

Effective Engagement: building relationships  
with community and other stakeholders

# Book 3 the engagement toolkit



### 3.8 Community Indicator

#### Description:

Community indicator projects are those where communities have a vision for a sustainable future and have established ways of tracking their progress through the use of indicators. The list of indicators varies and is generally developed by the community itself. The technique has been used mostly in North America and Europe. The most successful projects have three characteristics in common:

- First, the community created a vision of its future that balanced economic, environmental, and social needs. This future is long-term – not in the order of years, but for decades or generations.
- Second, the vision incorporated the views of a wide cross-section of the community.
- Third, the community decided how to keep track of its progress in reaching that vision.<sup>11</sup>

#### Objectives:

Community indicators measure progress toward community sustainability action plan goals.

#### Outcomes:

Community indicators provide a set of indicators that allows a community to keep track of its progress in reaching an agreed vision.

#### Uses/strengths:

- Can be used to educate other residents and to mobilise additional community members to join in community efforts.
- Can either precede efforts to build a community-wide initiative or be developed through a community-wide process. Both approaches are valid and serve distinctly different yet complementary purposes.
- Can still be used to inform and engage a wider cross section of the community when the set of indicators are developed by a small, non-inclusive group of concerned residents first.
- Can help generate community-wide interest reporting of change through measurement and indicators.

- May reveal data previously unknown by residents and decision-makers.
- Helps build citizens' capacity for community involvement and participation.
- Benefits from the community members' combined experience and their first-hand knowledge about their community.
- Allows monitoring of change over time.
- When it's difficult to know which are most urgent issues or will be most effective actions, a community indicator project can measure and guide the community.

#### Special considerations/weaknesses:

- The steps that have been chosen as indications of progress toward a goal should be relevant to the entire community.
- The community indicator project will need ongoing management.
- Indicators can be incorporated into wider statutory/legislative frameworks and this may be beyond the scope of the project and the experience of the project leaders.
- There may be difficulties in identifying and agreeing on accepted stakeholders.

#### Resources required:

- Publicity
- Venue
- Catering
- Staffing
- Moderator/facilitator

#### Can be used for:

- Engage community
- Discover community issues
- Develop community capacity
- Develop action plan

#### Number of people required to help organise:

- Large (> 12 people)
- Medium (2–12 people)

#### Audience size:

- Large (> 30)

#### Time required:

- Long (> 6 months)
- Medium (6 weeks – 6 months)

#### Skill level/support required:

- High (Specialist skills)
- Medium (Computer & other expertise)

#### Cost:

- Medium (AUD\$1,000 – AUD\$10,000)
- Low (< AUD\$1,000)

#### Participation level:

- High (Stakeholders participate in decision)

#### Innovation level:

- High (Innovative)

#### Method:

1. Select a representative sample of the community.
2. Organise the appropriate method to gather people together. This may be in the form of a meeting or it may be done via phone or email.
3. Establish a vision for the future and the steps that are needed to get there (strive to balance environmental, social and economic issues in all decision-making activities).
4. Develop a set of indicators that will indicate that progress is being made – significant milestones that have made concrete and measurable progress towards the future vision.
5. Can also be developed by a small group prior to community-wide visioning and planning processes for educational purposes, and then be developed through community-wide involvement.
6. Monitor progress against indicators.
7. Publish and circulate regular progress reports through media and newsletters.

#### References:

- Hart, M (1997) 'Evaluating indicators: a checklist for communities' *Wingspread Journal*, 19(2). Available online: <http://www.johnsonfdn.org/spring97/indicators.html> [accessed 07/06/2005].
- <http://www.iap2.org> [accessed 07/06/2005]

<sup>11</sup> Hart, M (1997) 'Evaluating indicators: a checklist for communities' *Wingspread Journal*, 19(2)