

Effective Engagement: building relationships
with community and other stakeholders

Book 3 the engagement toolkit



3.67 Websites

Description:

World wide websites that contain project information, announcements and documents can use various media formats. The array of computer software and graphics packages and capacity of the internet as a publicity tool and information source and forum for public input or electronic democracy is expanding, increasing the application of this participatory tool. Websites are particularly useful for people in remote areas accessing project information and are more effective than information repositories in this regard. As well, websites make ideal community noticeboards for small organisations and provide sources for interaction when they invite feedback and provide email addresses or chat options. They are readily updateable and can be used to dispatch information with relative ease. The internet and websites are emerging consultation tools and their applications and number of users continues to expand. (See also Electronic Democracy)

Objectives:

A website aims to make information available, freely and in forms that are easily accessible (click and go information, multimedia options for accessing information, and/or the option of collecting and/or providing feedback).

Outcomes:

A website allows community groups, industry and government agencies to obtain information quickly, effectively, and at low cost, that will assist their members to undertake whatever tasks are needed to be done. Websites provide the chance to inform a wider range of people about issues and to invite the website visitors to become involved in some way.

Uses/strengths:

- Can provide publicity, information and limited public input.
- Capable of reaching very large numbers with enormous amounts of information.
- Offers a low cost way of distributing larger documents.
- Offers a highly accessible forum for posting project updates.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- Many people still cannot access the web.
- Many people are still not web-literate.
- Its success as a participatory tool is still relatively unknown.
- Information overload and poor design can prevent people from finding what they need.

Resources required:

- Staff
- Internet access
- Web design skills

Can be used for:

- Showcase product, plan, policy
- Communicate an issue

Number of people required to help organise:

- Medium (2–12 people)
- Individual

Audience size:

- Large (> 30)

Time required:

- Medium (6 weeks – 6 months)

Skill level/support required:

- High (Specialist skills)

Cost:

- High (> AUD\$10,000)
- Medium (AUD\$1,000 – AUD\$10,000)

Participation level:

- Low (Information only)

Innovation level:

- Low (Traditional)

Method:

1. Contact a web designer, or find someone within the organisation with web design skills.
2. Discuss the 'architecture' - all the levels of information, links and illustrations available and necessary to inform and engage the user.
3. Do some background research, web-surfing in your chosen area or field. Discover what works well on other websites, what they cover, what they omit, and use this information to improve your own website.
4. Trial the website before releasing it to the public. A bad experience with a website can mean people do not return. Ensure all links are working, and that the material scrolls smoothly with minimum delays.
5. Launch the website with suitable coverage in the media, in newsletters, and in a public forum.
6. Ensure that you have alternative communication options for those who are not web-literate or do not have access to the internet.
7. Place the website address on all correspondence and other printed material from the organisation.

References:

- Grant, C & Pirotta, M (2002) *Connecting communities*, Improvement and Development Agency, UK
- <http://www.makingthenetwork.org> [accessed 02/07/2005]