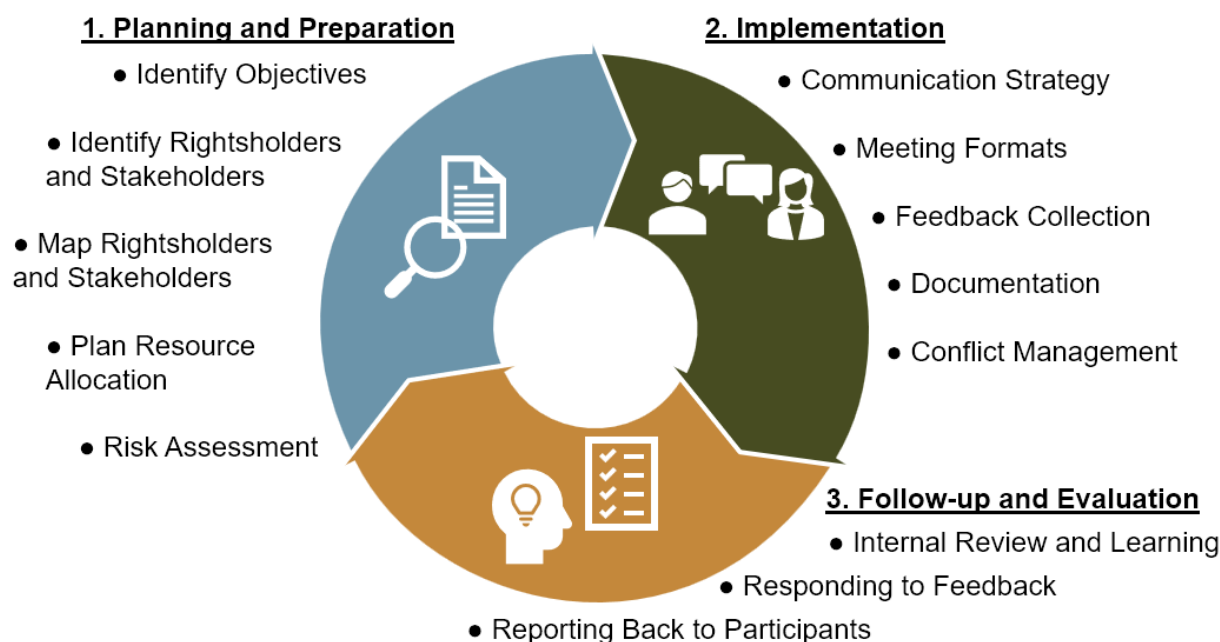


Figure 4.1: Engagement Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation Process

Planning and Preparation

This foundational stage ensures the engagement effort is strategic, resourced, and focused.

1. Identify Objectives: Clearly define the purpose of the engagement (e.g., gain information, assure communities of the project's benefits and minimized harms, meet legal duty) and what success looks like for both the proponent and the community.
2. Identify Rightsholders and Stakeholders: Compile a comprehensive list of all Indigenous groups, public groups, and individuals whose rights or interests may be affected by the project, ensuring all potential voices are included.
3. Map Rightsholders and Stakeholders: Analyze and categorize identified parties by their influence (power to affect the project) and interest (impact level) to determine the appropriate depth of engagement for each group.
4. Plan Resource Allocation: Dedicate and secure sufficient budget, time, and trained personnel for the entire lifecycle of the engagement; treat these resources as a necessary project investment, not a contingency.
5. Risk Assessment: Identify potential engagement failures (e.g., opposition, legal challenges, reputational damage) and plan mitigation strategies rooted in honesty and communication for each identified risk.

Implementation

This is the execution phase, focusing on clear communication, equitable process management, and documentation for posterity and analysis.

1. Communication Strategy: Develop a tailored plan specifying what information will be shared, when, and how (using diverse channels) to ensure transparency and accessibility for all target audiences.
2. Meeting Formats: Select and design meeting structures (e.g., small group, public forum, virtual) that are accessible, inclusive, and appropriate for the complexity and sensitivity of the topics being discussed.
3. Feedback Collection: Institute formal, accessible, and documented methods for receiving Rightsholder and stakeholder input (e.g., comment forms, recorded dialogue, dedicated emails) to ensure no concern is missed and can be addressed later.
4. Documentation: Maintain a detailed, systematic record of all interactions, commitments, feedback received, and how that feedback influenced decisions. This demonstrates due diligence and accountability.
5. Conflict Management: Establish clear, internal protocols and train staff on de-escalation techniques and resolution processes to manage disputes constructively and prevent minor issues from becoming major conflicts.

Follow-up and Evaluation

This stage is critical for building trust, demonstrating accountability, and ensuring continuous improvement.

1. Responding to Feedback: Provide direct, timely, and substantive written or verbal replies to major concerns raised, explaining how input was considered and what decision was reached.
2. Reporting Back to Participants: Issue public reports or summaries to all participants that clearly communicate project adjustments made (or not made) due to their input, validating their time and effort.
3. Internal Review and Learning: Conduct a formal, internal post-mortem evaluation to assess the success of the engagement process, identify instances of the Intent-Impact Gap, and integrate lessons learned into future projects and policy.

Following these steps will provide proponents with the necessary preparation to undertake engagement that is meaningful, helps build lasting relationships, and stewards the development of the project and proponent's social acceptability. Some of the steps require the use of tools that will be provided in the following sections, specifically identifying Rightsholders and stakeholders in the Nova Scotia context, mapping these groups, and more.

Proponents should note that checking off one of the above steps does not mean that it is finished. A change in political climate may introduce new risks that affect the conflict management techniques trained and practiced. New Rightsholders or stakeholders may enter the discussion, requiring re-mapping and potential changes to resource allocation, risk assessment, the communication strategy, meeting formats, and more. The higher up on the list something changes, the more cascading modifications may be necessary to existing plans.

4.2 Rightsholder and Stakeholder Identification

The composition of a project's relevant Rightsholder and stakeholder list is highly variable and entirely project-specific, meaning no generic list will suffice for effective engagement planning. This variation is driven by factors such as a project's location (urban vs. rural, local economic drivers), its scale (small biomass-based heating plant vs. grid-scale biomass power generating facility), the type of impact (environmental, economic, social), and its jurisdiction (federal vs. provincial permitting). The proponent must acknowledge that the definition of who is "affected" or "interested" is not static; it changes based on these unique project characteristics.

Identifying a comprehensive list requires moving beyond simple property boundaries and regulatory requirements. Proponents should begin by consulting the Crown's records (like the federal ATRIS system for Indigenous rights) and local planning documents to identify legally recognized and asserted Rightsholders. For the public, effective identification involves gathering local knowledge through community leaders, local government officials, and NGOs, who can pinpoint formal and informal groups. A general tip is to use a "ripple effect" or concentric circle model, starting with those directly affected (e.g., adjacent landowners) and moving outward to those indirectly affected (e.g., tourism operators, regional regulators) and those with strong value-based interests (e.g., ENGOs). This layered approach ensures that both high-influence regulatory bodies and lower-influence but deeply affected community groups are brought into the engagement plan.

For practical identification, proponents operating in Nova Scotia should leverage the provincial EA Projects database to conduct an historical review. This involves analyzing documentation from similar past projects to identify which Mi'kmaq groups were consulted, which local organizations provided formal comments, and which associations raised concerns. Note that individuals previously engaged will not be disclosed for privacy purposes, but planning to reach groups is a good way to get word out, and individuals aligned with these groups' interests will make themselves known in time. Projects that are geographically closer to the proposed site will yield the most relevant information for identifying local, place-based community Rightsholders and stakeholders. Conversely, groups with a larger provincial or national reach (e.g., ENGOs, industry associations) may be considered relevant regardless of the specific location, as their interest is often policy- or sector-based. Another practical tip is to search local media and social platforms for organized opposition or established community networks related to similar past developments, as these groups are highly likely to mobilize again.

An additional tool for conducting engagement is reaching out to established groups that serve as engagement forums, either specific to natural resource matters or community issues in general. In Nova Scotia's western forest region, Crown forest harvest planning involves

licensee engagement with the Western Region Crown Land Stakeholder Interaction Committee, with representation from a broad range of organizations that interact with public forests. Additional groups that serve a similar function as hubs of engagement around forest matters include:

- Regional watershed committees
- Regional conservation groups or forums
- Other environmental committees or interest forums

Identifying such groups is often most easily accomplished by asking local contacts if they are aware of such groups. They may not initially think to connect proponents with engagement forums, but once prompted, have thoughts on other opportunities to reach broad audiences.

A valuable conceptual tool for ensuring comprehensive coverage is the PICG framework, which categorizes external stakeholders into four key groups:

- Providers (e.g., suppliers of materials, construction contractors, skilled labor unions)
- Influencers (e.g., media, NGOs, academic experts, political parties)
- Governance (e.g., regulators, government departments, permitting bodies, and Rightsholders with veto/approval power)
- Customers (e.g., end-users of the project's output, community benefiting from service changes).

By systematically reviewing these four categories, a proponent moves beyond easily identified, directly affected parties, and broadens the engagement scope to capture groups whose influence or interest is indirect but potentially critical. For instance, an NGO that influences media coverage (Influencer) or a major union providing specialty labour (Provider). Using PICG helps prevent oversights by prompting the project team to actively seek out a wider network of possible stakeholders than might be initially obvious, creating a more robust foundation for a project's engagement network.

Rightsholder and Stakeholder Examples

Although a unique list is required for every project, the following list includes common types of Rightsholders and stakeholder groups to consider while searching. The importance of using this list only as a starting point cannot be overstated.

Table 4.1: Group Types Commonly Involved in Engagement and Examples

Group Type	Examples
Rightsholder	The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, including broader representation by KMK, but also each individual Mi'kmaq community (First Nation) and the Native Council of Nova Scotia, representing Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal peoples residing off-reserve in Nova Scotia. Regardless of whether a project is likely to trigger a Duty to Consult, early and open engagement with the Mi'kmaq is important for building trust.
ENGO	Healthy Forest Coalition, Ecology Action Centre, Sierra Club Canada (Atlantic Chapter), Nature Conservancy of Canada, environmental groups with a local, issue-based mandate. ¹

Group Type	Examples
Private forest landowner	Forest co-ops, NS Woodlot Owners and Operations Association, regional marketing boards.
Forestry industry	Industry or sector-based associations, pulp and paper companies, local sawmills, independent logging contractors.
Naturalist	Nova Scotia Nature Trust, local field naturalists clubs (e.g., Halifax Field Naturalists), academic researchers (e.g., from Dalhousie or Acadia Universities) with relevant expertise.
NGO	Regional Development Authorities, local Chambers of Commerce, and specific rural community groups concerned with local employment and economic stability derived from forestry.
Recreational group	Trail associations, angling and hunting associations, snowmobile and ATV clubs (e.g., Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia), local hiking groups.
Utility	Nova Scotia Power (electric), Heritage Gas (natural gas), regional municipal water/wastewater commissions, telecommunications providers (e.g., Bell, Eastlink).
Individuals	Adjacent property owners, local business owners dependent on the affected resource (e.g., tourism operator, lobster fisherman) or who may benefit from the project (e.g., lodging, food services, associated industry), residents directly impacted by noise or traffic.
Regulators	Federal, provincial, and municipal government bodies such as Fisheries and Oceans Canada (federal), Nova Scotia Natural Resources, and various municipal permitting offices.

¹ See the NS Environmental Network for an overview of many ENGOs in Nova Scotia:
<https://www.nsenvironmentalnetwork.com/org-membership-list>

Key Insights to Group Engagement Preferences

From the results of the survey and interviews, patterns emerged in terms of preferences for engagement that tended to covary by group type and these trends are presented below (Table 4.2). Note that the opinions expressed below are representative of the groups who responded to the survey and will help understand general trends in preferences. The groups you identify may have slightly different preferences and in the spirit of building relationships based on trust, you should ask Rightsholders and stakeholders about their preferences, and they in turn will likely appreciate being given a say in this process.

Table 4.2: Preferences for Engagement Expressed by Research Participants

Trend	Preference	Response and Groups Represented	Interpretation
Timing of first contact	Early in planning, even in the concept stage.	The most common preference across responding groups.	There is a dominant preference for early engagement. While some groups may prefer later initial contact, there is a greater risk associated with late outreach than early.
	Only when it is known that a project will affect them, their community, or organization.	Forestry industry, naturalists, NGOs.	
	Once specific project details are known or can be approximated.	Mi'kmaq groups expressed a specific interest in outreach when a project's approximate location, scale, and type of impacts are known.	Mi'kmaq groups expressed a pragmatic preference to be first informed of a project when the magnitude and type of effects on rights and traditional practices can be estimated.

Trend	Preference	Response and Groups Represented	Interpretation
Frequency of engagement	Regularly, at each major milestone.	Most respondents preferred regular, milestone-based outreach.	The preference for regular and milestone-based updates indicates that stakeholders want proactive communication that is directly tied to the project's progress and significant events. They are less interested in generic, time-based updates (like monthly or quarterly reports) unless those align with actual progress.
	When meaningful decisions are being made.	Some forestry, recreation, and naturalist groups preferred this option.	
	At fixed intervals, e.g., quarterly or monthly.	Only three responding groups, forestry, recreation, and naturalists, preferred this option.	
Methods of engagement	Emails as notifications for key events and milestones.	Most respondents indicated this preference across all group types.	The top two choices show that email is the most preferred method for both event-based outreach and regular summaries. This highlights the importance of maintaining up-to-date email contact lists and using email effectively for targeted and ongoing communication.
	Periodic emails (newsletters).	Slightly fewer respondents across a similar spread of group types indicated this preference.	
	Periodic project update meetings	Less than half of respondents indicated this as a preference for engagement, spread across group types.	Despite the digital preference, periodic project update meetings remain a popular choice, indicating that direct, in-person (or perhaps hybrid) interaction opportunities are still desired for deeper engagement and discussion.
	Social media posts	Relatively few respondents indicated this as a preference, and there is no observable trend in group types.	

The survey findings overall reveal that the engagement landscape is busy with proponents asking for people's time. While potential engagement participants like to know about projects early on, they prefer to set the terms of engagement and find that emails are an easy way to filter for events and milestones that interest them. There is an overall fatigue with in-person meetings because of the demands they place on participants' time and resources, and they should be saved for highly consequential periods in a project's development. Not only will this avoid fatigue amongst participants, but it will demonstrate a respect for their time and contribute to building a positive relationship.

4.3 Understanding and Managing Rightsholders and Stakeholders

With a list of Rightsholders and stakeholders who are likely to have an interest in the project compiled, the next practical step is to classify these individuals and groups by one of a few factors that will influence your interactions with them. The first is their engagement posture, or likely attitude toward the project. This classification determines the necessary resources, communication style, and depth of interaction required for each group. The five primary posture categories and resulting strategic approach are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Rightsholder and Stakeholder Posture Categories and Associated Approaches

Posture Category	Description	Proponent's Strategic Approach
Leading	Groups who have a high interest and high influence and are highly supportive of the project. They may champion the concept or even be a partner.	<u>Manage Closely/Collaborate</u> : Maintain constant communication, empower them to be project advocates, delegate specific engagement or advisory roles to leverage their influence and expertise.
Supporting	Groups who are generally favourable toward the project and its goals but have less formal power or a lower profile than Leading groups.	<u>Keep Satisfied/Reinforce</u> : Ensure they are regularly informed of progress, address minor concerns promptly to maintain their goodwill, and provide them with materials they can use to defend the project publicly.
Neutral	Stakeholders who are aware of the project but currently have no strong opinion, either for or against. Their position is susceptible to change.	<u>Keep Informed/Monitor</u> : Provide balanced, factual information through accessible channels. The goal is to prevent their position from hardening into resistance; monitor their feedback closely for early signs of concern.
Resistant	Groups actively or potentially opposed to the project. They may have high influence, high interest, or both, and pose the highest risk of delays or conflict.	<u>Consult Deeply/Mitigate</u> : Engage early and substantively to understand the root causes of their opposition. Focus on design modifications, mitigation, and accommodation; avoid debate and prioritize listening to build trust and find common ground.
Unaware	Groups who may be affected by the project but have not yet been formally notified or are simply unaware of its existence.	<u>Initial Notice/Inform</u> : Use the initial engagement phase to provide clear, accessible, and comprehensive information about the project and its potential impacts. The goal is to transition them into the Neutral or Supporting categories through transparency.

By accurately classifying the engagement posture of each group, the proponent can strategically allocate limited resources, ensuring deep consultation efforts are focused on high-risk Resistant groups and constitutionally mandated Rightsholders, while maintaining strong relationships with supportive and influential Leading parties. This systematic approach is essential for managing overall project risk.

The exercise of mapping influence and interest is the quantitative complement to classifying a group's subjective engagement posture. It is an important step for prioritizing engagement efforts and allocating a proponent's limited resources effectively. The process involves plotting each identified Rightsholder and stakeholder onto a 2x2 matrix, where the vertical axis represents their level of Interest (how deeply the project impacts them or their focus area) and the horizontal axis represents their level of Influence (their power, formally or informally, to affect the project's success or failure). An example of this with corresponding approach to engagement is presented in Figure 4.2.

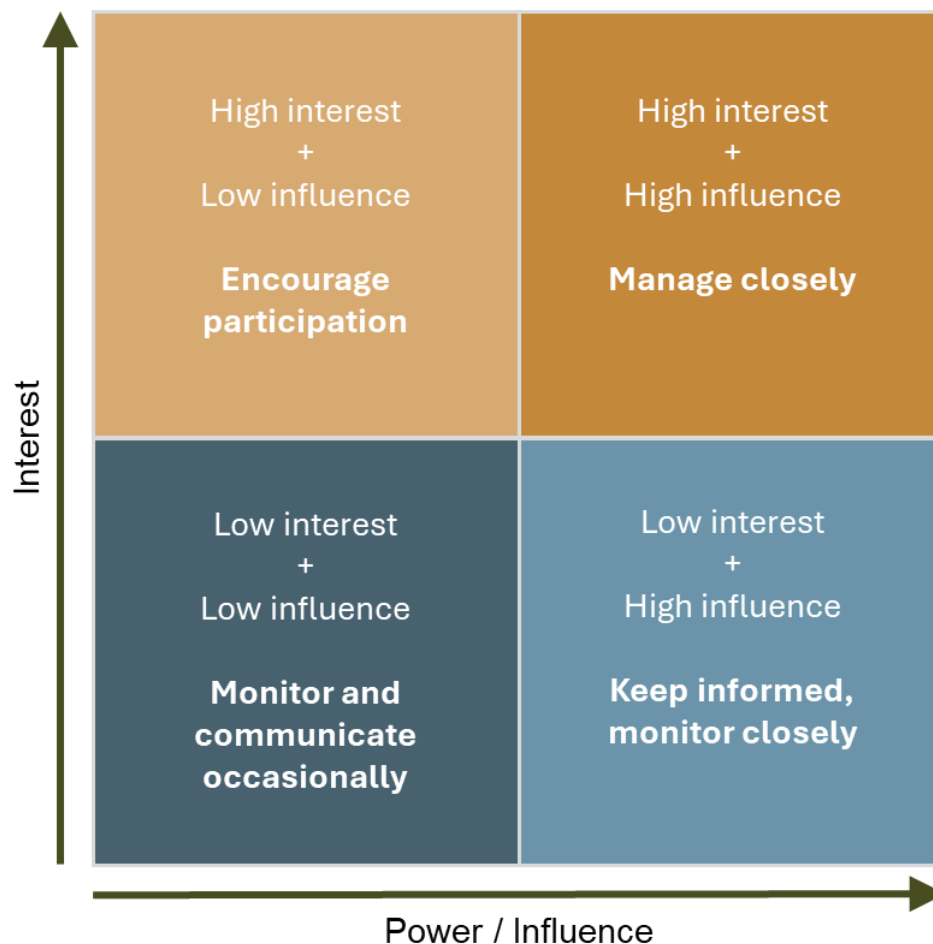


Figure 4.2: Interest and Influence Matrix for Engagement Planning

This mapping exercise naturally flows from the engagement posture classification because a group's attitude often dictates their placement on the matrix:

- **Leading** and highly **Resistant** groups typically fall into the High Interest/High Influence quadrant (requiring close management) because their strong supportive or opposing attitude is usually tied to significant power (like a regulator) or deep stake (like a Rightsholder).
- **Supporting** groups might fall into High Interest/Low Influence (they care deeply but lack formal power) or Low Interest/High Influence (they have power but aren't focused on the project), dictating whether the proponent needs to primarily inform them or simply satisfy their high-level concerns.
- **Neutral** and **Unaware** groups frequently occupy the Low Interest/Low Influence quadrant (requiring only monitoring), reflecting their current lack of either a strong stake or mobilizing power.

By mapping a group's posture onto this matrix, a proponent can strategize the level of engagement needed: groups in the High Influence/High Interest quadrant must be actively collaborated with to manage risk, whereas groups in the Low Influence/Low Interest quadrant only need to be kept informed to ensure transparency. This ensures the proponent invests the most time and resource-intensive efforts in relationships that are most critical to securing project approvals and who may be the most vocal and passionate project amplifiers.

This is but one (particularly useful) form of a stakeholder matrix. There are a wide range of engagement variables that can be mapped on a matrix to help understand the different characteristics of groups to be engaged. Other characteristics that can be classified using the matrix include predictability, awareness, support, technical knowledge, distance from the project, frequency of updates required, and more (Simply Stakeholders, 2024). By using this approach, proponents can tailor their communications and target resource allocations to ensure that engagement efforts are efficient and appropriate for the given audiences.

4.4 Types of Participation

Understanding each group's relative engagement posture and the type of approach that may be appropriate based on interest/influence mapping, a proponent may plan for appropriate forms of engagement through a developed spectrum of participation. This is a framework used by proponents to define the expected level of involvement in project decision-making from different Rightsholders and stakeholders, and the proponent's commitment to groups at each level (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Spectrum of Participation

Level	Goal	Commitment to Groups
Inform	Provide balanced, objective information to assist in understanding the project and associated impacts, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.
Consult	Obtain feedback on the project, analyses, identified alternatives, and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.
Involve	Work directly with groups throughout the process to ensure concerns are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns are directly reflected in the project's development and provide feedback demonstrating this impact.
Collaborate	Partner with groups in every aspect of either key decisions or the overall project, including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	Place final decision-making authority in the hands of groups.	We will implement what you decide.

Modified from IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2, 2018).

The appropriate level of participation follows directly from the interest/influence mapping exercise to determine the appropriate and efficient level of participation on the spectrum of participation for each group. This ensures effort is correctly focused, meeting both legal duties and relational goals.

Table 4.5: Influence/Interest Matrix to Spectrum of Participation Relationship

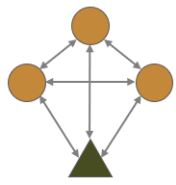
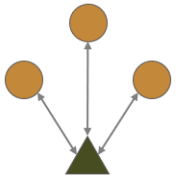
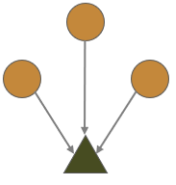
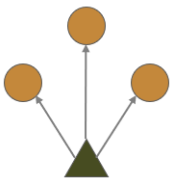
Matrix Quadrant	Target Spectrum of Participation Level(s)	Rationale
High Interest / High Influence	Collaborate / Empower	These groups (e.g., Rightsholders, regulators) require the highest level of engagement to manage risk and meet the constitutional Duty to Accommodate.
High Interest / Low Influence	Consult / Involve	These groups (e.g., deeply affected local residents, specialized NGOs) care intensely and need to be actively consulted and involved to maintain goodwill and ensure social acceptability is maintained.
Low Interest / High Influence	Inform / Consult	These groups (e.g., distant executives, non-adjacent government officials) have power over the project but little desire for detail. They require proactive informing and some consultation to ensure their high-level needs are met.
Low Interest / Low Influence	Inform	These groups (e.g., general public, remote businesses) require basic, accessible information to ensure transparency and build a foundation of trust, without expending disproportionate resources.

Modified from Guidelines on public engagement (Health Canada, 2023)

By aligning a group's position on the 2×2 matrix with the spectrum of participation, a proponent creates an efficient, strategic, and defensible engagement plan that directs intensive resources toward those who hold the greatest interest in the project and the greatest influence over its outcome.

Once Rightsholders and stakeholders are characterized in terms of their interest and influence on a project, and appropriate levels of participation are identified, the proponent must select means by which to engage each group. Not all engagement methods offer the same opportunities for informational exchange between the proponent and the groups engaged. The communication continuum describes the style and direction of communication a proponent uses with groups during engagement. It is a practical tool that directly supports the strategic decisions made using the interest/influence matrix and the spectrum of public participation.

Table 4.6: Levels of Engagement

Level	Description	Goal	Examples / Formats
Dialogue 	Deep, continuous two-way flow based on mutual learning and respect.	Build long-term relationships, establish shared goals, and co-create solutions.	Joint working groups, negotiations, crowdsourcing.
Discussion 	Two-way flow of information with structured exchanges.	Clarify issues, explore alternatives, and answer questions within a defined scope.	Bilateral meetings, technical workshops, interactive open houses, presentations with ample Q&A time.
Listening 	Primarily one-way flow of information from the group to the proponent.	Passive data gathering and understanding concerns.	Written submissions, requests for feedback.
Informing 	One-way flow of information from the proponent to the group.	Transparency and awareness.	Project descriptions, or sharing baseline environmental conditions, email newsletters, flyers, posters, fact sheets, social media posts, non-interactive open houses.
 Proponent  Engaged parties (Rightsholders, stakeholders)			

Similar to the relationship between the interest/influence matrix and spectrum of participation, a group's position on the matrix provides a starting point for the engagement methods for effectively providing an appropriate amount of information exchange. High influence/high interest groups require dialogue, as their power necessitates co-creation and negotiation. High interests/low influence or low interests/high influence are best served by discussion and listening efforts, validating their input, ensuring that their concerns are recorded, and providing feedback on how input influences decisions. Low influence/low interest groups are sufficiently served by informing efforts that provide transparency (ensuring there is always a mechanism for feedback); if a group's interest grows for any reason, they may necessitate increased levels of engagement.

4.5 Tools and Resources

Bringing together the above tools for identifying, classifying, and selecting appropriate levels of engagement for Rightsholders and stakeholders, a proponent may find an engagement plan table useful. Below is an example of how this is filled out (Figure 4.3). Work will be required to produce a list of groups and individuals and to adequately characterize them using the

previously discussed frameworks. A full-page template version of the below is available in Appendix C.

Rightsholder or Stakeholder	Influence Level	Participation Level	Communication		
			Frequency	Level of Involvement	Selected Methods
Snowmobile Club	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☒ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☒ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☒ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☒ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	- Newsletter - Emails before engagement opportunities

Figure 4.3: Example of a Single Row of a Completed Engagement Plan

A stakeholder map can be used for Rightsholder and stakeholder characteristic mapping, using any of the following variables, although interest versus influence or power is a common and particularly useful analysis:

- Interest
- Influence
- Power (sometimes used in combination or instead of influence)
- Awareness
- Support
- Technical knowledge
- Experience with projects of this type
- Level of detail required
- Predictability
- Distance from the project
- Update frequency required

Proponents may also select any group characteristic that helps understand the relationships between different groups and unique strategies required to reach each group with the appropriate level of effort and information. An example of a completed map is provided below (Figure 4.4). Note that this example is generalized, and proponents should be identifying specific groups such as individual trail or ATV associations, and that the position of a group or group type on this example may vary from a map for a specific project.

This exercise is best workshopped by printing the template (Appendix C), filling in the two axis categories, writing groups on sticky notes, and moving them around on the grid through discussion about the relative levels of each characteristic appropriate for each group.

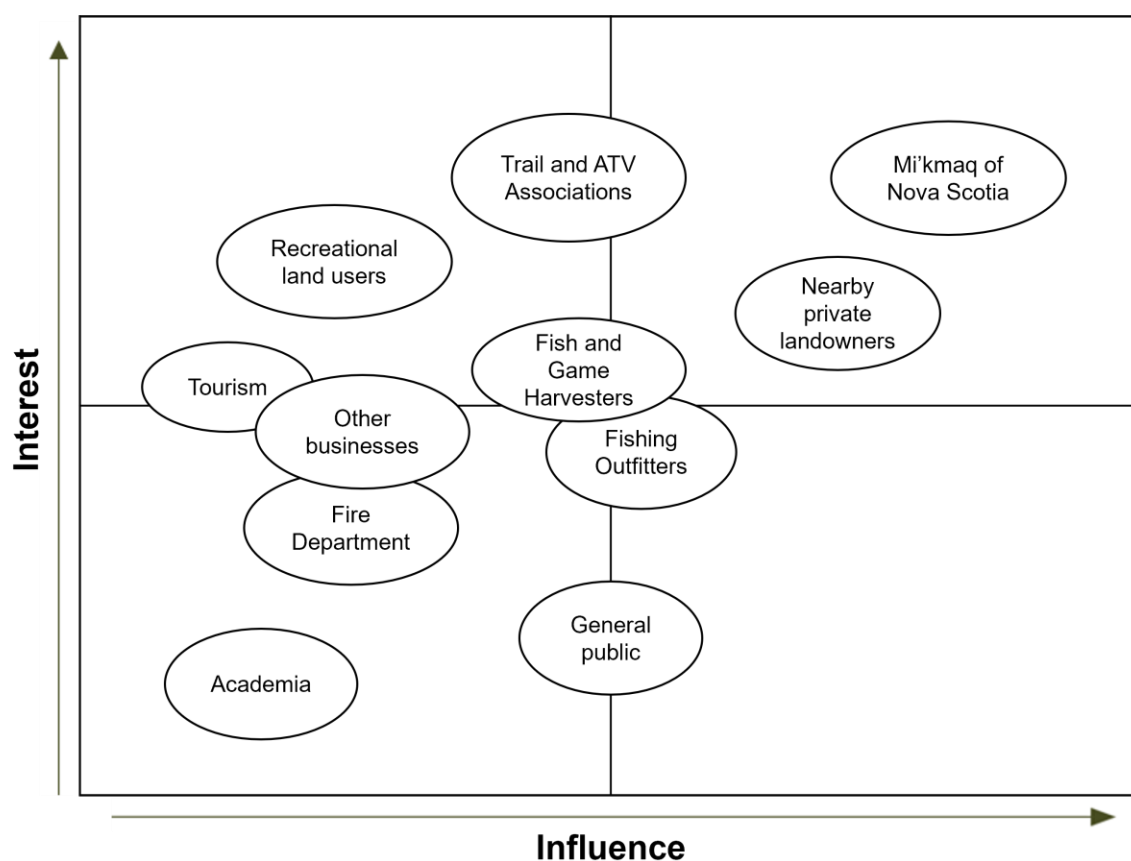


Figure 4.4: Example of a Completed Rightsholder and Stakeholder Map

It is important that engagement with Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators is recorded in an engagement log. The engagement log can be utilized to demonstrate posterity, inform reporting, and ensure commitments are met. The following example demonstrates how this is completed with an engagement log (Figure 4.5). This is provided in template form in Appendix C and can be recreated in Excel for easier manipulation but provides proponents with key information to track about each interaction.

Date	People / Groups engaged	Engagement Format	Project Team Involved	Purpose / Summary	Project Team Commitments	Follow-up Timeline
Oct 10, 2025	Local Councilors	Email	CEO	Introduce project and seek feedback on local considerations	Follow-up when more specifics of the project are known.	When details are known

Figure 4.5: Example of a Completed Row from an Engagement Log

5.0 CONCLUSION

Meaningful engagement is not merely a regulatory hurdle but is fundamental to the successful, responsible, and sustainable development of any forest resource project. By understanding the feedback provided by survey and interview participants and systematically applying the tools outlined in this report – from mapping influence and interest to correctly utilizing the communication continuum – proponents can transform opposition into collaboration and build resilient relationships with Rightsholders and stakeholders. We must reiterate that while core principles remain consistent, the actual execution of engagement for every project will be unique, reflecting the singular context, cultural sensitivities, and community composition of the project area. Although engagement is a responsibility that must be championed and owned by the proponent, securing assistance from an experienced consultant can provide vital administrative support, technical capacity, and unbiased facilitation, substantially enhancing a project's engagement outcomes.

Ultimately, these strategic frameworks are designed to empower proponents. By moving engagement from a reactive task to a proactive, strategic investment, future proponents can foster stronger, more trusting relationships, anticipate and mitigate project risks early, and achieve better, more durable project outcomes that are supported by a strong social acceptability. As the composition of communities evolves and as environmental and social expectations increase, engagement remains an ever-evolving field. We encourage all proponents to view these principles not as a fixed set of rules, but as a foundation for ongoing learning and adaptation in response to the dynamic needs and aspirations of the communities they operate within.

6.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Consultation	The Duty to Consult and Accommodate (DCA) is a constitutional obligation of the Crown (government), flowing from the Honour of the Crown and Section 35 of the <i>Constitution Act, 1982</i> . It is triggered when the Crown contemplates conduct that may adversely impact asserted Indigenous rights. This duty is carried out on a spectrum ranging from simple notice to deep consultation and accommodation, often with procedural tasks delegated to project proponents seeking government approvals, to achieve the ultimate goal of reconciliation.
Engagement	Engagement refers to the voluntary process undertaken by project proponents to develop project social acceptability by building trust with the public and non-Indigenous stakeholders. This practice is proactive and relational, involving continuous, two-way dialogue to identify and incorporate the concerns, local knowledge, and interests of those affected. Its primary goal is managing project risk and achieving community acceptance, rather than fulfilling a legal mandate.
Environmental Assessment	An Environmental Assessment (EA) in the Nova Scotia context, whether conducted under the provincial <i>Environment Act</i>, S.N.S. 1994-95, c. 1 or the federal <i>Impact Assessment Act</i>, S.C. 2019, c. 28, is a mandatory planning and regulatory process for proposed large-scale "undertakings" to predict, evaluate, and mitigate their potential environmental effects, including impacts on socio-economic conditions, cultural heritage, and climate change. The fundamental purpose is to promote sustainable development by ensuring potential adverse impacts are identified and managed before a project is approved and built. A core, non-negotiable requirement of the EA process is engagement, which mandates that proponents conduct consultation with the public and, critically, with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia (Rightsholders), collecting both scientific data and traditional/community knowledge to inform the government's final decision on the project's social acceptability.
Influence	Influence refers to the capacity of a Rightsholder or stakeholder to affect the proponent's decisions on a project's design, timeline, or ultimate approval. This power is exercised through formal mechanisms (like legal rights or regulatory processes) or informal means (such as public opinion, media pressure, or direct negotiation) to achieve desired project outcomes or mitigate negative impacts.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Interest	Interest refers to a Rightsholder or stakeholder's stake or concern regarding a proposed project's outcomes, reflecting how the project will affect their rights, well-being, resources, or values. This can encompass tangible impacts (e.g., changes to land, water, or livelihood) or intangible concerns (e.g., cultural protection, historical preservation, or community identity).
Proponent	A proponent is the individual, company, or governmental agency that proposes and seeks approval for a project or development activity. They hold the financial and practical interest in the project's success and are responsible for executing the engagement program necessary to gain regulatory approval and community acceptance.
Rightsholder	A Rightsholder is an Indigenous Nation or group whose Aboriginal and Treaty Rights are recognized and affirmed under Section 35 of the <i>Constitution Act, 1982</i>. Their position in project development is distinct due to the Crown's constitutional Duty to Consult and Accommodate any potential adverse impacts on these protected rights. The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia are Rightsholders in the context of projects proposed in Nova Scotia, and are engaged through the Kwi'mu'kw Mmaw-Klusuaqn Negotiation Office (KMKNO), the Native Council of Nova Scotia, Sipekne'katik, and individual First Nations. The rights of the Mi'kmaq apply to the entirety of Nova Scotia because the province is part of Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territorial claim establishes the Mi'kmaq Nation as the collective rights-holder for the whole area, meaning rights are not confined to the boundaries of specific local First Nation reserves.
Stakeholder	A stakeholder is any non-Indigenous individual, group, or organization that holds an interest in a proposed project and may be affected by its outcomes (positively or negatively), but who does not possess the same constitutionally protected rights as a Rightsholder.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

THE INVESTIGATORS

Strum Consulting was hired by the Nova Scotia Forestry Economic Task Force for their experience and expertise in the fields of engagement, environmental assessment (EA), and working with groups and individuals in the forestry sector. Strum is a leading provider of EA services with a staff of experts in a variety of biophysical subjects, a long history of successful project management, and respected connections in communities of place and practice. Project and subject area leaders at Strum have observed, contributed to, and led engagement efforts as part of diverse projects across the Atlantic Canadian landscape and beyond. The lead investigator was David Foster, PhD, who, through a variety of past and ongoing projects, has worked and collaborated with those both working in and affected by Nova Scotia's forestry industry. Dr. Foster's understanding of the forestry industry and dedication to understanding the nuances of how it affects people makes him an excellent choice to lead this research, and ultimately, to guide future proponents on designing effective engagement campaigns.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Three primary data collection methods were employed in the preparation of this report:

- Interviews with skilled EA practitioners
- Public survey
- Interviews with Rightsholders and stakeholder individuals and groups

The detailed methods of how each were conducted are provided below.

EA PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS

Senior and experienced EA practitioners at Strum were engaged in scheduled interviews and asked a series of questions to understand their individual experience with engagement, giving them the opportunity to share lessons learned about effective and timely engagement. Four such interviews were held with senior project managers who themselves demonstrated a range of engagement experience, and whose past projects had afforded them the opportunity to observe examples of proponent-driven engagement that had a range of outcomes. To draw out these experiences, interviewees were asked a series of questions in a conversational format on subjects such as:

- How to ensure engagement throughout an EA.
- Examples of projects where early engagement had an impact for better or worse.
- Examples of projects where timing (either way) caused delays or challenges in the progress or outcomes of engagement.
- Specific engagement practices to help build trust with Indigenous groups.
- How to identify and prioritize stakeholders from the diverse landscape.
- Tools and formats for effective engagement.
- Tailoring engagement for remote, rural communities.
- The effectiveness of new and innovative engagement tools.

- Common mistakes or oversights committed by engagement practitioners.
- Misinterpreted or missed signals and the harms they caused.
- Practical ways to build relationships with Rightsholders, stakeholders, and regulators.

In addition to questions on the above subjects, practitioners contributed lists of Rightsholder and stakeholder groups involved in past engagement to help build an understanding of the overall engagement landscape in Nova Scotia.

ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

To assist in better understanding the breadth and characteristics of the engagement landscape in Nova Scotia, a survey was designed to solicit input to the research from a broad range of participants. The survey's questions were chosen to understand each respondent's background and motivations for engaging with projects and their proponents, give them the opportunity to explain past engagement experience, and share their thoughts on a range of engagement-related topics. Questions included the below subjects (summarized from the survey):

- Characterize themselves as an individual or member of a larger group, their status within that group, and the group's overall objectives.
- Provide a high-level overview of the subjects they or the groups they represent look to see addressed in an EA.
- Share experience engaging with project proponents or their representatives, and the nature of the projects that led to the engagement.
- Explain how a connection was made with the project team and the details of ongoing engagement efforts such as methods and timing.
- Characterize the effectiveness of different engagement approaches including the reception to such methods by various individuals and communities.
- Provide feedback on the accessibility of engagement, including physical, technological, cultural, social, and other logistical factors.
- Share examples of when attempts to engage with project teams were unsuccessful and explain the factors they believed contributed to the barrier to engage.
- Outline preferences for engagement including the method and timing of communications and specific practices found successful in the past to sustain going forward.
- Provide perspective on how to reach marginalized and underrepresented voices in environmental decision-making.
- Self-nominate as interested in a follow-up discussion to delve deeper into their experiences with engagement, and suggest additional people or groups to receive the survey or who would be appropriate for follow-up discussions.

The survey was sent to over 200 email addresses that were gathered from publicly available sources such as websites, social media pages, etc. Surveys were not distributed to Mi'kmaq groups as a more direct approach through interviews was selected as being a more appropriate means through which to engage. In total, 34 responses were received,

representing an approximately 15% return rate. Respondents were guaranteed anonymity, therefore identifying characteristics cannot be reported herein, however, the types of groups and individual backgrounds represented by respondents include:

- Recreational groups (ATV clubs, trail associations)
- Environmental non-governmental organizations (naturalist and environmental advocacy-focused individuals and groups with both terrestrial and aquatic focus)
- Other non-governmental organizations
- Forest landowners and representing groups
- Forest industry employees, groups, and companies
- Utilities

Survey responses were tabulated and processed using generative AI to look for trends within and across groups, and noted trends were verified manually.

DETAILED INTERVIEWS

Drawing on the self-nominations for interviews from the survey and supplemented by personal connections in a range of sectors, interviews allowed for more detailed insights into the keys to engagement success. Interviews followed a semi-formalized script that varied by interviewee type, but in general sought to understand:

- Interviewees' organizational or personal relationship to natural resource-based projects.
- Past experiences with engagement in the context of project planning and operation, including:
 - Aspects of engagement that were perceived to be well designed and result in positive outcomes, from their perspective.
 - Aspects of engagement that were perceived to be poorly thought out or, for whatever reason, to have resulted in negative or less-desirable outcomes, from their perspective.
- Preferences in engagement, especially pertaining to non-proponent interviewees, relating to the timing and methods of engagement.
- Recommendations to future proponents for planning and carrying out successful engagement from the perspective of those who have been through engagement as either a proponent of participant.

A total of 10 interviews were conducted with 15 individuals representing more than 11 groups or organizations (some interviewees represent or are members of multiple groups) across a range of backgrounds, including:

- Mi'kmaq groups
- Forest private woodlot ownership and management
- Municipal development office
- Crown land forest management

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Forest products industry
- Environmental non-governmental organizations and advocacy

A summary of detailed meeting notes was produced using generative AI to look for trends within and across groups, and to glean key insights from discussions. Noted trends and findings were manually verified.

LIMITATIONS

This report benefited from the input of a variety of Rightsholders, stakeholders, and experienced engagement practitioners, and is intended to help enable successful engagement programs from the outset. As a roadmap, this report identifies critical pathways to success, important milestones along the way, and suggests tools for planning and conducting effective engagement. Project-specific work is required to develop an engagement plan that accounts for project and proponent details and background, the local context, and understands the unique engagement landscape associated with every project.

This report does not provide recommendations or guidelines for understanding and approaching the regulatory landscape. The rationale for this is presented in greater detail in Section 2.1, but this type of engagement tends to be the most prescriptive with clear paths laid out to obtain certain regulatory approvals or permits.

APPENDIX C

ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT RESOURCES

Engagement Plan Template

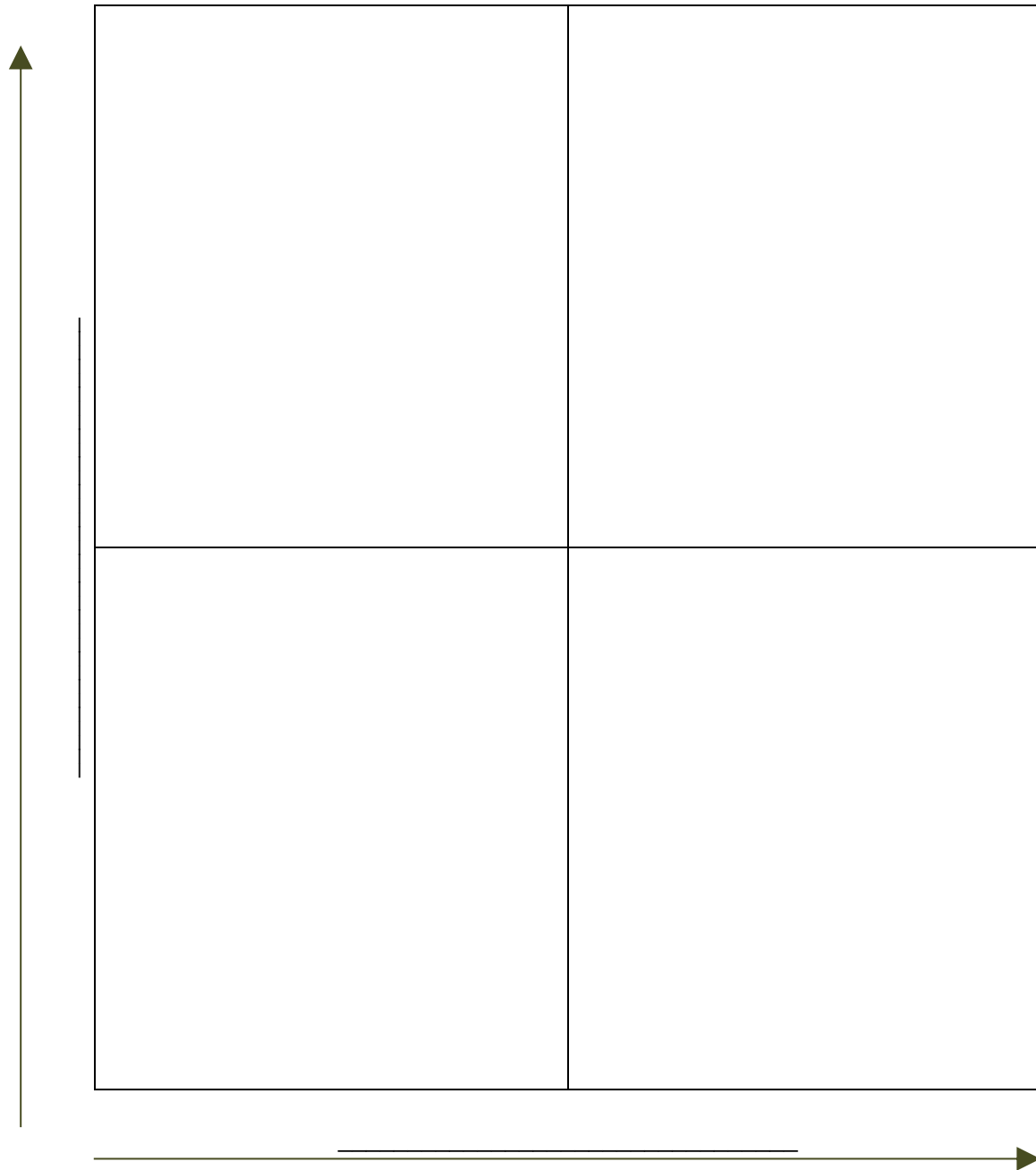
Rightsholder or Stakeholder	Influence Level	Participation Level	Communication		
			Frequency	Level of Involvement	Selected Methods ¹
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	
	☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low	☐ Leading ☐ Supporting ☐ Neutral ☐ Resistant ☐ Unaware	☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ As needed	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower	

Modified from Asana's Stakeholder engagement plan template (Asana, 2022).

See Engagement Roadmap Figure 4.3 for an explanation of how to complete this table and an example of its completion.

¹ For a listing of a wide range of engagement techniques that may be employed, specific to each level of involvement from the spectrum of participation, see the Index of Community Engagement Techniques (Tamarack Institute, 2017)

Rightsholder and Stakeholder Map Template



Rightsholder and Stakeholder Characteristic Matrix

See Engagement Roadmap Figure 4.4 and associated explanations for an explanation of how to complete this map and an example of its completion.

Engagement Tracking Log Template

Date	People / Groups Engaged	Engagement Format	Project Team Involved	Purpose / Summary	Project Team Commitments	Follow-up Timeline