
AWS INTERNATIONAL WATER STEWARDSHIP STANDARD GUIDANCE ON SPECIAL SUBJECT: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DRAFT DATED 31 AUGUST 2018

The importance of stakeholder engagement to catchment management

Within a catchment, all water-related physical processes and activities are interconnected, although some more strongly than others. It is in the interests of all parties to communicate and cooperate, even though they may not have the same priorities, and may be competitors for the same water resources. Understanding each other's priorities and interests will provide a better chance of benefit for all, and for protection of the natural environment. Stakeholder engagement is a tool for water stewardship, not an end in itself.

The priority reason for stakeholder engagement is to support planning for the organization's water stewardship actions. The process should ensure actions take into account the needs and interests of stakeholders and the natural environment as well as those of the organization. The process of engagement can also motivate collective action with stakeholders.

The process of stakeholder engagement and the trust it can develop, may provide opportunities for the organization to influence water stewardship, first by setting an example to stakeholders, and second, to potentially influence water governance policies.

What are stakeholders?

Stakeholders include any organizations, groups or individuals that have some interest or 'stake' in the implementing organization's activities and can affect or be affected by them. The four main categories of stakeholder are:

1. Those who impact on the organization (e.g. regulators, other water users, polluters, special interest groups)
2. Those on whom the organization has (or is perceived to have) an impact (e.g. other water users, neighbors, conservation management organizations)
3. Those who have a common interest (e.g. similar business sectors)
4. Neutral. Those with no specific link, but with whom it is beneficial to maintain a positive reputation and relationship

Of most relevance are stakeholders associated with water use and dependency, but engagement should not be limited to these. Stakeholder Engagement should be much broader as many issues are interlinked, including community welfare, local economy, natural environment and the organization's reputation.

Every location and situation are different, but typical stakeholders include the following:

- Local authorities, regulators and other government agencies (e.g. municipality, environmental agency, water management agency, department of agriculture)
- Community
 - Role and influence vary significantly between countries and cultures.
 - It may include indigenous peoples and their traditional leaders
 - It can include influential individuals or groups, such as fishing clubs, water sports clubs and enthusiastic conservationists
- Farmers and landowners

- Small farmers may independently have limited resources and influence, although their water rights and risks are important. Some may be represented via a collective with larger net influence
- Larger farms and landowners may have important surface water bodies on their property, or aquifers below.
- Other water users: industry, private homes, public supply
- Environment
 - Commonly represented by conservation groups, NGOs, or including hunting and fishing clubs who have a strong interest in protecting the natural habitats

Before the start

The organization should first have a good understanding of its water and wastewater situation, and have defined its physical scope, at least provisionally (which may be adapted as a result of stakeholder engagement). This information will come from Step x (Gather and Understand) of the Standard. This puts the organization in the best position:

- to plan where to engage and who with.
- to know its own water challenges and therefore be prepared for constructive discussions on shared water challenges
- to be prepared to respond to questions about its water use and wastewater management, for example, how much water it uses (total and net), what it uses water for, and where its wastewater goes.

In this context, the organization should know the location and nature of its water sources, and the main water bodies that supply them (surface water body or aquifer). If it uses only municipal supply, it should know the supplier and the main water bodies it relies on. Similarly, the organization should know where its wastewater goes in terms of location and receiving water bodies. The physical scope is based principally on the catchment(s) of relevant water bodies (surface and/or groundwater), as described in the 'Catchment' section of this guidance.

Timescales

There are two main timescales for stakeholder engagement. The short-term aim is to identify shared water challenges and to support the development of initial water stewardship actions. However, stakeholder engagement should be maintained as a long-term process of two-way engagement and communication. The organization should be ready to adapt actions if circumstances change, examples of which are: increasing demand for water in the catchment, increasing physical water scarcity, increasing water charges, and extreme events such as flood or drought.

How to start engagement

The key stages in Stakeholder Engagement are:

1. **Identify and map stakeholders.** Starting with a map of its Physical Scope, the organization should identify as many stakeholders as possible. Stakeholders should be listed (ideally in table form) identifying their name, location, contact and reason for being a stakeholder. It is recommended to also show stakeholders on the Physical Scope map. There a number of ways a stakeholder may be linked to the organization's defined Physical Scope, with some examples as follows:
 - Physically located within the Physical Scope (e.g. inhabitants, businesses, farms)
 - Users of land, water bodies or HCV features within the Physical Scope
 - Suppliers of water or wastewater services to locations within the Physical Scope
 - Governments and regulators with responsibility in the Physical Scope
 - Other organizations with a strong interest within the Physical Scope (e.g. NGOs responsible for managing WHCV features)
2. **Categorize stakeholders.** The organization should review its stakeholders and categorize them according to the four categories shown in Fig 1. This may be undertaken as a 'materiality assessment' (common terminology in sustainability reporting), whereby for each stakeholder, it is assessed to what extent they are 'material' to the organization and its water

stewardship program. For some stakeholders, it may be possible to categorize only after initial engagement. The category then helps define the form of engagement appropriate to each stakeholder or stakeholder group, as shown in Fig 1 (see section below).

3. **Know the water policy framework and institutions.** Engagement on water-related issues in the catchment should be within the context of the policy framework and institutions, and should not conflict with them. The organization needs to be sensitive to others who hold responsibility. For example, if the organization and its stakeholders rely on municipal water supply, the organization should first go through the supplier. If it first discusses water supply issues or concerns directly with stakeholders, then it may raise mistrust. Equally, if the organization relies on its own private water sources, it should first go through the relevant regulatory agency. The organization also needs to be aware of any existing engagement programs, and start through them, so as not to duplicate work or conflict with existing programs. For example, England has an advanced program called Catchment Based Approach (CABA www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/) to promote engagement and partnership on a river basin scale.
4. **Assigning responsibility within the organization's team.** The organization should define a team to undertake stakeholder engagement, with responsibilities, tasks and timetable of actions. This is a component of Step x (Implement) in the Standard.
5. **Plan of action.** This will consist of a number of types of action:
 - Actions for engaging with and communicating with stakeholders (short-term and long-term)
 - Actions for developing partnerships with relevant stakeholders to address shared challenges
 - Specific actions to address water stewardship issues and shared challenges

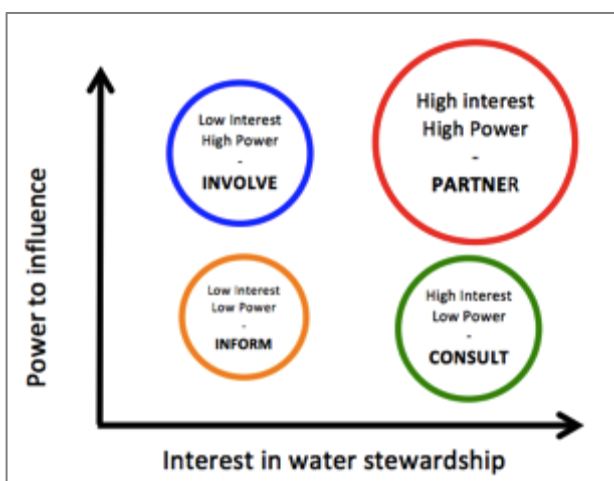


Figure 1 Categorizing stakeholders to guide communications

The most advanced stage in stakeholder engagement is to establish a program of long-term engagement combined with active promotion of water stewardship. This form of transparency is a first step towards influencing practice, and potentially policy, by example. The ultimate aim is to successfully encourage good water stewardship across the catchment, and to the benefit of all stakeholders and the natural environment.

The influencing of actions or policy needs to be managed carefully and sensitively. How it should be done is very specific to the local political landscape and culture. Considerations include:

- Be aware of any existing stakeholder engagement initiatives in the catchment. If they exist, the organization will have an opportunity to benefit from them, and should avoid duplication of effort or conflicting actions.
- For small farmers and businesses, their priority is economic survival, and they therefore need to understand how water stewardship actions can support this.

- Farming communities may be conservative and skeptical to ‘new ideas’ from perceived ‘outsiders’. It may require a program of long-term engagement (perhaps over years) to develop trust in the benefits of change.
- Some NGOs are highly experienced at influencing practice and policy, and can therefore make good partners in stakeholder engagement.

Communicating with stakeholders

There are many possible methods for communicating with stakeholders, as shown in Table 1. The method should be appropriate to the stakeholder and determined from the outcome of the categorization process as described above and indicated in Figure 1. The organization needs to decide what form of communication and engagement is appropriate to which stakeholder, but it does not need to rigidly align with the categories shown in Figure 1. The form and method of communication should take into account the cultural conditions and traditions of the community. This includes the levels of technological advancement and literacy within the community, and therefore whether digital, written or verbal communication is most appropriate.

Table 1. Examples of communication methods for different stakeholder categories

Inform	Consult	Involve	Partner
Send out information leaflets, newsletters, etc (door-to-door, by post, email, etc)	Questionnaire surveys	Advisory panel	Joint projects with other water users
Public access website	Focus groups	Invite input to planning of actions	Joint projects to protect or improve HCV features (e.g. with conservation NGOs)
Public presentations (e.g. at council meetings)	Stakeholder physical meetings	Interactive website, allowing feedback and comment	
Invitations to visit and tour the organization’s site			
Press releases and media postings			
Information panels in public places			

The level of stakeholder engagement required

The AWS Standard cannot define the appropriate level of stakeholder engagement, which will be dependent on a number of factors. The appropriate level can depend on considerations such as the following:

- The relative size of the organization in a catchment compared to other operations
- Whether the organization is considered a large water user or generator of wastewater
- Whether the organization uses its own private water sources or external service provider
- To scale of water-related challenges in the region.
- The nature and advancement of water governance

Where a lower level of stakeholder engagement is justified, it should not allow for no engagement. The organization should show it has undertaken an assessment and can justify the level of stakeholder engagement it applies.

Consensus

Where an organization is required to show consensus, it should show it has sought it, and ideally achieved it. Recognizing the organization cannot insist on feedback from its stakeholders, Where

feedback is difficult to gain, the organization should show an absence of serious objections and that the interests of vulnerable stakeholders are not negatively impacted.

[To include guidance on how to seek consensus]

Where stakeholders have rights to the water resource, such as some local communities and indigenous peoples with traditional rights, their informed consent must be given in order to use the resource. Where these rights are not formally recognized by a government regulator, there remains a duty to identify and respect them where they exist. Engaging with such communities requires a long-term commitment to achieve meaningful dialogue and build trust between parties.

Some indicators within the AWS Standard require the site to demonstrate it has sort consensus for its plans or actions, taking into account all reasonable positions and concerns.

Further guidance on stakeholder engagement

There are a number of guides on stakeholder engagement available from various sectors. Many of these are very long and detailed and more appropriate for the more advanced levels of stakeholder engagement. Smaller organizations may not have the resources to undertake such comprehensive stakeholder programs. As stated at the beginning of this section, stakeholder engagement is a tool to achieving the water stewardship Objectives and not an end in itself. As such, the scope and level of stakeholder engagement should be appropriate to the scale of the organization, the scope of its water use and wastewater generation, and relevant to the scale and issues of the catchment and defined physical scope.

REFERENCES [more to be added. Suggestions welcome]

Include references to other guidance on Stakeholder Engagement.

- Biodiversa, 2013, Stakeholder Engagement Handbook, 108pp
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 2013, Engaging Stakeholders in your Watershed, 2nd Edition, 91pp
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) 2012, *FSC guidelines for the implementation of the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)*, version 1, 83pp, [Link](#)
- Stakeholder Researches Associates, Canada, Inc, 2005, The Stakeholder Engagement Manual, Volume 1: The guide to practioners' perspectives on stakeholder engagement, First edition, 88pp
- Stakeholder Researches Associates, Canada, Inc, 2005, The Stakeholder Engagement Manual,
- Stakeholder Researches Associates, Canada, Inc, 2005, The Stakeholder Engagement Manual, Volume 2: The practioners' handbook on stakeholder engagement, First edition, 156pp