

1.1 Guide – Pitfalls to effective engagement

Unclear purpose

Unclear purpose If the purpose of the engagement is poorly defined, all the activities that follow will be affected, including the identification of stakeholders, determining the methods to be used, and managing stakeholder expectations. You may need to involve stakeholders in defining the purpose of the engagement.

Differing capacity of stakeholders

Stakeholders can sometimes have different levels of skills and experience in engaging with government. This can affect their ability to fully participate in an initiative, as well as the quality of the information they provide. You may need to work with some stakeholders to build their capacity to contribute or offer modified or different models of engagement.

Insufficient skills in the team

Effective stakeholder engagement requires a specific skill set. The absence of the right skills can hinder collaboration across organisational boundaries and make it hard to identify issues and opportunities. This can result in damaged relationships between government and stakeholders, and poor-quality advice and information. During the planning stages, identify skills available and skills required at subsequent stages. Explore options to develop skills and/or engage external expertise.

Unfocused dialogue

Stakeholder engagement can cover a range of issues that are important to stakeholders but may be less so to the initiative. If this happens, it can distract from obtaining relevant input. The engagement plan should be clear on what issues are relevant and how to manage and respond to any ad hoc issues that are raised. Responding to ad hoc issues thoughtfully is important. For example, there may be another area in the department where those issues could be considered further.

Failure to review and evaluate

Without robust review and evaluation, it is difficult to know if the approach is working and whether changes are needed. Failure to review and evaluate also reduces the ability to learn from and improve engagement. The engagement plan should include review points throughout the policy design and implementation, with flexibility to adjust the approach if needed.